Adopters’ Expectations Prior to Companion-Animal Ownership

by

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ABSTRACT

ADOPTERS’ EXPECTATIONS PRIOR TO COMPANION-ANIMAL OWNERSHIP

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Adopters’ thoughts and expectations prior to bringing home a companion animal were explored using one-on-one interviews (n=17) at three animal shelters in Ontario. Thematic analysis revealed “adopter concerns of, and perceived challenges to, companion-animal ownership”, “adopter and animal factors taken into consideration in the decision to adopt”, “perceived emotional benefits of the human-companion animal relationship”, “advice and sources for acquiring information”, and “adopter considerations surrounding the required care of a companion animal”. An observational study, involving potential adopters (n=234) recruited from 20 municipal pounds and animal shelters in southern Ontario, explored the associations between lifestyle characteristics and expectations for companion-animal ownership. Linear mixed regression showed adopters’ interest in dogs versus cats affected their expectations of “animal behaviour”, “human-companion animal relationship”, and “effort required in companion-animal ownership”. Relationship status affected “human-companion animal relationship” expectations. Animal-care knowledge influenced “effort required in companion-animal ownership” expectations. Overall results identify areas to educate adopters and guide future research.
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each other’s listening ear and every once in a while, shoulder to cry on. I can’t thank you all enough. To my other friends, we couldn’t be more lucky to have such a supportive group for all of these years. Thank you for always asking how things were going, being enthusiastic while I talked about things you may not have always understood, and continuing to be my cheerleaders. Just knowing you were there and had faith in me made a huge difference.

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STATEMENT OF WORK DONE

Through the advisement of, and collaboration with, Dr. Jason Coe, and on-going discussion with members of her advisory committee, Dr. Lee Niel and Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton, Rachel O’Connor designed the methodological approach and conducted the qualitative and quantitative statistical analysis for the research studies in this thesis.

Chapter 1: Literature review

Rachel O’Connor searched various databases for articles relevant to the topics under study. The literature review was written by Rachel O’Connor under the guidance of Dr. Jason Coe. Additional input and revisions were received from Dr. Lee Niel and Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton.

Chapter 2: Qualitative study

Through the collaboration with, and advisement of Dr. Jason Coe, Rachel O’Connor designed the methodological approach and wrote all study material for the qualitative study. A pre-test of the study materials was conducted by Rachel O’Connor under the advisement of Dr. Jason Coe. Study locations were recruited by Rachel O’Connor. At the three study locations, shelter staff members introduced the study to potential participants and Rachel O’Connor was involved in the informed consent process. All interviews were conducted by Rachel O’Connor. A professional transcriber transcribed all of the audiotaped interviews and Rachel O’Connor cleaned the transcripts. Rachel O’Connor conducted the initial thematic analysis, and through collaboration with Dr. Jason Coe, developed the final thematic map. A research assistant was asked to code all interviews used in the thematic analysis in order to calculate inter-coder reliability. The first draft of the manuscript was written by Rachel O’Connor, and reviewed and edited by Dr. Jason
Additional input and revisions were received from Dr. Lee Niel and Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton.

Chapter 3: Quantitative study

Through the collaboration with, and advisement of Dr. Jason Coe, Rachel O’Connor designed the methodological approach and wrote all study material for the quantitative study in this thesis. Rachel O’Connor contacted potential study locations regarding involvement in the study. Rachel O’Connor constructed the generated sections of the questionnaire. Dr. Jason Coe, Rachel O’Connor, and four colleagues were involved in refining the expectation and knowledge sections of the questionnaire. The pre-test was conducted by Rachel O’Connor. Study materials were packaged by Rachel O’Connor and couriered to study locations. Shelter staff members were responsible for recruiting study participants and couriering completed questionnaires back to the Department of Population Medicine. Follow-up phone calls were conducted by Rachel O’Connor and a research assistant. The research assistant was also responsible for inputting data into Access databases. Rachel O’Connor cleaned the data and performed statistical analysis with the help of Dr. Jason Coe, Dr. Serge Desmarais, and William Sears. These individuals also assisted in the interpretation of analyses. The first draft of the manuscript was written by Rachel O’Connor, and reviewed and edited by Dr. Jason Coe. Additional input and revisions were received from Dr. Lee Niel and Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The first draft of the manuscript was written by Rachel O’Connor, and reviewed and edited by Dr. Jason Coe. Additional input and revisions were received from Dr. Lee Niel and Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction, Literature Review, Rationale and Objectives
Introduction

Companion animals are an important part of many Western households, where the relationships between humans and their animals are similar in emotional magnitude to a relationship with a friend, family member, or child (Belk, 1996; Cohen, 2002; Hirschman, 1994; Walsh, 2009). Due to the strength of this relationship, and its impact on human lives, the study of the human-animal bond (HAB) has been given increased attention in the past forty years (Hines, 2003). A significant proportion of these studies have focused on the physical and psychological benefits of the HAB, the companion animal’s role in the family system, and the benefits of animal-assisted therapy (Sanders, 2003). The HAB movement has become both international and interdisciplinary in its scope (Hines, 2003).

There are a number of factors that influence the attachment of an owner to their animal and the strength of the human-companion animal relationship. An owner’s attachment to their companion animal has also been found to change during different life stages (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988; Kidd & Kidd, 1989) and is influenced by: previous companion-animal experiences (Kidd & Kidd, 1989), an owner’s expectations for their companion animal’s behaviour (Miller, Staats, Partlo, & Rada, 1996; Serpell, 1996), the role of the animal in the family (Kidd et al., 1992), and the effort required for companion animal care (Diesel, Pfeiffer, & Brodbelt, 2008; Patronek, Glickman, Beck, McCabe, & Ecker, 1996).

Weak attachment of an owner to a companion animal, and unmet expectations of owners, can put companion animals at risk of relinquishment (Diesel et al., 2008; Patronek et al., 1996). Although this risk has been identified in a number of studies, few
have built upon these findings by attempting to identify expectations owners have for themselves, for their companion animal, and for their relationships with their animals, as well as, identifying influential factors on owner expectations.

**Literature Review**

*Human-companion animal relationship in society*

Companion-animal ownership is an integral part of Western society; companion animals have never been more important to the general public than they are today, as reflected in the amount of time, effort, and money spent on these animals whose sole purpose is to provide companionship (Case, 2008). For example, the annual cost of dog and cat ownership is estimated to be around $1500 and $1100, respectively, accounting for veterinary care, food, insurance, licensing for dogs, litter for cats, and other miscellaneous supplies (e.g., toys, collars) (Perrin, 2009). In Canada, approximately 56% of households have at least one companion animal (Perrin, 2009). Cats and dogs are among the most popular companion animals (Perrin, 2009). The results of an online survey of 3973 companion animal-owners across Canada in 2008 reported that 23% of participants owned only a cat, 20% owned only a dog, and approximately 13% of respondents said they owned both types of companion animals in their household (Perrin, 2009).

Historically, companion animals were obtained for utilitarian purposes such as providing food, transportation, clothing, protection, and assisting with hunting, herding or farming (Fogle, 1999; Walsh, 2009). In recent decades, reasons for acquiring a companion animal have moved away from function to where the majority of owners seem to acquire animals for companionship (Walsh, 2009). The increased importance of
companion animals to their owners has been demonstrated by a doubling in the amount of money spent on companion animals, from approximately $23 billion in total U.S. pet industry expenditures in 1998, to approximately $45.5 billion in 2009 (Walsh, 2009).

More and more specialized companion animal items and services are surfacing, including special toys, ergonomic feeding tables, day spas; some airlines, hotels, and resorts are beginning to include companion animals in the services they offer (Walsh, 2009).

*The roles of companion animals in the lives of their owners*

Previous research has identified the role of companion animals in the family as belonging to three main categories: companion, object, and extension of oneself (Belk, 1996; Beverland, Farrelly, & Lim, 2008; Hirschman, 1994). Individuals who view their animal as a companion view their relationship with their animal as reliable, unconditional, and non-judgmental (Sable, 2013). These relationships are often similar in emotional magnitude to that of a relationship with a friend, family member, or child (Belk, 1996; Hirschman, 1994; Walsh, 2009). In these relationships, companion animals are valued for who they innately are, and appreciated for their distinct and intelligent personalities (Beverland et al., 2008). In contrast, the perception of companion animals as objects includes owners having companion animals as a status symbol, to be used as equipment, or as an exhibit or ornament (Beverland et al., 2008; Hirschman, 1994). This form of ownership entails the owner having control and mastery over the animal (Beverland et al., 2008). Owners who view their animals as companions differ from those who view them as objects in that the former focuses on the animal’s individual personality, quirks, and achievements, while the latter may focus on the appearance of the animal or the pleasure they expect to receive from owning it (Beverland et al., 2008).
Some owners are so attached to their animal that they see them as an extension of themselves; they take pride when their animal does something well, and are embarrassed or ashamed when it misbehaves (Belk, 1996; Beverland et al., 2008; Hirschman, 1994). In addition, these types of owners use their companion animals to express their actual or desired self (Belk, 1996; Beverland et al., 2008; Hirschman, 1994). For example, a companion animal is said to express an individual’s actual self when its personality perceivably matches the personality of its owner, as seen in the example, “my cat, Max, is temperamental and wild. He takes after me. Jim’s is quiet and even tempered” (Belk, 1996, p. 131). An animal expressing an owner’s desired self can be seen when characteristics of an animal are chosen because of what they represent to the owner (Belk, 1996; Hirschman, 1994). For example, certain breeds (e.g., German Shepherd, Doberman) and certain animal names (e.g., “Axel Foley” after Eddie Murphy’s character in the movie, “Beverly Hills Cop”) might be chosen because of an owner’s desire to appear tough (Hirschman, 1994, p. 621).

In a nationwide United States pet owner survey conducted from 2007 to 2008, approximately 95% and 87% of respondents considered their companion animals their friends and family members, respectively (Walsh, 2009). In this same survey, 87% of respondents reported that they include their companion animals in holiday celebrations, 65% sing or dance for them, 52% prepare special meals for them, and 53% indicated having taken time off from work to care for a sick companion animal (Walsh, 2009). A similar finding was reported by Belk (1996), which involved 40 interviews with people who were highly involved with their dogs, cats, horses, or birds in Utah. Owners who considered their animal to be a companion said they talked to, and included, them in
family activities like watching television or sleeping, held special occasions such as celebrating the companion animal’s birthday, and gave their companion animal a Christmas present (Belk, 1996). Similarly, in another study, consisting of 471 owners in the Netherlands, 92% of participants said the most important reason for acquiring their companion animal was companionship (Endenburg, Hart, & Bouw, 1994). In this same study, the most important reasons for acquiring a companion animal were social in nature, including for company, to teach children responsibility, for tactile contact, for unconditional love or attachment, and to be able to provide and care for something (Endenburg et al., 1994).

Societal changes, resulting in more hectic and rushed lives, have made owning a companion animal more attractive because they offer relaxation, humour, enthusiasm, and play (Walsh, 2009). In addition, companion animals provide a relationship with humans that is reliable, consistent, non-judgmental, and provides a source of unconditional love. This has especially been found to be important to people when undergoing different life stages such as divorce, human grief, and the diagnoses of mental and physical illnesses, where many individuals turn to their companion animals for comfort (Walsh, 2009).

As highlighted by these studies, companion animals play an important role in many people’s lives; owners not only form attachments with animals that are comparable to those with other people in many cases, but they commit a large amount of time, effort, and money in caring for companion animals. It is hypothesized that by making these commitments, many owners have specific expectations regarding their unique emotional
bond with their companion animal and the form of support they expect to receive from the relationship (Kidd et al., 1992).

**Physical and psychological benefits of companion animal ownership**

One study conducted on companion-animal adoption surveyed 698 participants 2 weeks post-adoption, 490 participants 6 months post-adoption, and 343 one year post-adoption to investigate adopter satisfaction, animal retention, adopter-animal bond, and differences between species. Most of the participants were satisfied with their companion animal (94% of cat adopters and 86% of dog adopters), and one year following adoption, the majority of adopters reported feeling satisfied with their adoption experience (96% of cat adopters and 98% of dog adopters) (Neidhart & Boyd, 2002). Satisfied cat adopters reported enjoying having their cat be nice, friendly, loving, and affectionate, whereas satisfied dog adopters were more likely to discuss their dog’s positive behaviours, such as its obedience and ability to get along with other people and children (Neidhart & Boyd, 2002). When a positive human-companion animal relationship is formed, the owner may experience a variety of physical and psychological benefits.

The benefits derived from owning a companion animal have been termed, “zooeyia” (Hodgson & Darling, 2011). Reported instances of “zooeyia” include increased physical activity of owners, decreased owner anxiety and stress by having an animal to focus on, a sense of comfort, decreased owner loneliness and depression through having animal companionship, receiving unconditional love, and increased social interaction with others (Brown & Rhodes, 2006; Friedmann, 1990; Jennings, 1997; Wood, Giles-Corti, Bulsara, & Bosch, 2007). “Zooeyia” is recognized to be important in both health promotion and disease prevention in humans (Hodgson & Darling, 2011).
Owning a companion animal can provide many physiological benefits to humans. Dog ownership has been shown to cause an increase in the physical activity of both adults and children, helping to improve joint health and reduce an individual’s risk of obesity, and could reduce the risk of myocardial infarction by 35% to 55% (Brown & Rhodes, 2006; Cutt, Giles-Corti, Knuiman, Timperio, & Bull, 2008; Owen et al., 2010; Serpell, 1991). Owning a companion animal also positively impacts other cardiovascular risk factors such as triglycerides, blood pressure, and heart rate (Allen, Blascovich, & Mendes, 2002; Anderson, Reid, & Jennings, 1992). In one study, companion animal-owners tended to have lower resting heart rates and blood pressure levels, and lower heart rate and blood pressure reactivity during mental tasks, than non-owners and their heart rates and blood pressures tended to return to resting levels more quickly than non-owners (Allen et al., 2002; Anderson et al., 1992).

