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A Conception of Moral Sensitivity and Everyday Consumption Practices: Insights from the Moralising Discourses of Pet Owners

Abstract

The marketing discipline is somewhat under-theorised regarding the moral meanings that both shape and are shaped by the everyday consumption practices of contemporary consumers. Therefore, using the context of pet ownership, this paper aims to develop a conceptual understanding of the moral aspects of consumption by examining the social construction of morality in consumers' day-to-day lives. Using phenomenological interviews and autodiving techniques, we identify a number of underlying polemics, linked to the ontology of animals as pets, strands of which weave through our participants' moralising discourses. The study draws attention to the nuances and contradictory processes within which the moral meanings allied to pet ownership and the pet marketplace are constituted and enacted within consumers' day-to-day lives. The paper concludes with a discussion on the value of adopting a sociological perspective of consumption morality and its implications for future studies of consumption.

Keywords: moralisation, consumption practices, moralistic identity work, moralising discourse, pet ownership, phenomenological interviews.

Introduction

Much of the marketing literature which focuses on the morality of consumption has tended to equate the moral aspects of consumption either with explicitly ethical forms of consumer choice usually involving socio-environmental issues (see Caruana's, 2007a and 2007b critiques) or with elitist critiques of contemporary mass consumption (see Miller's, 2001 and Luedicke *et al.*'s, 2010 analyses of this). Crane and Desmond (2002) and Luedicke *et al.* (2010) have suggested that this has left the marketing discipline somewhat under theorised with regard to the moral meanings that shape and are, in turn, shaped by the day-to-day exigencies of contemporary consumption.

At the same time, an emerging body of literature advocates that insights may be gained by adopting a descriptive approach to the analysis of consumption morality (Crane and Desmond, 2002; Caruana 2007a, 2007b; Lovett and Jordan, 2010). In contrast to a normative approach, a descriptive approach involves focusing on people's subjective conceptions of the moral meanings of everyday practices, referred to by some authors in terms of their moral sensitivity (Lovett and Jordan, 2010). We therefore advance the position that in order to be able to understand the nuances of consumption morality, empirical analysis of the social construction of morality in the context of consumers' day-to-day lives is needed. We also argue that pet ownership provides a suitable context within which to explore consumption morality more broadly for two reasons. First, pet ownership provides a consumption context that is not usually considered to be explicitly ethical^[i]. Second, as 55% of UK households now own a pet (mainly cats and dogs), pet ownership is increasingly associated with contemporary mass consumption evidenced in part by the fact that the associated pet care market is now worth a staggering £2.6 billion (Perkins, 2011).

Therefore, using data from our phenomenological interviews, this paper analyses the discourses of pet-owning consumers from a descriptive perspective of morality. Our approach is informed by Caruana's (2007a, 2007b) and Luedicke *et al.*'s (2010) sociological perspective of consumption morality and Lovett and Jordan's (2010) descriptive approach to moral sensitivity. The advantage of adopting this sociologically informed descriptive approach to moral sensitivity is that it provides a means to explore the nuances and contradictory processes within which the moral meanings allied to pet ownership and the pet marketplace are constituted and enacted within the context of consumers day-to-day lives.

Morality and Consumption

The literature on morality identifies two broad approaches – normative and descriptive. The normative approach generally refers to morality in terms of the rightness or wrongness of an individual's behaviour as guided by a code of conduct and/or a set of rules (McGregor, 2005). However, criticisms have been leveled at this approach with regard to the over emphasis upon explicit cognitive processes and individual decision-making at the expense of more intuitive, emotional and socially constructed assessments of right and wrong (Caruana, 2007a, 2007b; Lovett and Jordan, 2010). Moreover, normative studies have tended not to focus on people's everyday life situations (with the exception of the workplace) where no explicit codes exist and where legal regulations often lag behind individuals' subjective assessments of moral issues (Lovett and Jordan, 2010).

By contrast, a descriptive approach sees merit in observing the ways in which issues are experienced and construed as moral and seeks to document this from the subjective perspectives of (socially situated) individuals. Caruana's (2007b) sociological perspective recognises that since morality is constructed through dialectical social processes between individuals and society, morality is seen as being ontologically fluid and subjective rather

than as an objective force that determines what is right or good for society. A sociological perspective of consumption morality therefore focuses on process rather than structure, specifically “discursive processes” (2007b, p.301) rather than social norms. Moreover, since consumption serves as a symbolic resource for socially situated individuals, morality in consumption becomes inextricably linked to issues of identity and affiliation. Luedicke *et al.*'s (2010) model of consumption as moral protagonism contributes to the literature on moralistic identity work in two ways that are important for our study. First, they demonstrate that consumers' identities are constituted with moral meanings by virtue of employing the mythic structuring device of the protagonist *versus* antagonist rather than because of any ideological beliefs stemming from anti-corporate, anti-consumerist or pro-environmental positions. This broadens the domain of consumption morality and lends support for the need to examine morality in contexts that we might view as being more mainstream forms of consumption, such as the practices related to pet ownership. Second, they demonstrate that moral polemics are essential structuring devices in the performance of moralistic identity work, providing us with a point of reference for the preliminary analysis of our interview data.

Lovett and Jordan's (2010) descriptive approach to moral sensitivity provides a useful framework to assess the strength of individuals' conceptions of the moral meanings of their everyday experiences, by examining the extent to which individuals cast their moral nets (i.e. whether they limit their moralising discourses to the self or whether they extend them to include others), as well as their willingness to express their privately held moral views in public. The authors identify four distinct stages to the moralisation^[iii] process. In the context of consumption and morality, we can say that Level 0 indicates no moralisation in regard to specific consumption practices, Level 1 indicates private moralisation in respect of one's own engagement with specific consumption practices, while Level 2 refers to private moralisation

in relation to both one's own engagement in specific consumption practices as well as that of others. Finally, Level 3 is the public expression of moralisation. In this case, rather than quietly evaluating consumption practices in private, the individual expresses their judgments publicly in an effort to try to change what they see as the immoral actions and practices of others. Once moralisation at levels 2 and 3 starts to pervade society, alignment from government and other major institutions helps to quicken the pace of further moralisation (Rozin, 1997).

Morality and Pet Ownership

Less the figures presented in the introduction should be taken uncritically as symbolising our reputation as a 'nation of animal lovers', let us consider another set of figures. As a result of pet owners over-indulging their beloved animals, 40% of the UK's 6.8m dogs and 7.5m cats are officially classed as overweight (RSPCA, 2008) and as a result of impulse purchasing, the number of abandoned animals has risen by 57% since 2008 (Gray, 2010). These statistics raise significant moral questions regarding the ways in which we care for the animals that we keep as pets. Consequently, the Animal Welfare Act 2006 was introduced, an important development of which is that pet owners must now additionally meet their animal's welfare needs (i.e. a suitable environment, a suitable diet, appropriate mental, social and physical stimulation) compared to previous legal requirements which required owners only to protect their animal from pain, injury and disease (see Defra, 2009a, 2009b).

Beverland *et al.*'s (2008) recent analysis of the "dark side of pet ownership" provides a rare example of an attempt to shine some light on morally questionable aspects of pet related consumption. This article compares intrinsically motivated pet owners (i.e. those that value their pet as an individual being and therefore as a subject within a relationship) with

extrinsically motivated pet owners (i.e. those that view their pet as a possession and therefore as an integral part of their identity projects). In so doing, they arrive at the moral judgement that intrinsically motivated owners treat their animals better. In contrast, Ahuvia (2008) argues that as extrinsically motivated pet owners view their dogs as subordinates in a hierarchical relationship (akin to a parent/child relationship), they may end up granting greater respect for the dog's natural 'needs' (i.e. recognising the "pack-living creature" that it actually is (p.498).

The disparity in the moral interpretations of Beverland *et al.* (2008) and Ahuvia (2008), echo the tensions and disparities apparent in earlier marketing literature on pets (see Hirschman 1994; Belk 1996). These contradictory conceptualisations are summarised succinctly by Bettany and Daly (2008) into two dimensions. First, pets as objects to be possessed *versus* pets as social beings and second, making sense of pet relationships using categories/metaphors of nature (animal/chaotic) *versus* culture (human/civilised)^[iii]. These analyses further substantiate the merit of focusing on the context of pet related consumption in order to develop our understanding of moralisation in the everyday lives of consumers.