Alongside the benefits to physical health, a number of psychological benefits associated with owning a companion animal have been identified, including feelings of intimacy, constancy, entertainment, and non-judgmental companionship, reduced social isolation, and facilitation of human social interactions (Rew, 2000; Sable, 2013; Walsh, 2009; Wood et al., 2007). In a study conducted on homeless youth, one of the ways described as a means to cope with loneliness included owning a dog and this also gave youth a sense of unconditional love, a feeling of safety, and a sense of responsibility to take care of the dog and make better choices (Rew, 2000). Owning a companion animal can also reduce feelings of loneliness, depression, and anxiety (Straede & Gates, 1993; Zasloff & Kidd, 1994). For example, in a cross-sectional study of 92 cat-owners and 70 non-owners, cat owners had significantly lower scores on the measure of general
psychological health than non-owners, indicating cat-owners had much lower levels of psychiatric disturbances (e.g., depression, anxiety, sleep disturbance) than non-owners (p<0.018) (Straede & Gates, 1993). In another study, researchers found that women who owned an animal were significantly less lonely than women who lived on their own (Zasloff & Kidd, 1994).

In addition to providing physiological and psychological benefits to owners, dogs can serve as a social facilitator for their owners (McNicholas & Collis, 2000; Wood et al., 2007). Dog-owners tend to experience more social interactions when their dog is present than when their dog is absent and in comparison to non-owners (McNicholas & Collis, 2000; Walsh, 2009; Wood et al., 2007). This social facilitator effect has largely been seen with strangers and acquaintances; research has shown that people were more likely to strike up casual conversations with people they had never met or did not know well when their dog was present (McNicholas & Collis, 2000). In addition, owning a dog can promote a greater sense of community (Wood et al., 2007). A cross-sectional study, involving 339 residents of three Western Australian suburbs, found that 40.5% of dog-owners said they had gotten to know people in their community because of their dog (Wood et al., 2007).

Factors affecting human attachment to companion animals

Many factors, including owner family dynamic and life stage, type of animal and animal behaviour, and owner expectations for time and effort in caring for a companion animal, can influence an owner’s attachment to their animal and whether the human-companion animal relationship is positive or negative (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988; Diesel et al., 2008; Patronek et al., 1996; Serpell, 1996).
Research has shown that the attachment owners feel for their companion animals can vary by the life stage being experienced by owners during companion-animal ownership (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988). In one study, individuals who were newlyweds, had never gotten married, were divorced, and those who were widowed or married more than once, showed higher levels of attachment to their animal than individuals who were living in common-law or individuals in their first marriage (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988). In addition, those who were childless or who were “empty-nesters” showed higher levels of attachment than parents of young children or teenagers living under the same roof (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988). This contrasts with the fact that a large proportion of families in the study acquired a companion animal when their children were at the school-age (30.4%, n = 320) and teenage (28.3%, n = 320) stages (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988). Low attachment of parents to companion animals may be due to lack of time and energy (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988). Interestingly, parents acquired companion animals because of the perceived importance of having an animal to teach their children love and responsibility (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988). Furthermore, the number of children participants had influenced attachment to a companion animal as well; those with two or more children were less attached to their companion animal than those with one child (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988). It is important to explore what role individuals in different life stages and family dynamics expect their companion animal to play, what their expectations are in terms of the time required to care for an animal, and their expectations for their companion animal’s behaviour. This information may contribute to understanding why attachment differs with family dynamics and life stages.
The difference between an owner’s expectations for their companion animal’s behaviour and the companion animal’s actual behaviour can affect an owner’s level of attachment. Serpell (1996) found that dog owners with larger distances between their actual ratings of their dog’s behaviour and their ideal dog behaviour had weaker attachment to their pet than those with smaller actual-to-ideal distances. For cat owners, the authors found no consistent patterns for the relationship between attachment and cat behaviour (Serpell, 1996).

Serpell (1996) explained the differences in cat and dog owner attachment by looking at the differences between dog and cat behaviour. Dogs tend to be larger in size and more interactive than cats; therefore, their less desirable behaviours may seem more intrusive to owners than the less desirable behaviours of cats. In addition, due to dogs’ sizes and interactive natures, their owners may have higher expectations for what they consider proper behaviour than cat owners, meaning they may be more unhappy when their dog fails to meet their ideal standards, possibly leading to a lesser attachment with the dog. These findings highlight the importance of identifying adopter expectations in relation to companion-animal behaviour when acquiring an animal.

Companion-animal relinquishment

When owners are dissatisfied with their companion animal, relinquishment or return of the animal may result. Although relinquishment of a companion animal is a voluntary action, qualitative studies have shown it to often be a difficult and emotional decision (DiGiacomo, Arluke, & Patronek, 1998; Shore, 2005). In a study conducted to gain a deeper understanding about what happens in the human-companion animal relationship that leads to relinquishment, it was found that many people procrastinated in
making the decision to relinquish their companion animal (DiGiacomo et al., 1998). Participants often tried to find alternative homes for their companion animals before arriving at a shelter as a last resort because of their attachment to the animal and their fear of the animal being euthanized (DiGiacomo et al., 1998).

Most studies conducted on companion-animal relinquishment have focused on the reasons for relinquishing a companion animal (Coe et al., In press). These reasons include both owner and animal factors, and when given the opportunity, owners often report more than one reason for relinquishment (Casey, Vandenbussche, Bradshaw, & Roberts, 2009; Diesel, Brodbelt, & Pfeiffer, 2010; Kidd et al., 1992; Mondelli et al., 2004; New et al., 2000; Salman, New, Scarlett, & Kass, 1998; Scarlett, Salman, New, & Kass, 1999; Shore, 2005). In a study developed to gain insight into the reactions of individuals who just experienced relinquishing their animal, a number of the participants discussed that they would take more time to think and plan if they were to adopt an animal again (Shore, 2005). In particular, individuals talked about taking more time to think about how having a companion animal would change one’s lifestyle, taking more time to research behaviours of breeds, spending more time interacting with the animal at the animal shelter, and asking staff members more questions in order to gain as much information about the companion animal as possible (Shore, 2005). Some participants commented on the fact that the outcome of an adoption is unpredictable and “just a chance you take” (Shore, 2005). The emotions elicited by relinquishers suggested many people likely did not enter into the relationship with the animal with the intention of relinquishing, rather they were quite disappointed with having to relinquish a companion animal and seemed to gain from the experience with regards to thinking about what they would do differently.
next time (Shore, 2005). These reactions to having to relinquish companion animals are significant because they suggest that the decision to relinquish may be preventable in some cases, if owners are given appropriate information and resources that would allow them to enter into a relationship with an animal being more prepared. The findings that individuals who relinquished animals would provide more thought to a companion animal adoption, do more research, and spend more time with shelter staff, suggests that these participants would want to be more informed during the process of acquiring an animal in order to be as prepared as possible and know what to expect out of companion-animal ownership.

1. Risk factors for relinquishment

In several studies, reported risk factors for dogs being relinquished included being adopted at older than 6 months of age and younger than 2 to 3 years of age, being of mixed breed, being sexually intact, being owned for less than a year in the adopters’ homes, being purchased at little to no cost, having not received veterinary care, and being considered more work than expected by their owners (Diesel et al., 2010; Marston & Bennett, 2003; Patronek et al., 1996; Salman et al., 1998). In comparison, risk factors for cats being relinquished included being sexually intact, being allowed outdoors, being purchased at little to no cost, having not received veterinary care, soiling the house, and owners having unmet expectations (Salman et al., 1998). Owners having reported that their companion animal was more work than expected suggests there are opportunities to adjust potential owners’ expectations prior to the acquisition of an animal. However, the source of animal acquisition poses a challenge in this regard; many companion animals are acquired through friends, strangers, or as strays (New et al., 2000; Salman et al.,
where little information may be provided to owners regarding what companion-animal ownership entails.

A variety of owner-related factors play a role in the risk of relinquishment. Previously identified factors associated with relinquishment include life stage, demographics, expectations for companion animal ownership, animal care knowledge, and opinions about companion animal care and services (Kidd et al., 1992; Marston & Bennett, 2003; Patronek et al., 1996). First-time adopters, those with lower household income levels, individuals renting an accommodation and those in short-term accommodations, and parents, are more likely to relinquish a companion animal than their counterparts (Kidd et al., 1992; Patronek et al., 1996). In addition, those who relinquished their animals were also less likely to have engaged in obedience classes (Marston & Bennett, 2003). It is important to note that many of the owner-related factors mentioned, such as first-time adopters, not engaging in obedience classes, and those with lower household incomes, suggest an opportunity to inform potential owners by providing access to reliable resources and information to increase their odds of success in companion-animal ownership. Although many studies focusing on companion-animal relinquishment have reported the demographics of individuals who have returned an animal (Miller et al., 1996; New et al., 2000; Patronek et al., 1996; Salman et al., 1998; Shore, Petersen, & Douglas, 2003), such as age, gender, parental status, living situation, previous pet experience, income and education level, few studies have considered how these risk factors are related to people’s knowledge and expectations of companion-animal owners prior to acquisition.
2. Reasons for relinquishment

The top reasons for relinquishment of both cats and dogs in the reported literature surround accommodation, animal behaviour, and owner lifestyle changes and personal issues (e.g. moving, allergies, landlord issues, having a baby) (Diesel et al., 2010; DiGiacomo et al., 1998; Miller et al., 1996; New et al., 1999; Salman et al., 1998; Scarlett et al., 1999; Shore, 2005). The issue of relinquishment is complicated by the fact that many external factors, such as change in income or owner health issues, which are out of an owner’s control, have also been found to be influential in the relinquishment of a companion animal (Scarlett et al., 1999).

2.1. Companion-animal behaviour problems

Many studies conducted on the reasons for relinquishment and return of a companion animal to an animal shelter following adoption have found undesirable animal behaviour to be one of the most common reasons given, including elimination problems, destructive behaviour, separation anxiety, aggression, escape behaviour, and timid behaviour (DiGiacomo et al., 1998; New et al., 2000; Salman, Hutchison, & Ruch-Gallie, 2000; Shore, 2005). In a study investigating the behavioural reasons for the relinquishment of dogs and cats, out of 1984 dogs relinquished, 22.2% of dogs were relinquished for biting, 17.4% were aggressive towards people, 16.4% exhibited escaping behaviour, and 15.3% were destructive (Salman et al., 2000). In the same study, out of 1286 cats, 43.2% cats were relinquished because they soiled the house, 18.9% were incompatible with other household animals, 14.6% were aggressive towards people, and 12.4% were destructive (Salman et al., 2000). However, research has shown that some behaviours, seen as undesirable by owners, were considered normal behaviours for the
species by veterinarians (Houpt, Honig, & Resiner, 1996). Companion-animal owners may have unrealistic expectations about the behaviours an animal will exhibit, how often the behaviours will occur, and how long the animal will exhibit a specific behaviour (Houpt et al., 1996). For example, owners who seek protection may want their dog to bark at strangers, but find it bothersome when a dog barks for longer than the owner wanted (Houpt et al., 1996). Reasons for acquiring an animal and previous animal experience were also reported to influence an owner’s perception of certain companion-animal behaviours (Bennett & Rohlf, 2007; Cromwell-Davis, 2008). In one study, participant experience with dogs was negatively correlated with the perception of nervousness, anxiousness and destructiveness, excitability, and disobedience in dogs (Bennett & Rohlf, 2007). An animal’s role in the family may also influence an owner’s tolerance of certain behaviours (Cromwell-Davis, 2008). For example, owners who acquire their animal for companionship would likely find petting intolerance and overexcitement problematic (Cromwell-Davis, 2008). In order to further understand the multi-factorial issue of companion-animal relinquishment, it is important to further identify and understand the expectations owners have for companion-animal behaviour and how previous animal experience and animal-care knowledge may affect these expectations; few studies have been conducted in this area. Identifying expectations for companion-animal behaviour is likely an important foundation for implementing successful owner education programs.

2.2. Owner-related reasons and lifestyle changes

Owner stress and lifestyle changes can also put companion animals at an increased risk of relinquishment. In one study involving 554 dogs relinquished from 520
households, and 488 cats relinquished from 384 households, the top owner-related reasons for relinquishment of dogs were having no time to spend with the animal (9.4%), personal problems (7.5%), family allergies (4.2%), and child and dog not getting along (3.1%) (Scarlett et al., 1999). For cats, the top owner-related reasons for relinquishment were family allergies (18.1%), personal problems (7.8%), the addition of a new baby (3.4%), and no time for the cat (3.0%) (Scarlett et al., 1999). Interestingly, in that study, for 30% of dogs and 43% of cats relinquished, the owners stated that health or personal issues were the only reason for relinquishment, meaning for over half of these participants, other reasons also contributed to relinquishment (Scarlett et al., 1999). These additional reasons for dog relinquishment included non-aggressive behaviour (reported for 28% of households), human housing issues (reported for 23.1% of dogs), and poor preparations and inappropriate expectations (reported for 13.5% of dogs) (Scarlett et al., 1999). For cats, other reasons given alongside owner health and personal issues included human housing issues (reported for 18.9% of households), too many companion animals in the household (reported for 11.3% of households), non-aggressive behavioural problems (reported for 11.1% of households), and inappropriate owner expectations (reported for 10.2% of households) (Scarlett et al., 1999). These findings suggest that in many cases, an owner’s reason for relinquishment is multi-factorial. Future studies are needed to examine this complex issue; most likely the solution to relinquishment will be complex in nature as well.

One factor that has been found to affect the likelihood of relinquishment is stress. Stress occurs when daily benefits do not outweigh daily stressors or problems, and the stress from these problems can be additive (Miller et al., 1996). It has been suggested that
individuals who relinquish their companion animals rate their daily benefits and daily problems associated with their animal lower and higher, respectively, than those who keep their animal (Miller et al., 1996). In a cross-sectional study conducted to investigate contributory factors to the relinquishment of a companion animal, 13% (10/80) of the cats and 21% (12/57) of the dogs were relinquished because they took up too much time, were too much work, or cost too much money (Miller et al., 1996). However, when individuals were given the appropriate resources to be able to pick a companion animal that is suitable for their lifestyle, and to know what to expect in owning a companion animal (e.g. time requirements, cost), risk of relinquishment is reduced (Bennett & Rohlf, 2007; DiGiacomo et al., 1998; Patronek et al., 1996). For example, in one study involving structured interviews with 285 individuals who had relinquished a dog, individuals who had received advice which they perceived to be helpful were at a 94% lower risk of relinquishment than those who received advice which they thought was unhelpful (Patronek et al., 1996). Therefore, it is important to first understand what is perceived as desirable and undesirable to companion-animal owners and how the magnitude of these preferences differ with stressful events such as different life stages and owner characteristics.