The Phenomenological Interview

Phenomenological interviews (see Thompson *et al.*, 1989) were held with UK adults and children from eleven households with pets. Our initial convenience sample of four snowballed to a total of eighteen^[iv]. We offered all participants complete assurances of anonymity and in return we were granted permission to record the interviews, which lasted from one to three hours. The interviews were held at the homes of each participant with either one or both of the researchers present. As the aim of a phenomenological interview is to yield a conversation, our interviews had no *a priori* questions, with the exception of the opening question – 'tell us about your pet(s)'.

Photographs of the owners' pets were used to initiate our conversations in a technique known as autodiving (Heisley and Levy, 1991). Given our open-ended instructions to participants, the photographs taken were predominantly positive, 'feel-good' pictures focusing on everyday activities such as playing and interacting with their pets. However, although the photographs provided a starting point for discussion, our participants invariably invoked a variety of morally dubious consumption practices within the broader pet marketplace against which they tried to make sense of their own consumption practices and behaviours. This meant that their discussions regarding morally questionable practices were not illustrated in their photographs. Therefore, the photographs largely play a 'supplemental' role to the verbal transcript (Rose, 2007).

As advocated by Thompson (1997), the verbatim transcripts were read through repeatedly, by each researcher independently and then discussed collectively. Having systematically examined all of the constituent parts of each transcript, we then looked across all interview transcripts and identified the following three broad categories of consumption practices, each of which appeared to embrace a moral dilemma for our participants. These are namely: (1) Acquisition Practices, which raised issues regarding the breeding and purchasing of animals; (2) Safeguarding Practices, which identified mixed views regarding the appropriate level of freedom to accord pet animals and; (3) Symbolic Consumption Practices, which surfaced issues underpinning the motivations of different 'types' of pet owners as well as affiliation with and/or differentiation from these types.

The Moralisation of Pet Owners' Everyday Consumption Practices

Table 1 illustrates the diverse patterns of ownership amongst our participants with some family households owning only one pet (all dog owners only had one dog) and other households, without children, owning as many as three pets. In total, fifteen pets (eight cats

and seven dogs) were currently owned by our participants and acquired from a variety of sources ranging from public spaces (i.e. strays), rescue shelters, family relations (i.e. gifts) to pedigree breeders.

Insert Table 1 near here

Acquisition Practices: Purchasing Pedigrees versus Rescuing Animals

Perhaps because of our open style of questioning, all of our participants recounted the circumstances surrounding the acquisition of their pets; a subject which invariably led into discussions regarding preferences in respect of pedigrees *versus* mongrels/cross-breeds (as seen in Table 1, of the fifteen pets currently owned, five are pedigrees and the remaining ten are cross-breeds) and hence the moral aspects of pet breeding as well as appropriate (and inappropriate) places from which to source pet animals.

With regard to pedigree cats, Helen talked enthusiastically about her preference for the Abyssinian breed, however she expressed disapproval of breeders meddling to produce cats' faces that were "*shoved out or pushed in*". Similarly, with respect to dogs, Laura criticised King Charles Spaniel breeders for going too far as "*their brains are too big for their head and all that*" (i.e. syringomyelia). Commenting on the Munchkin cat, Sam and Wilma also felt that such practices were inappropriate – "*she [the breeder] deliberately bred cats so that they had little tiny like dwarf legs...any breed of cat and she could breed it so that they were like these little tiny things...for me, that's wrong*".

Similar to other participants, Sam and Wilma were clearly uncomfortable with the financial aspects of pet breeding. This was apparent in the following comment made by Wilma: "*I work with a girl and...as soon as it was able, she bred a litter from it...I do think it's greedy. I think she did it for financial gain and not that she loves that breed of dog*".

Mandy had similar concerns regarding the breeding of pedigrees for the purposes of money-making and therefore having made the decision to buy a pedigree puppy she tried to avoid getting “*one from a puppy farm type place - you know where they just take your order - they are obviously just breeding bitches just to make money...and so we didn't want that*”.

In contrast, on discussing how she acquired Penny from the local dog shelter, Wilma went on to question the need to buy a pedigree at all when “*there are so many dogs there [at dog shelters needing homes]*” already. Indeed, many of our participants, including Judith, Jane and Gordon, Millie, Simon, Alison and Claire framed the acquisition of their pets in terms of rescuing animals rather than purchasing them. Thus for example, Judith told us that when she was in the process of looking for a dog she saw “*an advert for a dog that a chap couldn't keep. I went to see her...she was very excited to see me...she wasn't exactly what I thought of as having as a dog. But then once I'd seen her, I felt like she'd kind of chosen me...I would have felt guilty if I hadn't had her*”. Claire also rescued her dog Angus from a dog shelter and she mentioned at some length the weight of responsibility that she experienced when she first took Angus on because he was extremely poorly behaved and quite aggressive towards both humans and other dogs. She felt that if she could not cope and had to send Angus “*back - the chances were he'd be put down...being the third home and all that - I just felt this massive weight on me that it was either me or nothing you know*”.

Safeguarding Practices: Freedom versus Restraint

A second set of practices mentioned by all of our participants relates to the wider welfare needs of the animals in their care (i.e. beyond straightforward feeding and housing). When discussing a particular photograph of Bryan in the garden, Sheila emphasised the importance of ensuring adequate opportunities for her cat to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns and that, in her view it was wrong for cat owners to keep their cats inside:

“to me you can’t keep a cat indoors, a cat’s a free spirit you’ve got to let them go out”. Simon appeared to share this opinion, since like Sheila and Tom, he had also installed a cat-flap so that his cat DJ would have the freedom to come and go as he pleased, except for on those occasions when Simon and his partner were going out shopping together. In this regard, Simon discussed their exit strategy to prevent DJ from following them to the shops as follows:

“What I’ve got to do is give him a fresh bowl of food, quickly put the alarm on and lock the door, run down the back pass and meet Chris [his partner], we both can’t go out together because he will follow us”.

While Simon’s story focused on the everyday interactions between himself, his partner and their cat, safeguarding practices such as his can also be considered more broadly. That is to say, if pet animals were to stray onto busy roads and cause a crash the owners themselves would most likely be held accountable. Claire described her fear of Angus causing an accident and either hurting himself or hurting someone else and mentioned purchasing pet insurance primarily in case of “*some liability claim being made*”. Sheila had also taken out pet insurance for her cat Bryan, although her primary concern was to mitigate against the fear of losing him – “*if it gets lost, they’ll put a photo out and try and help you find your cat*”. Another safeguarding practice which was brought to our attention by Laura, who runs a doggie day care business with her husband, concerns the benefits of castrating male dogs, as she explains:

“If you get a van full of male dogs that are not castrated...we might have trouble. I don’t think they [her customers] realise...but because he smells like an un-castrated dog, they [other dogs] will attack him for it”.

The subject of training as a further means to ensure the pet’s well-being was raised mainly by dog owners. Claire informed us that she “*had to start from the basics...get him [Angus] to walk to heel...and it’s just taken pretty much all that time to feel confident about going out and letting him be round other dogs*”. In contrast, it seemed that cat owners merely

accepted their lack of control over their pets' behaviour. Millie's acceptance was clearly evident - "*unfortunately I know he does it [lies on top of the cooker] when we are not there, so I can't really stop him*". However, one mode of intensive training perceived by one of our participants as providing a valuable service to society but considered morally questionable as far as the quality of life of the dog is concerned is the training of guide-dogs for the blind. Speaking about her own experience of training guide-dogs, Laura felt that it was more natural for a dog to be trained for police work as a police dog is:

"Doing what their nose tells them and everything, whereas guiding...they are not allowed to scavenge and they are not allowed to chase other things and they are not allowed to play when they are in harness. It's really a lot of training against their instincts".

Although many participants went out of their way to ensure their pet's well-being (e.g. holidaying in the UK so that they could take their animals with them), they did on occasion need to use the services of professional kennels and catteries. On discussing the facilities available in their areas, Stewart and Helen explained:

"We take them to the best one in [our area] - 'Comfy Cat'...You have to book early to get them in there" (Stewart). "We've to know where we are going a year in advance" (Helen). "They are booked in already for next year. We had to take them [Agatha and Brady] to another one last year, because it was sort of last minute. She [Helen] wouldn't take them up there again" (Stewart). "The enclosures were closed in on all sides, so the cats couldn't see out. When I went, they looked frightened, they didn't look comfortable. Whereas, when I go up to [Comfy Cat] all the cats can see all the other cats" (Helen).