**Expectations for companion-animal ownership**

People have different reasons for adopting companion animals, and this may influence their expectations in terms of the animal’s behaviour, the role it will play in the household, and the individual’s expectations for themselves as a companion-animal owner. A person’s expectations have the potential to influence the type of animal they will acquire, how it is treated, and what they will consider desirable and undesirable
companion animal behaviour (Bernstein, 2007; Cromwell-Davis, 2008; Lue et al., 2008; Serpell, 1996). Although it would be beneficial for shelters and veterinarians to understand a person’s expectations in order to be able to give them appropriate advice and resources, few studies have focused on describing people’s expectations prior to acquiring a companion animal.

The role a companion animal is expected to play in the household has been found to influence an owner’s ability to bond with their companion animal. Specifically, it influences the strength and stability of the bond formed, how owners interact and care for companion animals, and what owners are willing to tolerate from the animal (Cromwell-Davis, 2008; Diesel et al., 2008; Kidd et al., 1992; Serpell, 1996). One study that did focus on companion-animal owner expectations found that both gender and whether or not a person was a parent influenced an individual’s expectations of their animal’s role in the family (Kidd et al., 1992). Participants without children, and women, both had higher expectations than their counterparts (i.e., parents and men) that a companion animal would be a confidante and a living being for them to love and touch (Kidd et al., 1992). In addition, parents who expected their companion animal to teach their child love and keep their child busy were more likely to relinquish their animal than those who had lower expectations for their companion animal in these roles (Kidd et al., 1992). Dog owners’ and cat owners’ expectations for their animal’s behaviour towards themselves and the animal’s role in their children’s lives differed significantly; dogs were more likely to be expected to be companions, confidantes, sources of emotional support for owners and playmates to children than were cats (Kidd et al., 1992). Although this study found no significant differences between the expectations of individuals who relinquished...
and those who kept their animal, other studies have found that many relinquishers believed the amount of time, effort, and cost to care for a companion animal was more than they expected (Diesel et al., 2008; Miller et al., 1996; Patronek et al., 1996). The study conducted by Kidd, Kidd and George (1992) is unique in exploring owner expectations; however, few studies have built on their findings. In addition, this study was conducted over two decades ago and family dynamics and roles have since changed.

Owner expectations of companion-animal behaviour have been found to be influential on the retention of an animal in the home (Cromwell-Davis, 2008; Houpt et al., 1996; Miller et al., 1996). In studies focused on companion-animal relinquishment, some owners had unrealistic expectations about when a companion animal would exhibit a behaviour, how often this behaviour would occur, and how long the animal would exhibit a certain behaviour (Houpt et al., 1996). In one study conducted on companion-animal relinquishment, the behaviours owners reported as problems were actually normal behaviours for the age of the companion animal (Miller et al., 1996). In another study, individuals who had returned their companion animal made comments relating to what they would do differently if they decided to adopt an animal again (Shore, 2005). Many of the changes participants suggested in order to avoid undesirable behaviours were related to the size and age of an animal, and some owners made misattributions or overgeneralizations of these traits based on their failed adoption experience (Shore, 2005). For example, individuals who said aggression was the reason for return said they would adopt a smaller or younger animal next time, suggesting they attributed the animal’s aggression to it being larger or older, and one woman who had returned a 6-month old dog due to stubbornness, destructive behaviour, and fear of people said she
would adopt either a very young or mature dog next time, attributing its behaviours to its age (Shore, 2005). Therefore, it is important to gain a deeper understanding of what people’s expectations are when they decide to acquire a companion animal.

The decision to relinquish a companion animal is also affected by an owner’s expectation for the amount of work required to care for an animal. It has been found that if the work required to care for a dog is more than expected, the dog is at an increased risk of relinquishment (Diesel et al., 2008; Patronek et al., 1996). In one study, owners who found that taking care of their dog was more work than expected were 9.9 times more likely to relinquish their dog than owners who found the amount of work was less than they expected (Diesel et al., 2008). In another study, individuals with dogs that were not spayed or neutered, or those owning dogs with behaviour problems including unwanted barking and chewing, aggression toward other people or other companion animals, inappropriate elimination and hyperactivity, were more likely to find the dog to be more work than they expected (Patronek et al., 1996). It is hypothesized that intact companion animals may appear to be more work due to showing undesirable behaviours such as intermale aggression, inappropriate sexual behaviour, straying, females being in heat, and being vocal when in heat (Wells & Hepper, 2000).

These findings reflect the possibility that some individuals acquiring companion animals may have unrealistic expectations for, and lack knowledge about, animal behaviour, and sheds light on an important opportunity for veterinarians and animal workers for owner education. Trips to the veterinarian may influence an owner’s decision to relinquish; in one study, dogs who never visited a veterinarian were 38 times more likely to be relinquished than those who visited the veterinarian two or more times per
year (Patronek et al., 1996). The underlying explanation for the difference is unknown; the authors of the study theorized that more attached owners may be more willing to pay the cost of visiting a veterinarian, or that owners who visit the veterinarian have access to more helpful resources by talking to their veterinarian about problems with their companion animal. Similarly, in a study conducted regarding risk factors for the relinquishment of dogs involving 285 relinquisher households and 1272 control households, households that did not take their dog to obedience training were found to be five times (OR, 5.09; CI, 2.71 to 9.59) more likely to relinquish their dog than those who went to obedience classes (Patronek et al., 1996). Dog owners who engaged in dog training have reported that their dogs are less disobedient, more friendly or less aggressive with others, are less nervous, and less likely to bark (Bennett & Rohlf, 2007). It is uncertain whether this finding is due to the training classes actually resulting in better behaviour or whether the training sessions changed the owner’s perception of these behaviours (Bennett & Rohlf, 2007). Regardless, obedience classes may give owners appropriate and effective tools to minimize undesirable behaviours, or change their perceptions of these behaviours. These findings suggest receiving helpful advice and gaining knowledge may be important to creating a successful human-animal relationship. As a result, the link between potential companion-animal owners’ knowledge and expectations prior to acquiring an animal is an important area for study.

*Owner knowledge about companion-animal care*

Studies conducted in the U.S. reported that many owners lacked knowledge about companion-animal reproduction and behaviour, and appropriate methods of training companion animals (New et al., 2000; Ramón, Slater, & Ward, 2010). Knowledge on
these topics is important in reducing the number of unwanted litters that occur, providing
companion animals with basic preventive health care, and having realistic expectations of
one’s animal. Similarly, in studies focused on individuals who relinquished their
companion animals, there were many misconceptions regarding animal behaviour and
training (New et al., 1999; Salman et al., 1998). For example, in one study, 18.3% of
people who relinquished dogs (403/2320) and cats (336/1717) disagreed or did not know
that there were behaviour differences between breeds (Salman et al., 1998). In this same
study, 55.3% of people who relinquished dogs (1229/2319) and cats (1003/1719) thought
that animals misbehave out of spite (Salman et al., 1998). In terms of training,
approximately 14% of both those who relinquished a dog (329/2314) and those who
relinquished a cat (247/1715) believed that it was not necessary to catch a companion
animal misbehaving in order to correct and/or punish it, and 34% (788/2312) of those
who relinquished dogs and 29% (498/1717) of those who relinquished cats believed that
rubbing an animal’s nose in its elimination would help housetrain the animal (Salman et
al., 1998). These findings are important because companion-animal behaviour is a
common reason for relinquishment and these studies show that many people, owners and
relinquishers alike, are lacking knowledge surrounding animal behaviour and appropriate
training methods. Overall, very few studies have been conducted on owner and
relinquisher knowledge regarding companion-animal care and its influence on owner
expectations.

Mixed methodology

Both quantitative studies, which can be used to objectively study causal
relationships between variables either experimentally or observationally, and qualitative
studies, used to study the meaning people give to phenomena by studying things in their natural settings, have their advantages and limitations (Creswell, 2003). In qualitative research, researchers rely on participant perspectives of phenomena, taking into account participant background and experiences (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative data acknowledges the role of the researcher and their background in the interpretation of data (Creswell, 2003). Data tend to be in the form of words collected by interviews, focus groups, observations, and/or field notes, and are used to identify emergent themes or patterns in the data. Qualitative results can often provide insight (the “why”) into quantitative findings without the intention of generalization.

Through quantitative studies, researchers are able to test hypotheses, look at associations, and make predictions. Data are measurements and can be used to look at statistical relationships. The findings from a quantitative study aim to be generalizable to the target population and the methodology and results are often considered objective.

It has been suggested that in order to have a complete understanding of a phenomenon, multiple perspectives need to be used in order to capture the material world, the personal world, and the social world (Mingers, 2001). Mixed methods consists of a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies in a single study, where one approach may be dominant or both may have equal weight (Ågerfalk, 2013). One of the major benefits of using mixed methods is that a fuller understanding of a phenomenon is gained through a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data; an understanding that would not be reached if either approach was used on its own.

Mixed methods are useful and important for a variety of reasons. Convergence may be identified through mixed methods when both qualitative and quantitative studies
of the same phenomena result in similar findings. The results of a qualitative study can be used to provide deeper meaning to the empirical findings of a quantitative study, or the findings of a quantitative study can be used to empirically support interpretations of a qualitative study. A researcher may also encounter divergent findings when conducting mixed methodology, which is valuable in re-evaluating the assumptions and concepts used in both the quantitative and qualitative studies. Furthermore, mixed methodology allows for the expansion of the depth and breadth of research, and the identification of different perspectives of the same topic by combining the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative study design (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013).

**Semi-structured interviews**

Semi-structured interviewing (i.e., the use of predetermined questions in a flexible framework) in qualitative research allows a researcher to explore personal experiences and potentially uncover new ideas and perspectives by asking open-ended questions and allowing the participant to direct the conversation (Britten, 1995; Fontana & Frey, 1994). Semi-structured interviews are a flexible means of data collection in that interviewers are able to ask for clarification and use probing questions to get participants to elaborate on their thoughts, observe whether their questions are being understood by participants (and subsequently re-word questions if needed), and to re-direct the participant based on the researcher’s predetermined questions and topics of interest (Hermanowicz, 2002). Interviews are unique in that they are one of the few forms of data collection that allow the researcher to develop rapport with their participants (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Developing rapport is important because it helps participants feel a sense of security and
comfort, encouraging their sharing of details surrounding their thoughts and perspectives, and elaborating on points previously discussed (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

**Thematic analysis**

Conducting qualitative interviews means that the data gathered are in the form of words and non-verbal expressions, and must be analyzed using qualitative methods. Thematic analysis is a commonly used method for analyzing qualitative data and is flexible in that it can be used across a variety of theoretical lenses and epistemological views (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method is used to identify themes and patterns across a qualitative dataset. Since this type of analysis is not tied to a certain type of theory, it can be used in a variety of ways, including reporting participant experiences and the meaning individuals put behind their experiences, and explaining how experiences are a result of, and/or or influenced by, societal factors (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, it is important that researchers using thematic analysis make the theoretical lens used to view the data known (Braun & Clarke, 2006), as it provides clarification for the nature of the phenomenon studied, the study objectives, the methods used by the researcher, and the way the researcher has interpreted the data and communicated their findings (Carter & Little, 2007; Holloway & Todres, 2003).

**Questionnaires**

In quantitative research, the use of questionnaires is an efficient and common form of data collection as large amounts of data can be collected at a small cost (Phelas, Bloch, & Seale, 2011; Vogt, Gardner, and Haeffele, 2012). Questionnaires are valuable when wanting to obtain information from participants directly and when data can be
obtained by using structured questions and through brief responses (Vogt et al., 2012). Good questionnaires are reliable and have strong validity, meaning the results the questionnaire produces are reproducible and the questionnaire is measuring what it is supposed to measure, respectively (Streiner & Norman, 2003). Insights drawn from qualitative studies can be used to inform questionnaires for quantitative studies and their use together offers a form of mixed methodology.

**Thesis rationale and objectives**

An owner’s expectations for how much time, money, and effort is required in caring for a companion animal, and for the companion animal’s behaviour, can affect their attachment to that animal (Diesel et al., 2008; Patronek et al., 1996; Serpell, 1996). When an owner’s expectations are met and a positive human-companion animal relationship is formed, both owner and companion animal are recipients of a variety of psychological and physical benefits (Brown & Rhodes, 2006; Friedmann, 1990; Jennings, 1997; Wood et al., 2007). However, when an owner’s expectations are not met, and a negative human-companion animal relationship is formed, or an owner has weak attachment to their animal, the risk of relinquishment of a companion animal increases (Diesel et al., 2008; Kidd et al., 1992; Patronek et al., 1996; Serpell, 1996).

To date, few studies have been conducted to investigate owner expectations and the studies that do focus on this topic were conducted over two decades ago. It is important to build on the findings of previous studies by sampling from different countries, looking at additional expectation items, and investigating how owner factors, previous companion-animal experience, and knowledge regarding companion-animal care affect owners’ expectations for their animals and for themselves as owners. It is
hoped that through identifying common expectations owners hold for their companion animals and knowledge gaps and misconceptions surrounding companion animal ownership, a better understanding of what information and tools companion-animal owners need prior to acquiring an animal will be identified, leading to more successful, sustainable human-animal relationships.

Through the process of gathering information in the form of one-on-one interviews, paper questionnaires, and follow-up phone calls with individuals at the stage of companion-animal adoption, the aims of this thesis were to provide the information needed to assist professionals in the companion animal field in providing the most appropriate, reliable resources to companion-animal owners and adopters, to inform strategies to reduce companion-animal relinquishment, and to identify areas of future research that are necessary to understanding the complex issue of relinquishment.

The primary objectives of this thesis were:

1.) to explore common thoughts and expectations individuals have when acquiring a companion animal, through the use of one-on-one interviews and thematic analysis (Chapter 2);

2.) to explore how adopter demographics and knowledge regarding companion-animal care affect adopter expectations for themselves, their companion animal, and their relationship with their companion animal (Chapter 3).
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CHAPTER TWO

Exploring the Anticipated Concerns and Challenges of Adopters Prior to Acquiring a Dog or Cat from an Animal Shelter

Prepared in the style of Anthroözos
Abstract

An owner’s expectations for companion-animal ownership can affect both their attachment to, and satisfaction with, their animal. Understanding these expectations and their underlying influential factors may help to better match adopters and companion animals, and increase the success of adoptions. The intention of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of the thoughts and expectations of adopters prior to acquisition of a companion animal. The study involved recruiting individuals filling out adoption applications at one of three animal shelters in Ontario, Canada. Recruitment was conducted until data saturation was achieved, resulting in 17 semi-structured one-on-one interviews. Interviews were conducted to explore participants’ reasons for adopting, thoughts on desirable and undesirable animal traits, anticipated challenges or concerns with the adoption or adjustment period, and previous experiences with companion animals. Findings highlighted animal behaviour, including unknown history, aggression, incompatibility with a current companion animal, shy or aloof behaviour, and destructive and vocal behaviour, as a pre-adoption concern held by the majority of participants. Participant thoughts on managing anticipated problem behaviours appeared to depend on the relationship they expected to have with the adopted animal. Participants who said certain behaviours were “deal-breakers” often identified specific traits they wanted and did not want in their adopted animal, compared to individuals who were willing to try training and get advice. This latter group of adopters generally indicated they would accept the companion animal for itself. Owner-related concerns, including living situation, allergies, concerns relating to animal care, and dealing with the eventual death of the animal, were brought up less frequently by participants. The results suggest both
animal-related and owner-related pre-adoption concerns should be explored and discussed at the time of adoption in order to better prepare individuals for companion-animal ownership.