Both negative and positive evaluations and experiences of local kennels/catteries were verbally communicated to family, friends and work colleagues by many of our participants.

Symbolic Consumption Practices: Them versus Us

In accordance with Defra's (2009a, 2009b) suggestion that pet owners should provide regular opportunities for exercise and play, all of our participants talked animatedly about playing and having fun with their pets. Dog owners clearly derived enormous pleasure from

taking their dogs for walks, and this often led to them meeting with other dog owners, which gave rise to identification practices in support of either affiliation with or dissociation from other dog owners. For example, Nathan identified a certain type of dog owner as “*one of us*”. He later explained this comment by referring to their dog as “*something that isn’t anything and a bit scruffy*”. Whereas, Alison described certain dog owners that she had seen on the beach as, “*not the usual dog walkers. I mean, normally on a cold day at the beach you get somebody wearing a pair of wellies, a woolly hat, gloves...the designer ones will be there in their sort of pink Wellingtons and designer outfits ‘n’ the dog looks immaculate – yeah, very different people*”. Alison indicated her disapproval of these owner’s motives for owning pets when she suggested that they were “*not getting a dog for family reasons...they’re not getting it to enhance their lives in any way...they are just getting it as a fashion accessory*”. Indeed, a number of our participants’ condemned the practice of using pets as fashion accessories. For example Laura was concerned by the rising number of “*trophy dogs*” in her local area.

Other examples of ‘*them and us*’ emerged when participants discussed the competitive arena of pet shows. Here, Laura felt that organisers and judges of competitive pet shows exist “*in their own little bubble and they go, isn’t it beautiful and look at its head - look at the size of the head – fantastic*”. Laura’s sarcastic reference to pet show judges’ being obsessed with certain features was made in specific reference to the Bulldog breed as she questioned the morality of Bulldog breeders who persist with manipulating a larger head through breeding methods despite the breed being unable to give birth naturally as a result.

In summary, we would suggest that the somewhat flexible ontological treatment of pets as social beings *versus* as objects to be possessed identified previously in the literature (Belk, 1996; Bettany and Daly, 2008; Beverland *et al.*, 2008; Jyrinki, 2012) no doubt goes some way to explaining why some of our participants feel uncomfortable with various aspects of the pet marketplace and so many felt it more appropriate to frame the acquisition

of their pets in terms of rescuing rather than purchasing. This, view of pets as social beings was also in evidence among those who expressed positive attitudes towards the competitive showing of pets, For example, while Helen was informed by the breeder that her Abyssinian kitten Agatha would make a good show animal she explained that they stopped attending shows after a while because “*Agatha didn’t like going*”.

Moreover, in further support of Hirschman’s (1994) assertion that pets inhabit a midway position between nature and culture, the above findings suggest that on the one hand, there are many instances when pet owners view their pets as animals, often drawing on a range of explanations prevalent within animal psychology that naturalise certain assumptions concerning their behaviour (see Fox, 2006) to do so. Thus, it was quite common for cat owners to naturalise the freedom needs of cats, as per Sheila’s comments above, notwithstanding the irony that Sheila has taken out pet insurance should her cat get lost. On the other hand, it was more common for dog owners to attempt to restrain their dogs’ animal natures *via* various training regimes. We would suggest that it is this liminal positioning of pets between nature and culture that gives rise to the complex and often contradictory moral views expressed by our participants with regard to how much freedom *versus* how much restraint is appropriate for pet animals.

Finally, Luedicke *et al.*’s (2010) analysis of consumers’ moralistic identity work and the associated idea of a moralising dichotomy provide a useful lens through which to examine the symbolic consumption practices discussed above. For example, by suggesting that a particular group of dog walkers were “*very different people*” and asserting that such types treat their animals as “*a fashion accessory*”, Alison was clearly adapting the myth of the moral protagonist to construct a positive moral identity position for herself, as someone who has a dog for family reasons (once again we see traces of the pet as a social being) and an

immoral identity position for those with their “*pink Wellingtons and designer outfits*” whom she opposes, because they treat their pets as objects.

Moralisation and Consumption Practices

Using Lovett and Jordan’s (2010) framework of moral sensitivity to assess the strength of our participants’ conceptions of the moral meanings underpinning pet related consumption practices as discussed above, we found little evidence in support of Level 0 moralising. That is to say all of our participants engaged in some form of moralising discourse in respect of the three categories of consumption practices identified above.

There were many instances when participants engaged in Level 1 moralising whereby they focused their private moralising discourses inwardly on the self. Such moralising was exhibited by many respondents through what might best be described as their personal sense of the rights and wrongs of pet ownership. Thus, in terms of acquisition practices, and in relation to those participants who appeared to focus on aesthetic choice criteria, still they expressed concerns with regard to the breeding practices associated with pedigree breeds (other than those they were considering purchasing) as well as in regard to the profit-making motives of some breeders. Such concerns led one of the participants to try to assess the credentials of a number of pedigree breeders before making her final purchase.

For the most part Level 2 moralising related to our participants’ judgments in respect of where to source pets and in relation to the objectification of pets through symbolic consumption practices. With regard to the acquisition of pet animals, a number of participants felt that it was more appropriate not just for themselves but also for others to source pets from animal shelters and rescue homes rather than purchasing them from animal breeders, particularly given the large number of animals that are abandoned each year.

In terms of the ways in which pets are objectified, it is interesting to note that like Beverland *et al.* (2008) as well as some of the intrinsically motivated participants in their

study, many of our participants also engaged in moralising discourses that served to denigrate other pet owners whom they saw as using pets (as objects) to portray a certain image, whether this was related to constructing either a fashionable or a masculine image. On the one hand, and in respect of the former, this may well be an incidence where our participants are engaging in what Luedicke *et al.* have termed the “jeremiad against consumerism” (2010, p.1016). However, with regard to latter, a number of our participants made their private judgments explicit in that they suggested that such pet owners were most likely not looking after their animals properly (for example not walking their dogs sufficiently).

Level 3 moralising discourses were predominantly identified in relation to safeguarding consumption practices, whereby participants were willing to express their privately held moral views in public with a view to influencing the behaviour of others. One example came from participants informing us that they often shared their views on the inadequacies of some boarding facilities publicly with friends, family and work colleagues. Another example of Level 3 moralising was evident in the advice given to customers of a doggie daycare business to castrate their dogs. We would contend that in these examples, our participants possessed the “authority...to make one’s opinions known” (Lovett and Jordan, 2010, p.182).

Conclusions, Implications and Avenues for Further Research

In terms of contributing to current knowledge on the role of morality in relation to everyday consumption practices associated with pet ownership, it is evident that for many, although by no means all of our pet owners, their moralising discourses trace back to childhood experiences of pet keeping, but that these discourses are developed through their own day to day experiences of taking care of their pets as adults. However, these moralising

discourses are infused with wider issues and concerns, such as the increasing number of abandoned animals in the UK as well as the relatively more recent and increasing problem of aggressive trophy dogs, to name just two issues discussed widely in the British media. Thus, our research presents empirical evidence in support of Caruana's (2007b) assertion that morality is constructed through dialectical social processes between individuals and society.

Our findings lend support to emerging research which recognises that our emotions play an important part in shaping our moral judgments (Caruana, 2007a, 2007b; Lovett and Jordan, 2010). However, this study proposes empirical evidence of more specific emotions such as guilt, contempt, sadness and distress that shape our consumers' moral judgements. In addition, we would note that by framing their acquisitions in terms of rescuing rather than purchasing many of our participants are clearly in accord with the notion of 'pets as social beings' rather than 'pets as objects to be possessed' (see Belk, 1996; Bettany and Daly, 2008, p.409; Beverland *et al.*, 2008; Jyrinki, 2012). Moreover, our study suggests that the somewhat fluid ontological status of animals as pets, evidenced in the way that owners vacillate between treating their pets as social beings and possessed objects and between accommodating, and by turn restraining, their animal nature so as to live within human culture, interlaces and underpins the nuances and contradictions apparent in the moralising discourses of our participants. Lovett and Jordan's (2010) framework provided a means of analysing the intensity of the contradictory threads of these discourses and allowed us to recognise that while many pet owners attempt to 'nurture' and inculcate what they perceive as appropriate consumption practices across generations within their family, they make little attempt to intervene in the lives of others beyond advice to friends and work colleagues. However, we appreciate that our analysis provides a relatively static view of moralisation and we would therefore suggest that future studies might address this issue by adopting an