Keywords: adoption, behaviour, companion animal, expectations, relinquishment
Introduction

Companion-animal ownership is an integral part of Western society; it has been estimated that approximately 32.3% of Canadian households and 36.5% of U.S. households own at least one dog, and 35.5% of Canadian households and 30.4% of U.S. households own at least one cat (Perrin 2009; American Veterinary Medical Association [AVMA] 2012). Most individuals acquire animals for emotional and social reasons, including companionship, to teach children responsibility, for physical contact, and to take care of something (Albert and Bulcroft 1988; Endenburg, Hart and Bouw 1994; Cohen 2002). In addition, caring for a companion animal provides a source of non-judgmental companionship and can result in a variety of human physical and psychological benefits including lowered blood pressure and heart rate, increased physical activity, reduced loneliness and depression, and increased social interactions (Serpell 1991; Anderson, Reid and Jennings 1992; Rew 2000; Allen et al. 2002; Brown and Rhodes 2006; Wood et al. 2007; Cutt et al. 2008; Walsh 2009; Owen et al. 2010; Sable 2013). In many instances, the bond between people and their companion animal is strong, with many caretakers viewing their animals as family members, close companions, or as children (Cohen 2002; Neidhart and Boyd 2002).

Although many people are satisfied with the relationship they have with a companion animal in their care (Neidhart and Boyd 2002), a variety of owner- and animal-related factors can negatively impact the human-animal relationship and lead to companion-animal relinquishment. The Animal Humane Society (AHS), in the U.S., reported that between July 2012 and June 2013, 43% of animal intakes at their facilities were due to owner surrender of animals for reasons other than euthanasia (Animal
Humane Society [AHS] n.d.). The most common reasons identified in the published literature for relinquishing a companion animal have been related to housing issues (e.g., zoning regulations, parent/landlord disapproval, moving), owner lifestyle issues (e.g., pregnancy, new baby, allergies, divorce, no time for the pet), or undesirable companion-animal behaviour (e.g., aggression towards other people and animals, inappropriate elimination, destructive behaviour) (Salman et al. 1998; Salman et al. 2000; Marston and Bennett 2003).

Owner expectations impact the attachment an owner feels towards a companion animal. In one study, owners who found that taking care of their dog was more work than expected were 9.9 times more likely to relinquish their dog than owners who found the amount of work was less than they expected (Diesel, Pfeiffer and Brodbelt 2008). In addition, an individual’s expectations for their animal’s role can affect their tolerance of certain animal behaviours and increase the risk of relinquishment (Kidd, Kidd and George 1992; Cromwell-Davis 2008). Behaviour problems owners have reported post-adoption include pulling on the leash when walked, mouthing, hyperactivity, escaping, destructive behaviour, fear, separation anxiety, inappropriate elimination, aggression towards other animals and humans, and being vocal (Marston, Bennett and Coleman 2005).

Recognizing that there are a number of common owner-related and animal-related reasons for companion-animal relinquishment, understanding adopters’ expectations prior to adoption is likely to play an important role in managing an adopter’s expectations and helping to ensure a successful human-animal relationship by avoiding common reasons for relinquishment. One study found that 8.9% of post-adoption returns
of dogs to the shelter could have potentially been prevented by providing the caretaker with more education in advance, including realistic expectations of the effort required in caring for a companion animal (Diesel, Pfeiffer and Brodbelt 2008).

As part of a broader qualitative study exploring adopters’ thoughts and expectations prior to acquiring an animal, the findings presented here provide an account of participants’ pre-adoption concerns and perceived challenges to companion-animal ownership.

Materials and methods

The study protocol was reviewed and cleared by the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board (REB#12AP022).

Study design

The study consisted of a series of semi-structured, one-on-one interviews conducted at three animal shelters in Ontario, Canada: two were in southwestern Ontario and one in eastern Ontario. Inclusion criteria for the study included English-speaking male or female individuals, aged 18 or older, in the final stage of the adoption process (i.e., in the process of filling out an adoption application) at the time of recruitment. At the time of the study, participants had not brought a companion-animal home but had already interacted with the animal of interest at the shelters.

Shelter staff members introduced the study, using a prepared script (Appendix A.1), to individuals who were filling out adoption application forms, inviting their participation in the study. To interested individuals, the author explained, in-person, the purpose and importance of the study, including what was involved and that there was an incentive for participating (i.e. a ten dollar coffee gift card) (Appendix A.1). The study
focused exclusively on individuals interested in adopting dogs or cats; thus, individuals adopting other types of animals were excluded. Upon agreeing to participate, participants provided written, informed consent prior to their interview (Appendix A.3). Participant recruitment was conducted until data saturation was achieved; the interviews were conducted from June to July 2012.

*Interview structure*

A semi-structured interview guide was constructed to ensure the same core questions were asked of all participants (Appendix A.4). To allow participants to speak openly about their experiences, the questions in the interview guide were open-ended. Key questions were used to gather information and insight into individual reasons for adopting, perceived desirable and undesirable traits in a companion animal, any challenges participants foresaw with the adoption or adjustment period, and to recall past experiences with companion animals.

A pre-test, involving a convenient sample of seven individuals known to the author, was conducted. The pre-test was conducted to evaluate the study protocol and familiarize the author with the recruitment script and interview guide.

Final interviews were conducted by the author in a quiet, private room at each of the three animal shelters. All interviews were audio-recorded (Zoom H2 Handy Recorder). A professional transcriber transcribed the audio-recorded interviews verbatim. Transcripts were de-identified and only the author, author’s advisor, and professional transcriber had access to the interview transcripts, ensuring participant confidentiality.
Data analysis

Following verbatim transcription, the author listened to each audio-recorded interview while reading the transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the transcription and to begin to become more familiar with the data. The transcripts were then analyzed using inductive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This type of analysis was used to identify patterns among the interviews that represented the major thoughts and experiences that were both common and distinct among participants. The analysis followed the six stages of thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Following several reviews of the transcripts, to familiarize the author with the data, the transcripts were coded line-by-line until data saturation had been reached. Data saturation represents “data adequacy”, the point where no new information is found in additional transcripts (Kerr, Nixon, and Wild 2010). Initial line-by-line codes were then assessed to determine how they were related to each other and how similar codes could be grouped together. The line-by-line codes were grouped into main codes, which were subsequently defined in a codebook. Main codes were then arranged into themes and sub-themes. A thematic map was generated highlighting the relationships among the identified themes and sub-themes.

Inter-coder reliability

Inter-coder reliability was conducted to support the rigor of the analysis. An individual, who had experience with companion-animal ownership but no profound knowledge on animal shelter workings, used the established codebook of main codes to review and code the same transcripts coded by the author. Coding between the author and second coder were compared and disagreements were discussed. If an agreement could
not be reached by consensus, the code was deemed a true disagreement. Inter-coder reliability was calculated as the number of agreements divided by the total number of agreements and disagreements (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall and McCulloch 2011).

**Results**

*Study participants*

Demographic information for the study participants are reported in Table 2.1. In total, 17 interviews were conducted across the three study locations. Six (35.3%) interviews involved a couple, where both partners were involved in answering questions. When a couple participated, demographic information was gathered from the self-identified primary caregiver. All participants had owned a companion animal previously, with 11 (64.7%) participants being companion-animal owners at the time of the study. Four participants (23.5%) reported having relinquished an animal previously. Ten (58.8%) participants planned to adopt cats and seven (41.2%) participants planned to adopt dogs.

*Data saturation*

Interviews ranged from 14.3 to 83.1 minutes (mean = 29.9 minutes, median = 26.2 minutes) in length. Data saturation was reached during thematic analysis at 12 interviews, which included interviews from all three shelter locations. An additional two interviews were coded to confirm data saturation. Therefore, a total of 14 out of 17 interviews were line-by-line coded and included in the thematic analysis presented here. In addition, prior to finalizing the thematic analysis, the three interviews that were not
line-by-line coded were reviewed thoroughly to ensure they would not contribute any new information to the study. Inter-coder reliability on the 14 coded interviews was 0.88.

**Thematic analysis results**

Thematic analysis revealed adopter expectations and thoughts prior to acquiring a dog or cat surrounded five major themes: “adopter concerns of, and perceived challenges to, companion-animal ownership”, “adopter and animal factors taken into consideration in the decision to adopt”, “perceived emotional benefits of the human-companion animal relationship”, “advice and sources for acquiring information”, and “adopter considerations surrounding the required care of a companion animal”.

This paper focuses on results relating to “adopter concerns of, and perceived challenges to, companion-animal ownership” (Figure 2.1) because it received notable attention by all participants during the interviews, and the theme appeared to pose the greatest threat to the relationship between a human and an adopted companion animal. This theme had two subthemes: one representing pre-adoption concerns surrounding undesirable companion-animal behavior and the second representing owner-related concerns prior to companion-animal adoption.

1. **Pre-adoption concerns surrounding undesirable companion-animal behaviour**

Animal behaviour was a predominant consideration and pre-adoption concern for all participants. These participants spoke about undesirable behaviours in two ways: either as an unwanted, but manageable trait, or a trait that was an adoption “deal-breaker”, which participants indicated would result in the return or re-homing of the animal. In general, concerns toward undesirable companion-animal behaviours
surrounded the potential to disrupt relationships either between the adopter and the adopted companion animal, or between the adopter and other people, including children. Of specific concern for participants was adopting an animal that had unknown history, was aggressive, was incompatible with a current companion animal, was shy or aloof, vocal, or destructive.

1.1 Unknown companion-animal history

A number of participants interested in adopting dogs expressed concern over lacking knowledge about the adoptive companion animal’s past. These participants reported feeling nervous about how the adopted animal would act once it was brought home, in comparison to how it behaved in the shelter. These participants indicated lacking information was a concern because it limited their ability to predict how the animal would behave once they brought it home. Participants were concerned with not knowing whether the animal had “random triggers”, bad habits, whether the animal was trainable, or how the animal would adjust, in general, once it was home. “That’s probably my biggest worry… that’s always the thing on the card, ‘unknown,’ because they don’t know. And these animals are in a run, they’re not in a house, so you don’t know – you don’t know what bad habits they have and whether you can undo them.” For these participants, this apprehension was often expressed in relation to concern over the potential impact an animal that did not adapt well into their life might have on their relationship with that animal, “she’s going to have to learn manners, and be trained, and be obedient of course… You don’t want a bad kid, you don’t want a bad dog.”

One participant was concerned about lacking information regarding the adopted animal’s history because they were uncertain whether the adopted animal would be
trainable. This participant indicated they felt an owner should have mastery over their companion animal and be in the position of “alpha”, and that a companion animal should respond to their owner’s commands. Thus, having an animal that could not be trained would be detrimental to this adopter’s expected dynamic with the adopted companion animal, and in their mind, would result in their return of the animal.

For other participants concerned with lack of information on a companion-animal’s history, leading to potentially unpredictable behaviour, the concern appeared to be related to how unpredictable behaviour from a companion animal might impact their relationship with other people. A couple that participated in the study together mentioned the importance of their adopted animal being good with other people and children several times during their interview: “I think just like the behaviour stuff, you know, like I’d be worried that, you know, even if they seem nice here, that we’d get them home and they’d be really barky or they would, you know, be aggressive towards other people… like our friends have a little kid so we might be worried about that”. The importance of the animal’s relationship with others on their relationship with the companion animal was clear for these participants. For this couple, they indicated they were purposefully choosing to adopt from a shelter instead of another animal source because they believed a shelter would be more likely to provide information on an animal’s history and personality: “I think we were looking on [name of online source] and stuff… if it was just a random person, would they really have had the, sort of the vetting of why they’re giving the dog away, and whether the dog is healthy, or – you know, they’ve had some interaction [at the shelter], they can tell you a little bit about their personality, and it’s not just like, ‘I found this dog in my yard.’ (laughs).” It was important for these participants
to try to have an idea of what they were getting themselves into before taking the animal home, in order to avoid potential problems that might jeopardize their relationship with the animal.

1.2 Companion-animal aggression towards adopters, other people and animals

Aggressive behaviour was discussed by all participants, either in terms of their adoptive companion animal behaving aggressively towards themselves, towards their current animal(s), or towards other people and other animals. Overall, aggression was the most commonly identified undesirable behaviour mentioned by participants wanting to adopt a dog, as well as participants wanting to adopt a cat. Participants described their concerns with adopting an aggressive animal consistently in relation to the effect it would have on forming a relationship with the adopted companion animal. Dog adopters, who discussed animal aggression directed towards other people or animals, felt that having an aggressive animal would limit their ability to enjoy and include the companion animal in leisure activities, and both cat and dog adopters felt it could also negatively impact their relationship with others, “I think we’re hoping that you know, [adopted animal] just gets along with us, and isn’t too aggressive towards other people. We do like to have friends over and stuff, so it couldn’t be aggressive towards strangers.”

Although all adopters expressed concerns toward adopting an aggressive animal, several participants expressed willingness to work through an animal’s aggression, regardless of who or what it was directed at. Most of the participants who discussed their willingness to work with an adopted animal on aggression expressed their newly adopted companion animal would be considered a “companion”, “buddy”, “family member”,

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“child” or “fur baby”, and indicated they expected their newly adopted animal to play an emotional role in their lives rather than be “just a pet”, as one participant indicated: “for me, they’re part of my family, and they’re part of my friends’ family… it’s not just a pet. It would be like, my brother or my mom… somebody I take care of, takes care of me… it’s a different level than being a pet…. So a pet, you know, protects the house and that type of thing… for me, really I just want, we have fun, we play… it’s a loving relationship.” These participants expressed caring about the animals’ happiness, and showed a deep sense of commitment to understanding the aggression and putting effort into making the human-animal relationship work, “I mean, a cat obviously gets like that because there’s a reason, cats just don’t just wake up one morning and want to just be vicious. So to me, if something like that ever happened, I would definitely look into going, ‘ok, what could have happened for this?’ Because I won’t – it’s not my choice to say, ‘oh, let’s get rid of it.’ No, that’s not the option. The option is to work with it.”

In contrast, one individual clearly indicated owner-directed aggression would be an adoption “deal-breaker”. Unlike others, this participant indicated they expected to be in a position of control over the animal and that owners should have mastery over their animals, “THAT is a deal-breaker. You can’t have a dog you’re afraid of… You have to discipline them and you have to be alpha, and if you’re afraid of them, you’re not alpha.” For this participant, it was clear that having an aggressive animal was seen as a barrier to establishing themselves in a position of control, or as “alpha” in their own words. For this participant, a lack of control over an adopted animal was seen as a justifiable reason for returning an adopted animal to the shelter. It was clear that participants’ anticipated
relationship with an adopted animal influenced their level of willingness to seek help if their new companion animal was behaving aggressively.

The influence of a participant’s expected relationship with an adopted animal and their approach to managing aggression was taken further by a couple of participants who said they would blame themselves if the companion animal was behaving aggressively towards them. These participants differed from other participants in that they described their relationship with an adopted animal as similar to a relationship between a “mother and child”: “I just want to be there for her and make sure that she feels safe and happy and healthy. Yeah. Kind of be a mom to her, too, because she is so young.” These two participants discussed their desire for the adopted animal to have complete dependency on them to provide what it needs, as seen in the quote, “oh, I love giving, I love doing, so to me a cat that’s needy, like I love that… I want to just come through and just be able to give her shelter, love, just playful surroundings. Have her feel this is her home.” This desire for the adopted animal to be dependent on them was connected to the two participants expressing a strong feeling of responsibility for providing the best environment for their companion animal, and ensuring their animal was happy in their home. As such, these participants indicated they would take their companion animal behaving aggressively towards them as a sign that they were doing something wrong and they needed to change rather than the animal, “I would be kind of more analyzing, like, what I’m doing wrong: how’s her surroundings? Are we making it an aggressive environment for her? Is she feeling scared?”.

In relation to an adopted animal being aggressive, a few participants expressed the importance of their adopted animal getting along with other people and other animals.
These participants indicated aggression towards others was a concern because of the possible strain it could put on their social life. These participants discussed the importance of feeling comfortable inviting visitors over to their house and having their dog behave well during interactions with people or other animals outside of the home. “We have a lot of friends who have dogs, so we’ll have a lot of people over with their dogs, and then when he’s old enough, he’ll go down to the leash-free park. You don’t want to be walking down the street with him and he’s got a hate on for, you know, other dogs, and he’s lunging at everything that’s going by. I don’t want that.” Although this was brought up more often in relation to adopting a dog, participants also raised this concern in relation to adopting cats. It appeared getting along with other people and animals was a greater priority for dog adopters in comparison to cat adopters because of plans to include an adopted dog in activities outside of the home, like going for walks and going on trips.

For one couple, having their companion animal not get along with children was viewed as an adoption “deal-breaker” because it would limit their ability to visit with their friends: “We’ve seen a couple of descriptions where it’s like, ‘oh this dog is not good with kids.’ And that’s a deal-breaker for us, because we want to be able to hang out with our friends.” For this couple, it was apparent that their relationship with their friends took precedence over the relationship they would have with an adopted animal.

1.3 Incompatibility between adopted and current companion animals

Over half of the participants that were current companion-animal owners expressed concern toward their current animal and the newly adopted companion animal adjusting well to each other. This concern was discussed by both dog and cat adopters
and appeared to stem from one of two things: their loyalty to their existing companion animal(s), or the adopter wanting the adopted animal to fit into their household and for both animals to be happy in their home.

Approximately half of participants that were concerned with the compatibility of the adopted animal and their current animal(s) said that if they were not compatible, they would return the adopted animal. These participants expressed having strong emotional bonds toward their current animals, calling them their “companions” or “buddy”, “family members”, or their “child”. These participants indicated the loyalty and attachment they have to their current animal would take priority over a relationship with the newly adopted animal, “if I saw that they weren’t getting along or [current dog] was really put off or aggressive, I wouldn’t [keep the newly adopted dog] – because, you know, we had him first.” One participant, who spoke about having experienced returning an adopted companion animal a few weeks prior to the interview, indicated one of the reasons for the return was due to the adopted animal not getting along with their cat at home, “yeah, after almost two weeks they were still – and the [current cat], she’s such a nice cat, and she was trying to approach the other one, and every time she went near her, [newly adopted cat] just hiss at her… Well yeah, that’s why we got rid of the other one, it was horrible.”

In contrast, a few participants concerned about the possibility of incompatibility between animals expressed an interest in ensuring the happiness of both their current animal and the newly adopted animal, “I want to make sure that they both feel loved equally and that I’m not favouring one or the other. And it’s going to be like, you know, when you introduce a new baby to a family, like the older sibling is going to feel neglected, so it’s going to be – you know, you want to make sure that he knows that he’s
still loved.” A couple of the participants that indicated they would not favour one companion animal over the other said they had done research to prepare themselves prior to adoption on how to properly introduce new companion animals to current companion animals and the best age to introduce a new companion animal to the household.

1.4 “Shy” and “aloof” companion-animal behaviour

The majority of participants perceived cats as independent animals, “[dogs] are always so eager to see you… I’m not saying cats don’t, but cats are more independent, whereas dogs are more dependent on you, and they want to be with you, they’re part of your pack type of thing.” Two participants planning to adopt cats were concerned with the potential for an adopted cat to be “shy” or “aloof” as a result of the independent nature of cats.

Both of these participants appeared to be extremely emotional about the adoption and expected to rely heavily on their animal for companionship and emotional support, “She’ll be like my therapy cat… somebody I can talk to… somebody that will be there… There’s nothing worse than feeling that you’re all alone in certain times. And if you’ve got a cat there that you love and that you think loves you back [laughs] – you know, then that sometimes makes all the difference in the world.” Neither participant said shy behaviour was a “deal-breaker” but both implied they would blame themselves if their adopted cat was shy or aloof, “I understand all cats are going to start off being shy, but yeah I wouldn’t want a cat being scared or shy because I would think, ‘ok, what am I doing so wrong?’” One of these two participants was also among the two participants that said they would blame themselves if the adopted animal was aggressive.
Both participants indicated they expected to have a strong emotional bond with their adopted cat; shy behaviour was seen as an obstacle to this relationship forming: “I’m looking for that companionship again, you know? So I don’t want a cat that’s going to be aloof or shy… I want a cat that will play with me… a cat that’s at least going to show affection, and be around me and play, you know.”

1.5 Destructive and vocal companion-animal behaviour

The undesirability of both destructive and vocal behaviour for participants seemed to be due to irritability, potentially affecting the relationship between the participant and their adopted animal, and the adopter’s relationship with others. Destructive behaviour was discussed more often by participants planning to adopt a cat over participants planning to adopt a dog; however, no participant said destructive behaviour was an adoption “deal-breaker”. This heightened concern relating to cats appeared to be associated with these participants being concerned about the cat using their claws on furniture. Destructive behaviour did not seem to be a major concern for over half of the participants who brought it up, as they indicated it was a manageable trait that they thought could be minimized through various training methods, “I would like, you know, one that doesn’t scratch everything, but again that is something that you have to work with and train… if you catch them clawing something that they shouldn’t, spray them. I know there’s different products you can use as a repellent, to try and deter them from being there. There’s catnip products that you can put on the scratching post to attract them to those, so things like that.” For these participants, destructive behaviour was seen as an overall annoyance but manageable.
Being vocal was viewed negatively by approximately a third of participants. Half of these participants felt vocal behaviour was an undesirable trait, yet it was not a reason to prevent the adoption from occurring or to return the newly adopted animal; it was simply a preference to not have a very vocal animal, “I think barking is not great. I mean, once in a while is ok, but I don’t want the dog to bark all the time.” Only one of the participants who felt vocal behaviour was undesirable mentioned they would seek advice to try to minimize it.

In contrast, two couples interviewed indicated vocal behaviour was an adoption “deal-breaker”. For one couple, who had recently adopted and returned a cat a few weeks prior to the interview, vocal behaviour was one of the reasons for the return: “we actually adopted one from here a few weeks ago and it just didn’t work out, she needed to be outdoors and she was meowing ALL the time, and disrupting the house.” The other couple simply indicated that they would not be willing to tolerate vocal behaviour, “Barkyness. Little chihuahuas, yapping at everything that moves. Deal-breaker.”

For a couple of participants, vocal and destructive behaviour was identified to be undesirable due to their current living situation, leading to potential tension with other people or a landlord, “because living in an apartment, people can hear that, and I don’t want to get a complaint right? So, yeah, no, I won’t be teaching her to speak or anything – I’ll be perfectly happy if she doesn’t learn how to.” In addition, concern was expressed over destructive or vocal behavior causing a rift in the tenant and landlord relationship. In one instance, a participant talked about using crate training when out of the house in order to minimize destructive behaviour, “at least until I’m comfortable that he’s not going to go beserk. Because I have a landlord, and he would not be very happy with
that.” The same participant, when asked if there was anything that would stop them from adopting, said, “no, I don’t think there’s any specific challenge that I’m not willing to work with”, illustrating the participant’s commitment to working with the companion animal on undesirable behaviours, including destructive behaviour. In comparison, another participant discussed a time when they had to re-home a companion animal due to landlord demands. The landlord-tenant relationship was found to be the root cause for concern with certain undesirable behaviours for a few participants.

1.6 Other undesirable behaviours

Other undesirable behaviours touched upon briefly by one or two participants during the interviews included housetraining issues, escaping the house, jumping on people, and control issues. None of these behaviours were raised as adoption “deal-breakers” by participants.

1.7 Adoption “deal-breakers”

Each participant who discussed animal-related concerns or challenges they considered to be adoption “deal-breakers”, also talked about behaviours that were undesirable but manageable, “Yeah, those [aggression with children and unpredictable behaviour] are the biggest ones. I mean, it’d be nice if they didn’t chew up the place either, but… some breeds are chewy, and as long as they have their toys, it’s fine.” Therefore, in the minds of the participants, it was not undesirable behaviour in general that was an adoption “deal-breaker”; rather, specific behaviours that posed challenges to their situation or beliefs that were deemed adoption “deal-breakers”. For example, when incompatibility between a current and new animal was perceived to be an adoption “deal-breaker”, it was the result of the participants feeling committed to their current animal.
When owner-directed aggression was discussed as a “deal-breaker” by one participant, it was a result of the perception that humans should have mastery over their companion animals. In another instance, aggression towards other people was deemed an adoption “deal-breaker” as a result of the couple’s lifestyle and the perceived effect the behaviour would have on the couple’s relationship with others. When vocal behaviour was seen as a “deal-breaker” by one couple, it was due to the couple’s personal intolerance for such behaviour.

None of the participants who brought up returning an adopted animal as a means of dealing with animal-related concerns or challenges, talked about training or getting advice for the identified adoption “deal-breaker” or indicated that they would be willing to work through the problem behaviour. In addition, participants who indicated certain animal behaviours were warranted reasons for returning an animal tended to express very specific traits they wanted or did not want in an adopted animal. On the other hand, participants who discussed training and getting advice for managing animal-related concerns or challenges often made statements about accepting the companion animal for its own personality, or about the steps they would take to adapt to their animal’s personality.

2. Owner-related concerns prior to companion-animal adoption

Owner-related concerns and challenges received notably less attention from participants than animal-related concerns or challenges during the one-on-one interviews. Only a handful of owner-related concerns and challenges were raised by a few participants, with the most commonly discussed owner-related concerns surrounding living situation and allergies. In general, this group of concerns tended to be implied
rather than discussed directly in response to being asked about general concerns or challenges the participants had prior to adoption of a companion animal or tended to be associated with animal-related concerns at various points throughout the interviews.

2.1 Living situation

For a few participants, their living situation was both a consideration and obstacle to companion-animal ownership. One participant spoke about renting and having to take their landlord into consideration when deciding to adopt a companion animal: “we did our research for that, to make sure our landlord says ok. Because without her approval, I can’t do it, because I would feel bad, right? So, want a good reference? Make a happy landlord.” This participant indicated the importance of continuing to have a good relationship with their landlord; evident in their intended actions to only adopt a companion animal once they obtained their landlord’s permission.

For two other participants, their living situations posed a challenge to companion-animal ownership. One participant was at odds with other family members over acquiring a companion animal. The other household members present during the interview voiced a general dislike for companion animals, clearly opposing the participant’s desire to go through with the adoption, stating their various annoyances surrounding companion animals and their behaviours. Another participant spoke about having previously relinquished a companion animal due to landlord stipulations: “The landlord was really sticky! She [previous cat] used to sit in the windows, and somebody complained… there was cats all over the building, somebody saw her and said, ‘I think she can’t have a cat if I can’t have a cat.’ He [landlord] made me get rid of her.” In both instances, the participants’ living situations impacted their ability to have a companion animal.
As previously indicated, a couple of participants’ living situations were underlying reasons for their concern surrounding destructive and vocal behaviours. Therefore, living situation was both a consideration for potential adopters and also viewed as a challenge by some participants where disagreements between tenant and landlord or other household members was an obstacle to adoption.

2.2 Allergies

Adopter allergy was mentioned by two participants, both of whom were interested in adopting dogs. For one of the participants, their allergies were taken into consideration when deciding to adopt a companion animal, “when I was younger, I had cats, as did my husband. But sometimes I have an allergic reaction to cats. I love them, but – the dogs for whatever reason don’t bother me.” Although allergy was not the only reason this participant chose to adopt a dog over a cat, it was a factor the participant indicated they were taking into consideration.

For the other participant, allergies were more concerning. Their allergy to animal dander was very apparent in the interview as they were sniffing, sneezing, and coughing after being in the shelter for only a short period of time. The participant showed concern over potentially being allergic to their adopted animal, “well, I’m hoping I’m not allergic to her, because there are never any guarantees about that, but I’m going in hoping for the best, and you know, we’ll take it from there.” Although, the participant mentioned researching the breed of dog they were interested in adopting to ensure it was hypoallergenic, they also displayed a more casual approach to dealing with their allergy concern by “hoping for the best”.

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2.3 Other owner-related concerns

Other owner-related concerns touched upon briefly by only one or two participants were related to animal care (e.g., being attentive to the animal’s health), and the anticipated experience of having to grieve the loss of the adopted companion animal in the future.