ethnographic approach involving participant observation over a sustained time frame, of two years for example, in order to try and capture a more dynamic perspective on moralisation.

With regard to the implications of our findings in this context for future studies of consumption, we would suggest that the moralising discourses and the moralistic identity work identified here are undoubtedly applicable to other consumption contexts. In fact, given the current concern regarding the levels of alcohol consumption in the UK and in the aftermath of the controversy in global financial markets as well as more general debates on rising materialism within capitalist society, we would expect to see a greater prevalence of Level 3 moralising among consumers and a wider range of immoral adversaries against whom consumers may position themselves than we have seen in our study of pet ownership.

Although none of our participants mentioned the Animal Welfare Act, 2006 or any other piece of legislation regarding pet keeping or animal welfare, they all exhibited a very strong sense of duty and a clear personal sense of the rights and wrongs of pet ownership. However, there is still a sense for some participants that both marketers and policymakers could do more to protect animals from abandonment, exploitation and harm. Here, the re-introduction of the compulsory dog license and improved vetting practices of animal breeders and potential buyers could help to reduce the rising number of animals that require rehoming. Further extensions to the prohibition on breeding certain pedigrees and hybrids might assist in reducing the number of trophy dogs as well as reducing the serious health problems associated with certain breeds. More research is needed on these aforementioned areas if as Ghandi suggests our moral progress as a nation is to be judged by the way our animals are treated!

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

OWNER(S)	AGE	MARITAL STATUS	HOUSEHOLD SIZE	EMPLOYMENT STATUS	PET TYPE	PET NAME(S)	PET BREED	PET AGE
Sheila Tom	35-44 35-44	Married	2 adults 2 children	Employed p/t Employed f/t	Cat	Marmelstein Bryan	British Short-Hair cross British Short-Hair cross	17 1
Millie	26-34	Married	2 adults	Employed f/t	Cat	Bobby Zeta Blanche	British Blue Persian-cross British Short-Hair cross	10 12 13
Mandy	35-44	Living with partner	2 adults	Employed f/t	Dog	Becca	Cocker Spaniel (Blue Roan)	10 months
Alison	35-44	Married	2 adults 1 child	Housewife	Dog	Patsy	Labrador	4.5
Judith Nathan	35-44 45-54	Married	2 adults	Both employed f/t	Dog	Tessa	Collie-cross	13
Helen Stewart	55-64 55-64	Married	2 adults	Both employed p/t	Cat	Agatha Brady	Abyssinian Blue British Short-Hair cross	12 2
Simon	45-54	Living with partner	2 adults	Employed f/t	Cat	DJ	British Short-Hair cross	14
Jane, Gordon, Michelle, Anne	35-44 35-44	Married	2 adults 2 children	Employed p/t Employed f/t	Dog	Jake	Bearded Collie-cross	9
Claire	45-54	Single	1 adult	Employed f/t	Dog	Angus	Standard Poodle	4
Laura	45-54	Married	2 adults 2 children	Employed f/t	Dog	Fifi	Patterdale cross	4
Wilma Sam	35-44 35-44	Married	2 adults 2 children	Both employed f/t	Dog	Penny	Labrador cross Staffordshire Terrier	12

Notes

[i] Indeed some might suggest that it is unethical to keep animals as pets.

[ii] Moralisation is defined as the process whereby society and/or individuals come to view a subject that was previously considered morally neutral as possessing moral qualities (Lovett and Jordan, 2010; Rozin, 1997).

[iii] See also Jyrinki's (2012) discussion on pet-related consumption.

[iv] Pseudonyms are adopted when referring to our participants and their pets.