2.4 Differences between owner- and animal-related concerns

During the interviews, participants described more proactive approaches to managing owner-related challenges. As mentioned previously, one participant discussed having spoken to a landlord about getting a companion animal prior to beginning adoption formalities. Another participant, who had allergies, researched the breed characteristics of the dog they were interested in adopting prior to formalizing the adoption to ensure it was hypoallergenic.

In comparison, the majority of participants expressed an attitude toward animal-related concerns and challenges that they would have to wait and see and hope for the best, “hopefully she settles into where she is and she’s happy with the environment, and you know… hopefully she’s good with the cats.” Only a few participants mentioned attempts they had made prior to adoption to prepare for managing their animal-related concerns. For example, a few participants mentioned the research they had done in preparation of the adoption, such as the participant that researched how to introduce a new and existing animal and the couple that chose to adopt at a shelter versus acquiring an animal from another source because they believed they would receive more information about the animal from the shelter. Although some participants clearly showed they had made an effort to prepare themselves in anticipation of their animal-
related concerns or challenges, most participants indicated they would deal with things as they came, “hopefully she’ll adjust in there good, and that’s what I’m hoping, that she’ll adjust good.”, supporting a more reactive, rather than preventative, approach to managing their animal-related concerns.

**Discussion**

Findings of the present study offer a deep understanding of participants’ pre-adoption concerns and perceived challenges to companion-animal ownership, which can provide animal shelters and other animal sources (e.g., breeders, pet stores, rescue groups, online sources) with information that can be used to develop pre-adoption education programs and resources. It also provides animal sources with topics to investigate with potential adopters in order to identify and manage a person’s pre-adoption expectations. This will hopefully assist animal sources with troubleshooting an individual’s concerns as a preventive measure toward ensuring a sustainable human-animal relationship.

Past research has found that both undesirable companion-animal behaviour and owner-related factors are commonly reported reasons for the relinquishment or return of an animal (Miller et al. 1996; New et al. 1999; Patronek et al. 1996; Scarlett et al. 1999; Salman et al. 2000; Diesel, Brodbelt and Pfeiffer 2010). In the present study, prior to adoption, individuals seemed focused primarily on concerns or challenges related to the animal’s behaviour, specifically: unknown companion-animal history, aggression, incompatibility between new and current animals, “shy” and “aloof” behaviour, and destructive and vocal behaviour. Many animal behaviours cited in the literature as reasons for relinquishment post-adoption appeared to also be concerns on the minds of
participants in the present study prior to adoption. This suggests there may be an opportunity to work with adopters prior to taking an animal home to ensure the selection of companion animal is appropriate for the adopter, and to ensure the adopter has been counselled on their pre-adoption expectations and concerns relating to companion-animal behaviour.

In relation to behaviour-related concerns, not knowing an adopted animal’s history, and the risk of unpredictable behavior or behavior not observed in the shelter setting, was concerning for a number of participants in the current study. In addition, one couple mentioned deciding to adopt an animal from an animal shelter instead of another source due to the information they expected to receive about the animal. In both situations, participants indicated a need for information, suggesting they wanted to be in as much control of the adoption, and as prepared, as possible. This finding is in agreement with a past study where adopters indicated the companion-animal adoption process could be improved through shelter staff providing better information pertaining to the health and personalities of prospective adoptees, and giving advice surrounding which animal would best suit adopters (Neidhart and Boyd 2002). This finding suggests many adopters want pre-adoption education and counseling; therefore, providing these resources is likely to result in a better outcome for all parties involved.

The program, “Satisfaction Guaranteed”, initially implemented by the Humane Society of Boulder Valley in Boulder, Colorado in 2010, is an example of an attempt to address this type of concern by advocating that a potential adopter has the right to take a companion animal home for a trial run, with the promise that if an animal and adopter are incompatible, the animal can be returned to the shelter free of judgment (Troughton
2013). The success of the program has been tested at two locations, Salt Lake County Animal Services and the Anti-Cruelty Society in Chicago (Weiss 2011). At both of these shelters, the transition rate (number of adoptions divided by the number of people that walked into the shelter) increased for felines and the canine transition rate also increased at the Salt Lake County Animal Services location, meaning more people were choosing to adopt (Weiss 2011). Return rates did not increase at the Anti-Cruelty Society location (Weiss 2011). An increase in the return rate of adult cats, in relation to pre-implementation of the program, was seen at the Salt Lake County Animal Services location; however, even with this increase in returns, more cats were adopted (Weiss 2011). Initial findings are supportive that the implementation of this type of program more broadly within shelters and other animal sources could increase transition rates and could have the potential to address adopters’ concerns, as identified in the study. However, more research is needed to assess the impact of this program on potential adopters, adoptions, and shelter animals.

In the present study, all participants expressed concern regarding their adopted animal behaving aggressively towards themselves or others. Participants felt aggressive behaviour could negatively impact their relationship with their adopted animal and their personal relationships with others. This is in agreement with past studies that have found that animal aggression is a common behavioural concern for owners and a commonly reported reason for relinquishment (Salman et al. 2000; Diesel, Pfeiffer and Brodbelt 2008; Shore, Burdsal and Douglas 2008). A past study found that owners that did not receive behavioural advice regarding their dog’s aggression towards people were 11 times more likely to return the dog than dogs that did not have behavioural problems
(Diesel, Pfeiffer and Brodbelt 2008). In contrast, if the owner received advice regarding their dog’s aggression, the odds of return were reduced to 5.5 times (Diesel, Pfeiffer and Brodbelt 2008). Providing resources and educating adopters on ways to manage aggression is an important consideration for inclusion in pre-adoption counseling programs in order to reduce the threat known and unknown aggression at the time of adoption can pose to the human-animal relationship.

Many of the participants who were current companion-animal owners in the present study expressed concern regarding the compatibility between their current household animal(s) and their newly adopted animal. Those who indicated incompatibility would be an adoption “deal-breaker” showed loyalty to their current household animal(s), whereas others expressed concern for the happiness of both animals. Research has shown problems between new animals and current animals have resulted in relinquishment for both dogs and cats (Salman et al. 2000; Shore 2005). In the present study, only one participant described having researched prior to adoption how to best integrate new and existing companion animals. In addition, one participant who shared their experience of returning an animal a couple of weeks prior to the interview, indicated they found the incompatibility between the two animals to be the most concerning behaviour out of the reasons given for relinquishment. The participant indicated they had learned, from the experience of returning the animal, about the importance of developing a plan to “properly integrate” the newly adopted animal and their current animal in order to improve the chances of having a successful adoption this time. Rather than relying on learning from experience, as in this participant’s case, having educational resources on how to integrate a new animal into a household with existing animals would likely raise
awareness to this situation among potential adopters and in turn, reduce the risk of animals being returned or relinquished for this reason. Given the potential risk of return due to incompatibility between new and current animals, it is important for animal sources to explore the current household population of animals of a potential adopter in order to provide the appropriate resources and counseling on how to increase the chance of successfully integrating a new animal into the household. Interestingly, in the present study, 11 of the 17 participants currently had a companion animal at home and four of the 17 participants disclosed having had a previous experience where they had relinquished an animal.

A number of participants in the present study indicated they would be willing to engage in training classes or seek advice if their companion animal was exhibiting an undesirable behaviour. Although this is a positive finding of the present study, other research has found that many companion-animal owners were actually hesitant or had no intention to engage in training activities or obedience classes following adoption (Marston, Bennett and Coleman 2005; Bennett and Rohlf 2007). For example, in a study involving dog adopters from two shelters in Melbourne, Australia, 88% (22/25) of adopters of small-sized dogs, 59.1% (13/22) of adopters of medium-sized dogs, and 46.7% (7/15) of adopters of large-sized dogs had no intention of training their dog (Marston, Bennett and Coleman 2005). It is possible that in the present study, participant responses were reflective of their pre-adoption intentions, or were influenced by a bias to provide a socially acceptable response that would be in favour of seeking training or advice as a response to undesirable animal behaviour. In addition, participants of the present study implied taking a more reactive, rather than proactive, approach to managing
problematic behaviour. Only a small number of participants mentioned they had done preparation prior to adoption to help address potential animal-related concerns. Together, these findings suggest that even though owners and adopters may be willing to engage in training, there are likely certain obstacles to doing so. Understanding these potential barriers is important because both the action of seeking advice and engaging in training classes have been found to have a protective effect on the relinquishment of companion animals (Bennett and Rohlf 2007; Diesel, Pfeiffer and Brodbelt 2008). Furthermore, this highlights the importance of including behavior counseling at the time of adoption to ensure people do receive advice on common behavioural issues, in order to reduce the risk of adoption failure as a result of undesirable animal behavior.

In addition to animal shelters and other animal sources, veterinarians should also see a role in providing behavioural education and advice to individuals close to the time of adoption. It has been found that when owners receive advice from veterinarians, it reduces the risk of relinquishment for the companion animal involved (Patronek et al. 1996). Therefore, it falls to the entire animal-care community to educate both new and established dog and cat owners about companion-animal behavior in support of promoting sustainable human-animal relationships.

In the present study, participants who labeled certain undesirable behaviours as adoption “deal-breakers” tended to have specific traits in mind in comparison to individuals who were more willing to work through any behaviour problem. Participants with adoption “deal-breakers” in mind also spoke of behaviours they viewed to be undesirable but manageable. For these participants, it was often a specific situation or belief that made an undesirable behavior an adoption “deal-breaker”. This finding
highlights the importance of gathering information about a potential adopter’s specific expectations of the adopted animal. This may include specifically asking the adopter whether there are certain animal behaviours they consider to be an adoption “deal-breaker”. This information would allow shelter staff to better understand the individual adopter and their beliefs to ensure the adopter is properly matched to an animal.

Studies have found that personality matching between an owner and companion animal improves owner satisfaction and attachment (Woodward and Bauer 2007; Curb et al. 2013). “Meet Your Match (MYM) Canine-ality Adoption Program” and “Meet Your Match (MYM) Feline-ality Adoption Program”, are programs developed by The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) with the goal of matching the lifestyle and expectations of the adopter with the personality and behavior of a dog or cat (ASPCA 2013ab). This program has been shown to have the potential to be successful at increasing the adoption rate of adult dogs and decreasing the rate of adoption returns (Nobles 2006). For example, in 2000, at the Kansas Humane Society in the United States, the monthly adoption return rate decreased from between 15% to 20% to around 7% to 9% (Nobles 2006). Exploring an adopter’s living situation and expectations of an adopted animal, coupled with the shelter staff’s personal experiences with shelter animals, may help to better match adopters and companion animals, addressing many of the owner-related and animal-related concerns identified by participants in the present study.

Although animal-related concerns and challenges received a lot of discussion by participants in the current study, comparatively, owner-related concerns and challenges were less of a focus. Although it appeared some participants attempted to prepare for
their owner-related concerns by seeking out information in advance, research has found owner-related issues are some of the most common reasons reported for relinquishment (Miller et al. 1996; Salman et al. 1998; Scarlett et al. 1999). Owner-related factors have a greater potential to change than animal-related factors. As such, these reasons for relinquishment may be an area where greater attention needs to be drawn for potential adopters, including the provision of educational resources and counseling.

In the current study, two participants indicated their living situation was an obstacle to companion-animal adoption. In addition, a few participants identified pre-adoption concerns about the potential effects of destructive or vocal behaviour on the participant’s relationship with their landlord. In a study focused on moving as a reason for relinquishment, 42.1% (24/57) of participants reported landlord conditions, such as a no animal rule, size or weight limitations, or an animal deposit, as a reason for relinquishment (Shore, Petersen and Douglas 2003). Since living situation was the most commonly identified owner-related concern prior to adoption in the current study, it would be beneficial for animal sources to consider exploring this issue with potential adopters and in turn, counseling individuals as needed.

Research has shown that the relinquishment of a companion animal is often multifactorial in nature, where owners may give several reasons for not retaining an animal in the home (New et al. 1999; Scarlett et al. 1999; Shore, Petersen and Douglas 2003). In the current study, one participant discussed relinquishing a cat a few weeks prior to the interview for several reasons, including incompatibility with the current household animal, the companion animal being too vocal, and a discrepancy between the animal wanting to be outdoors and the participant wanting the animal to stay solely indoors.
Therefore, due to the multi-factorial nature of relinquishment, it is important for animal sources to explore information broadly with respect to a potential adopter’s lifestyle, including their current companion-animal ownership status, their expectations for animal ownership, and their concerns. Gathering this information would allow staff at animal sources to best provide resources that address all possible issues or concerns specific to an individual’s situation.

The one-on-one interview approach used in this study allowed for a deeper understanding of concerns and challenges that exist for adopters prior to adopting a companion animal. Due to the small number of participants, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all individuals planning on adopting an animal. As a step to ensuring the rigor and quality of the analysis, inter-coder reliability was conducted. The findings do provide a foundation for animal sources to explore the concerns and perceived challenges of an adopter. This would allow animal sources to take preventive action by discussing the specific adopter’s concerns and expectations before adoption in order to educate and provide solutions to their concerns prior to them taking the animal home. The current study’s methodology relied on shelter staff members to introduce participants to the study, which may have resulted in a selection bias. In particular, shelter staff might have approached fewer people than were available, and they may have been more likely to approach specific types of people, such as those who seemed friendly and or were overt animal-enthusiasts. In addition, it is possible that those who were willing to take the time to participate in the present study held different views than those who did not. All participants in the study had either previously owned a companion animal or
were current owners; the views and needs of first-time companion-animal adopters may be different than what was found in relation to participants of the present study.

These findings, alongside what has been previously found, suggest owner concerns pre- and post-adoption are multi-factorial, and involve both animal- and owner-related factors. Future studies are needed to further examine this complex issue, along with the impact of interventions that address individuals’ pre-adoption concerns and challenges. This information could be used by animal sources to provide evidence-based resources and tools that address a person’s concerns at the time of acquiring a companion animal.
References


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Table 2.1. Descriptive statistics of categorical demographic information of 17 participants interviewed from early June 2012 to end of July 2012 in three animal shelters located in southwestern and eastern Ontario (numerical variation due to missing values). Note: self-identified primary caregiver demographic information is represented in table for when couples participated (n=6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age (in years)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-33</td>
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<td>29.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>34-41</td>
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<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42-49</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-57</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58-65</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66 or older</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Area</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Living situation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renting a house</td>
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<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own a house</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>58.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11.8</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living common-law</td>
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<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
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<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
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<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of children 13 years or younger in household</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>88.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school or equivalent</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college/university</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>52.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral degree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annual household income</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000 - $49,999</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000 - $99,999</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000 - $150,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Figure 2.1. Thematic map for the theme, “adopter concerns of, and perceived challenges to, companion-animal ownership”.

Owner concerns and challenges

- Undesirable animal behaviour
  - Vocal
  - Destructive
  - Incompatibility with current companion animal(s)
  - Shy or aloof
  - Aggression
  - Lack of history

Owner-related factors

- Living situation
- Allergy

Dealing with behaviour problems
CHAPTER THREE

The Effect of Lifestyle and Animal-Care Knowledge on Adopters’ Expectations Prior to Companion-Animal Ownership

Prepared in the style of *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*
Abstract

Human expectations can greatly affect the human-companion animal relationship, sometimes putting animals at risk for relinquishment. This study explored the associations of adopters’ lifestyles and companion animal-care knowledge with their pre-adoption expectations, and occurred at 20 locations involving the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA) branches, OSPCA-affiliated animal shelters, and municipal pounds. Potential adopters (n=234) completed a questionnaire regarding their lifestyle, expectations, companion-animal care knowledge, and attitudes towards animals, and were involved in two phone calls post-adoption. Exploratory factor analysis conducted on the expectation section of the questionnaire resulted in four overall expectation factors: “animal behaviour”, “adopter sense of responsibility”, “human-companion animal relationship”, and “effort required in companion-animal ownership”. Linear mixed models assessed the association of adopters’ lifestyles and companion animal-care knowledge with three expectation factors. Type of animal of interest affected “animal behaviour”, “human-companion animal relationship” and “effort required in companion-animal ownership” expectations. Adopter relationship status also affected expectations for the human-companion animal relationship. Companion-animal care knowledge influenced “effort required in companion-animal ownership” expectations. Understanding factors influencing adopters’ expectations will help animal shelters better match, educate, and prepare adopters for their lives with companion animals.

Keywords: adoption, companion animal, expectations, owner, relinquishment
The effect of lifestyle and animal-care knowledge on adopters’ expectations prior to companion-animal ownership

Companion animals are becoming increasingly important to our society; we have never spent more time or money on animals that are kept simply for companionship (Case, 2008). Societal changes, resulting in more hectic and rushed lives, may have increased the attractiveness of owning a companion animal because they offer relaxation, humour, enthusiasm, and play (Walsh, 2009). For some people, a positive human-animal relationship is said to be close in emotional magnitude to a relationship with a friend, family member, or child, and provides a source of unconditional love (Belk, 1996; Cohen, 2002; Hirschman, 1994; Walsh, 2009). Animal companionship can be particularly important to humans who are undergoing life events such as divorce, grieving the loss of loved ones, or diagnoses of mental or physical illnesses, often resulting in individuals turning to their companion animals for comfort and companionship (Walsh, 2009).

A recent study of companion-animal adopters has suggested that most adopters are satisfied with their adoption experience and with their adopted animal (Neidhart & Boyd, 2002). However, many factors, including owner life stage, childhood companion-animal experience, animal behaviour, and owner expectations for their companion animal, can affect an owner’s attachment to the animal (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988; Cromwell-Davis, 2008; Curb, Abramson, Grice, & Kennison, 2013; Kidd & Kidd, 1989; Serpell, 1996; Woodward & Bauer, 2007). People who are more attached to their companion animals tend to exhibit a higher level of commitment to the animal (Kidd, Kidd, & George, 1992). For example, highly attached individuals have been shown to seek veterinary care more frequently than those who are less attached and the former
have also been found to be more likely to keep their animal (Kidd et al., 1992; Patronek, Glickman, Beck, McCabe, & Ecker, 1996). Single, divorced, “empty-nesters,” newlyweds, and widowed individuals have been shown to have higher levels of attachment to their animals than those who are married or are parents with children living at home (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988). In addition, adults who had a childhood companion animal have higher levels of attachment to their animals than adult owners who did not grow up with an animal in the household as a child (Kidd & Kidd, 1989). A companion animal’s behavior also influences a person’s level of attachment (Serpell, 1996). In one study, owners’ levels of attachment to their dogs were influenced by the difference between their expectations for ideal dog behaviour and their dog’s actual behaviour (Serpell, 1996).

When the needs and personality of an owner match the characteristics of their companion animal, owner satisfaction and attachment are improved (Curb et al., 2013; Woodward & Bauer, 2007). However, when owner needs and expectations are not met and owner and animal personalities are not compatible, there may be a negative impact on the human-companion animal relationship. Unrealistic and unmet owner expectations and undesirable companion-animal behaviour have been frequently reported in North America as reasons for relinquishment of companion animals to shelters (Diesel, Pfeiffer, & Brodbelt, 2008; Houpt, Honig, & Resiner, 1996; Kidd et al., 1992; Miller, Staats, Partlo, & Rada, 1996; New et al., 2000; Scarlett, Salman, New, & Kass, 1999). An individual’s expectations for their animal’s role in their family can increase the risk of relinquishment of a companion animal and affect an individual’s tolerance of certain animal behaviours (Cromwell-Davis, 2008; Kidd et al., 1992). Owner expectations for
companion-animal care may also negatively impact the human-companion animal relationship, possibly leading to relinquishment (Diesel et al., 2008).

Among multiple factors that can affect an adopter’s expectations for companion-animal ownership (Bennett & Rohlf, 2007; Cromwell-Davis, 2008; Kidd et al., 1992) are owner lifestyle characteristics. For example, a study, involving 120 male and 223 female adopters from the San Francisco Bay area shelters, found that women and also people without children had higher expectations than their counterparts (i.e., men and parents) that a companion animal would be a confidante for them to love and touch (Kidd et al., 1992). Further, owner reasons for acquiring a companion animal and previous animal experience can impact owners’ expectations for animal behaviour (Bennett & Rohlf, 2007; Cromwell-Davis, 2008). For example, it is suggested that those who acquire an animal for companionship may find intolerance of petting and hyperexcitement problematic (Cromwell-Davis, 2008). The amount of experience participants report having with dogs is also an important factor in the perception of dog behaviour (Bennett & Rohlf, 2007). Experience with dogs was negatively correlated with participants’ perceptions of their dogs being nervous, anxious and destructive, excitable, or disobedient (Bennett & Rohlf, 2007).

Alongside owner lifestyle characteristics, knowledge about companion-animal ownership may be influential in development of owner expectations. Many owners and people who relinquish animals (“relinquishers”) lacked knowledge regarding companion animal behaviour and training (New et al., 2000; Ramón, Slater, & Ward, 2010; Salman, New, Scarlett, & Kass, 1998). Furthermore, a number of animal behaviours reported as problematic or undesirable by owners, are considered normal by veterinarians (Houpt et
al., 1996), suggesting a potential mismatch between owner expectations and their knowledge about companion-animals. No study has been conducted to explore the association between prior companion-animal care knowledge and owner expectations. However, owner knowledge and previous experience may influence expectations for companion animal behavior and the human-animal relationship.

Human expectations can play a significant role in the quality and strength of the human-companion animal relationship; however, few studies have identified these expectations and how they are associated with owner factors, such as experience and knowledge of companion-animal ownership. Understanding potential adopters’ expectations will benefit animal sources in developing relevant screening and educational programs for adopters that assist in managing adopter expectations and can inform prior knowledge.

The first objective of this study was to explore if adopter lifestyle characteristics, prior companion-animal experience, and current knowledge are associated with an adopter’s expectations as an owner, of their companion animal, and of their relationship with a companion animal, at the time of adoption. The second objective of this study was to explore how adopter expectations for companion-animal ownership are associated with the likelihood of an adopted animal being retained over a three-month period.

Materials and Methods

A cross-sectional study was performed from early February to late June 2013, involving potential adopters at 20 locations in southern Ontario including the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA) branches, OSPCA-affiliated animal shelters, and municipal pounds (Appendix B.1).
The following study protocol was reviewed and cleared by the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board (REB#12OC008).

Adopters’ Expectations Questionnaire Development

A questionnaire, developed in four phases, was constructed to measure an adopter’s expectations for companion-animal ownership, their knowledge regarding animal care, and their general attitude towards companion animals (Appendix B.2).

Phase 1. Expectation item generation and compilation

The first phase involved creating the “expectation” section of the questionnaire. Published articles that had been pooled under the category, “expectations of companion-animal ownership”, as an ancillary part of a prior scoping study (Coe et al., In press) were read to compile an initial list of items to include in an expectations questionnaire (Archer, 1997; Beverland, Farrelly, & Lim, 2008; Burrows & Adams, 2008; Caldwell, 2008; Carlisle-Frank and Frank, 2006; Connell, Janevic, Solway, & McLaughlin, 2007; Dotson & Hyatt, 2008; Endenburg, Hart, & Bouw, 1994; Endenburg & Knol, 1994; Flynn, 2000; Gilbey, McNicholas, & Collis, 2007; Haggerty Davis, & McCreary Juhasz, 1995; Hirschman, 1994; Jennings, 1997; Kidd & Kidd, 1994; King, Marston, & Bennett, 2009; Knight & Edwards, 2008; Serpell, 1996; Siegel, Angulo, Detels, Wesch, & Mullen, 1999; Staats, Sears, & Pierfelice, 2006; Staats, Wallace, & Anderson, 2008; Triebenbacher, 1998; Walsh, 2009; Zasloff & Kidd, 1994). Additional expectation items were generated using interview transcripts from a previous qualitative study conducted by the author (Chapter two). All items generated through this process were placed on a 7-point Likert response format (where 1 was “strongly disagree”, 2 was “moderately disagree”, 3 was
“mildly disagree”, 4 was “neutral”, 5 was “mildly agree”, 6 was “moderately agree”, and 7 was “strongly agree”).

**Phase II. Expectation item elimination**

Phase two involved reducing the initial number of expectation items for the final questionnaire via two rounds of elimination. The first round of elimination involved the author, a colleague familiar with questionnaire development and the topic under study, and a second colleague familiar with the topic. Items were independently rated by each of the reviewers as “keep” or “discard”. Items that received three “keep’s” were retained, and items that received two “keep’s” and one discard were discussed amongst the group until consensus was reached; otherwise, items were discarded. A second round of elimination, involving two different colleagues familiar with the topic and following the same process, was used to further decrease the number of expectation items for the final questionnaire.

**Phase III. Knowledge, attitude, and demographic sections**

A section of the questionnaire was generated to assess potential adopter knowledge on companion-animal behaviour, training, health, and cost of ownership. The knowledge section was based on the content and themes of the website of the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA) and from past studies involving assessment of animal-care knowledge (Salman et al., 1998; New et al., 2000; Reisner & Shofer, 2008). A new scale was constructed from these sources to assess participant knowledge on a variety of topics simultaneously. “True”, “False”, and “I don’t know” response options were used for each generated knowledge item following the format of previous studies (Salman et al., 1998; New et al., 2000). An animal-care
knowledge score was calculated by summing the knowledge item scores for each individual; answers which were deemed to be correct for each item were given a score of 1, whereas wrong answers and “I don’t know” responses were given a score of zero for each item. This score was used to capture knowledge regarding animal health, behaviour, and training, and the cost of care in the region where the study was conducted (Ontario Veterinary Medical Association [OVMA], 2012).

The questionnaire also included a demographic section developed by the author and “The Pet Attitude Scale” (Munsell, Canfield, Templer, Tangan, & Arikawa, 2004; Templer, Salter, Dickey, Baldwin, & Veleber, 1981) to gauge the adopter’s overall attitude towards companion animals.

*Phase IV. Pre-test of questionnaire*

Pre-testing of the questionnaire was conducted to assess face validity by gaining overall feedback and impressions from individuals on the ability of the questionnaire to assess adopters’ expectations and knowledge. The pre-test also generated feedback on specific “expectation” statements to ensure the participant interpreted the item correctly.

The pre-test was used to inform the removal of additional expectation items from the adopter expectation section of the questionnaire, based on the frequency of endorsement (FOE) for the item. If the FOE was greater than 0.9, meaning 90% of participants predictably selected the same response option, the item was removed.

Additional details regarding questionnaire development are available in Appendix B.3.
Study Participants

The study was conducted at a combination of OSPCA branches, OSPCA-affiliated animal shelters, and municipal pounds throughout southern Ontario, Canada (Appendix B.1). A list of OSPCA branches and OSPCA-affiliated animal shelters was obtained through the OSPCA website, and municipal pound locations were found online using the search “municipal pounds Ontario” in Google. The author spoke to the manager of each shelter location regarding their interest in being involved in the study. All OSPCA branches (n = 13) and OSPCA-affiliated animal shelters (n = 27) were contacted. From an online list of municipal pounds and shelters (Paws with heart, 2011), municipal pounds providing adoption services (n = 12) were contacted.

Shelter staff members recruited individuals interested in adopting a cat or dog via a standardized script prepared by the author (Appendix B.4). The script explained the study to potential participants and offered an incentive for their participation (i.e., a 1 in up to 500 chance of winning an iPad) (Appendix B.4). Inclusion criteria for the study included English-speaking male or female individuals, aged 18 years or older, completing the final stage of adoption. Individuals who agreed to participate in the study were required to read and sign the consent form (Appendix B.6) and then completed a paper copy of the questionnaire (Appendix B.2) prior to bringing home their adopted companion animal. Therefore, questionnaires were completed on site at the respective shelter locations at the time of adoption. Upon completion of the questionnaire, participants were asked to put the questionnaire and signed consent form in an envelope, and give the sealed envelope to the shelter staff member, helping to ensure confidentiality.
In consenting to participate in the study, participants also agreed to two follow-up phone calls occurring one month and three months after adoption. These follow-up phone calls were used to determine whether the participant still had the adopted animal and to inquire into how the companion animal was fitting into the participant’s household.

Individuals were recruited from early February 2013 to the end of June 2013. Completed questionnaire packages were couriered from the shelters to the researcher at three-week intervals following the start of recruitment in order to conduct the one-month follow-up phone calls. Questionnaire data were entered into Access (version 2007, Microsoft Canada Inc., Mississauga, ON) by an employed research assistant for data management. Entered data were checked for errors and cleaned by the author by comparing data entries to original paper hard copies of participants’ surveys.

*Exploratory Factor Analysis of the Adopters’ Expectations Questionnaire*

Principal components analysis was used to identify possible factors being measured by the expectations questionnaire with cases excluded pairwise to account for missing data. Both the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) and the Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity were considered to assess the suitability of conducting factor analysis (Pallant, 2010). To account for possible correlations between factors, a Direct Oblimin rotation was performed. Horn’s parallel analysis was used to confirm the final number of factors that should be retained (Horn, 1965). Average eigenvalues obtained from a randomly generated dataset were produced by putting syntax for a Monte Carlo principal-component analysis simulation into SPSS (version 20.0, International Business Machines Corp., Armonk, NY) (O’Connor, 2000). This method was chosen
because it has been reported to be the most accurate method for deciding the number of factors to keep (Hubbard & Allen, 1987; Zwick & Velicer, 1986).

Items with factor loadings (i.e., the correlation between the factor and the item) that were less than 0.30 were excluded (Streiner, 1994). Items that loaded onto more than one factor suggested that the item had a relationship with two or more factors. Items that loaded onto more than one factor were removed if the difference between their factor loadings was 0.10 or less and the factors they had loaded onto had at least three other variables loading onto them (Streiner, 1994).

Remaining items under each factor were further assessed for suitability for retention using three criteria: (a) whether keeping the item would improve the factor’s Cronbach’s alpha (i.e., the scale’s reliability), (b) whether the item had an inter-item correlation between 0.20 and 0.40, which was deemed acceptable (Briggs & Cheek, 1986), and (c) whether the item plausibly matched the overall factor’s construct. Items were removed if at least two of three of these criteria were not met.

Scores for the expectation factors were calculated for each participant by summing the ratings of all the items under the factor and dividing the sum by the number of items under the factor to give a mean score out of 7.0. Exploratory factor analysis and reliability analysis were conducted using SPSS.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were performed on the independent variables, using frequencies for categorical variables and using mean, standard deviation, median, and minimum and maximum values for continuous variables.
Due to small cell size, some categories for the variables age, living situation, relationship status, and number of children aged 13 or younger were collapsed or deleted. The type of animal an individual was interested in adopting was collected as one item on the demographic questionnaire. This information was subsequently separated into one variable capturing the species desired (dog or cat) and a second variable capturing the age desired (young, adult, or both, i.e., either age).

Scores for expectation factors were used as outcome variables in linear mixed modeling. Participants with missing values within a factor were removed from that analysis. The animal-care knowledge score was included in linear mixed modeling as an independent variable. The linearity of the knowledge score, the only continuous independent variable, was assessed by considering its lowess curve plotted against each outcome.

Linear mixed models were produced for each of the four expectation factor scores to explore the relationship between each factor and adopter lifestyle characteristics and animal-care knowledge. Random effects introduced by shelter nested in shelter type were controlled by using linear mixed modeling. For each model, independent variables included the following: (a) type of shelter, (b) gender of adopter, (c) age of adopter, (d) adopter living situation, (e) relationship status, (f) number of children 13 years or younger in the household, (g) childhood animal experience, (h) previous animal ownership experience, (i) current companion-animal ownership status, (j) the type, and (k) age of the animal of interest (i.e., the animal participants planned to adopt), (l) the highest level of education the adopter had completed, (m) annual household income, (n)
animal-care knowledge score, and (o) animal field experience (i.e., whether they fostered, volunteered, or worked at an animal shelter or pet store).

The first stage of model building consisted of conducting univariate models with each of the four expectation factors. All variables associated with the expectation factor(s) at \( \rho \leq 0.2 \) were included in the initial multivariate model of main effects for the relevant expectation factor. Manual backward selection was then used to remove non-significant variables (\( \rho > 0.05 \)), one at a time, starting with the highest p-value. Confounding was assessed simultaneously; if the removal of a variable resulted in a change of 20% or more in the coefficient of variable(s) remaining in the model, the removed variable was considered a confounder and retained. Biologically or socially plausible interactions amongst the remaining variables in the reduced main effects model were individually tested for significance (\( \rho \leq 0.05 \)). All significant interactions were then added to the reduced main effects model simultaneously and manual backward selection was used to remove non-significant interaction terms and main effects (\( \rho > 0.05 \)) to produce a final reduced model.

Residual analyses were conducted to assess the linear mixed model assumptions. Residuals were tested for normality by visually assessing the pattern of residuals plotted against the predicted values for each model. In addition, residuals of all final models were plotted against the predicted values and explanatory variables contained in each model to reveal outliers, unequal variances, or data requiring transformation. Transformations were attempted for models with non-normal distributions.

Descriptive statistics and linear mixed modeling were conducted using SAS (version 9.3, SAS Institute Inc., Cary, NC).
Results

Adopters’ Expectations Questionnaire Development and Structure

The initial elimination round conducted by the author and two colleagues resulted in 68 expectation items being kept out of the initial 667 items generated. The second elimination round resulted in 47 expectation items being retained, all of which were used in the final version of the questionnaire. For the knowledge section of the questionnaire, 34 items pertaining to participant knowledge of cost of companion-animal ownership, animal health and behaviour, and training were generated.

Study Participants

Of 52 locations contacted, 20 (38.46%) OSPCA branches, OSPCA-affiliated animal shelters, and municipal pounds participated in the study. The characteristics of the shelters are summarized in Table 3.1. Three shelters (shelter 5, 9, and 12 in Table 3.1) participated in recruitment for nine weeks and contributed 11.54%, 2.99%, and 29.49% of the questionnaires used in data analysis, respectively; the remainder of shelters recruited for 18 weeks. Of the three shelters who recruited for a shortened period of time, one shelter declined further participation because they had become too busy preparing for summer events to continue and a second shelter felt their staff were feeling overwhelmed. A third shelter gave no reason for not extending the study.

A total of 238 individuals filled out the study questionnaire across all 20 locations. Due to the dependence upon shelter staff to distribute the questionnaire, the total number of questionnaires distributed is unknown. Four questionnaires were excluded from the study because the participants reported during the first-month follow-up telephone call that they had adopted the animal for someone else. Therefore, a total of
234 participants contributed data to the analyses in the present study. Reasons provided by some shelter location managers for why individuals declined participation included being too eager to bring their adopted animal home, lack of interest in the study, lack of time, and inconvenience.

Demographic information for the 234 participants are provided in Table 3.2. Participants were predominately female (72.22%), with a broad range of age categories being represented. Participants’ self-reported residential areas fell fairly evenly across rural (37.28%), suburban (36.84%), and urban (25.88%) areas, and 40.52% of participants reported being married at the time of data collection. For approximately one-fifth (21.03%) of participants, the highest level of education completed, or in the process of being completed, at the time of recruitment was high school or its equivalent. Approximately forty percent (42.34%) of participants had an annual household income of less than $60,000.

Information regarding previous and current animal experience of participants and the type of adopted animal desired are shown in Table 3.3. Almost all participants (94.44%) had had a companion animal in their households when they were children. Similarly, the majority of participants (94.87%) had personally owned a companion animal before, with over one-third (36.32%) of these individuals having previously owned both a cat and dog. The majority of participants (76.50%) were current companion-animal owners.

Approximately two-thirds (63.20%) of participants planned to adopt a cat and approximately one-third (36.80%) planned to adopt a dog at the time of recruitment. Participant preference for age of adopted animal was approximately split in half between
those who wanted a young animal (i.e., kitten or puppy; 43.72%) and those who preferred an adult or senior animal (50.22%). A few participants said they would adopt either a young or adult companion animal (6.06%).

At the time of the one- and three-month follow-up phone calls with participants, an average response rate of 77% was achieved and five individuals (2.76%) had returned their adopted animal. Therefore, the association between relinquishment and adopter expectations could not be explored, due to the very small sample size.

Animal-Care Knowledge

The mean animal-care knowledge score was 24.00 of 34.00 (median 25.00; range 0.00 to 33.00). The most poorly answered items were related to the cost of the first year of owning a kitten or puppy, annual cost of cat or dog ownership, reproductive health, and some areas of animal behaviour (Table 3.4).

Exploratory Factor Analysis

When principal components analysis was performed, the KMO value was 0.83 and the Bartlett’s test was significant ($\rho < 0.001$), supporting the use of factor analysis on the data. Horn’s parallel analysis identified that four factors should be retained on the basis of having eigenvalues greater than the corresponding criterion values for a randomly generated data matrix of the same size (47 items by 234 participants). All inter-correlations amongst factors were small, indicating factors were related but measured different concepts; therefore, a four-factor solution was deemed appropriate.

From the initial 47-item questionnaire, nine items were removed during factor analysis because they had loaded onto two or more factors, and the difference in their
loadings was similar (0.10 or less). Two additional items were discarded because they did not meet at least two of the three aforementioned criteria for retention.

Factor one (12 items) was named “animal behaviour” as all items under this factor related to animal behaviour and attributes (Table 3.5). This factor explained 21.09% of the variance in adopters’ expectations. The mean expectation score for the “animal behaviour” scale was 4.82 of 7.00 (median 4.92; range 1.75 to 7.00).

Factor two (7 items) was named “adopter sense of responsibility” as items under this factor related to concepts of the cost of, and commitment to, companion-animal ownership, owner responsibility, and animal healthcare (Table 3.5). This factor explained 10.91% of the variance in adopters’ expectations. The mean expectation score for the “adopter sense of responsibility” scale was 6.50 of 7.00 (median 6.71; range 3.29 to 7.00).

Factor three (9 items) was named “human-companion animal relationship” because its items described the emotional aspects of the human-animal relationship and the emotional support an owner might receive from the animal (Table 3.5). This factor explained 7.48% of the variance in adopters’ expectations. For the “human-companion animal relationship” scale, the mean expectation score was 5.21 of 7.00 (median 5.22; range 1.22 to 7.00).

Factor four (8 items) was named “effort required in companion-animal ownership” because items were related to the owner’s expectation for the effort required in caring for an animal. This factor explained 5.75% of the variance in adopters’ expectations (Table 3.5). A high score reflected an expectation that a companion animal
would require minimal effort. The mean expectation score for the “effort required in companion-animal ownership” scale was 4.34 of 7.00 (median 4.38; range 1.75 to 7.00).


The pattern of residuals plotted against the predicted values for “adopter sense of responsibility” expectations model was highly left skewed, and due to the outcome variable being a score, a transformation resulted in biologically implausible interpretation of the results. As such, an analysis of the variables associated with this outcome was not possible. The results from the univariate analyses are shown in Table 6 for the expectation factors, “animal behaviour”, “human-companion animal relationship”, and “effort required in companion-animal ownership”.

The final model for expectations of “animal behaviour” included type of animal desired (Table 3.7). Although shelter nested in shelter type was not statistically significant as a random effect, it was maintained in the model to account for potential clustering. Those planning to adopt a dog had significantly higher ($p < 0.001$) expectations for animal behaviour than those planning on adopting a cat. The pattern of residuals plotted against the predicted values for the model visually approached normality. Participants that appeared to be outliers were evaluated by removing them from the model; removal did not significantly change the results of the model and there was no reason for their exclusion, so the outliers were retained.

The final model for expectations of the “human-companion animal relationship” included type of animal of interest and the relationship status of adopters (Table 3.8).
Although shelter nested in shelter type was not statistically significant as a random effect, it was maintained to account for potential clustering. Individuals interested in adopting a cat had significantly lower ($\rho < 0.001$) expectations than those interested in adopting a dog concerning the emotional benefits they expected to receive from the animal.

Widowed individuals had significantly higher expectations for the human-companion animal relationship than divorced ($\rho = 0.002$), living common-law ($\rho = 0.034$), and married individuals ($\rho = 0.004$) (Table 3.8). Likewise, single individuals had significantly higher expectations for the human-companion animal relationship than divorced ($\rho = 0.006$) and married adopters ($\rho = 0.006$) (Table 3.8). The pattern of residuals plotted against the predicted values for the “human animal bond” expectations model visually approached normality with a slight tail. Participants that appeared to be outliers were evaluated by removing them from the model; removal did not significantly change the results of the model and there was no reason for their exclusion, so the outliers were retained.

The final model for expectations of “effort required in companion-animal ownership” included type of animal desired and animal-care knowledge (Table 3.9). Those planning to adopt a dog had significantly higher ($\rho < 0.001$) expectations for the effort required in companion-animal ownership than those planning on adopting a cat (Table 3.9). With every one unit of increase (i.e., correct answer) in the animal-care knowledge score, the mean expectation score regarding effort decreased by 0.05 (S.E. ± 0.01) ($\rho < 0.001$) (Table 3.9). Although shelter nested in shelter type was not statistically significant as a random effect, it was maintained to account for potential clustering. The
pattern of residuals plotted against the predicted values for the model visually approached normal; no outliers were observed.

**Discussion**

The present study explored the associations between specific adopter lifestyle characteristics and prior animal-care knowledge with a potential adopter’s expectations for their animal’s behaviour, the emotional relationship between adopter and adopted animal, and the effort required to care for an animal, prior to acquiring it. The findings provide support that specific lifestyle characteristics and knowledge do influence certain aspects of an individual’s expectations. An understanding of a prospective adopter’s expectations for companion-animal ownership can be used to tailor individual educational interventions to ensure the adopter has realistic expectations for their animal.

The type of animal an individual was adopting influenced their expectations for their companion animal’s behaviour. Individuals interested in adopting a dog had higher expectations of the animal’s behaviour than individuals interested in adopting a cat. In general, dogs tend to be larger in size and are seen as being more interactive with their owners in comparison to cats; therefore, their less desirable behaviours may seem more intrusive by owners than the undesirable behaviours of cats (Serpell, 1996). In addition, since dogs are more likely to share in activities with owners outside of the home and interact with other people and animals, it is not surprising good behaviour is more important for dog adopters than cat adopters (Serpell, 1996). This finding is supported by another study that found the reasons for satisfaction with a companion animal differed between cat and dog adopters (Neidhart & Boyd, 2002). Cat adopters gave reasons for satisfaction that were social in nature, such as the cat being friendly and loving, whereas
dog adopters tended to emphasize behaviour, such as being obedient and well behaved (Neidhart & Boyd, 2002). The larger emphasis on behaviour by dog owners has also been supported by studies conducted on companion-animal relinquishment (Diesel, Brodbelt & Pfeiffer, 2010; Miller et al., 1996; New et al., 2000; Patronek et al., 1996). Although behaviour has been reported as a reason for relinquishment for both cats and dogs, undesirable behaviour seems to play a smaller role in the relinquishment of cats (New et al., 2000).

The current research suggests the importance of good behaviour to dog adopters specifically and provides an increased opportunity for educational intervention to improve the success of adoptions. The finding that dog adopters had higher expectations for their animal’s behaviour than cat adopters also suggests the importance of managing the expectations of potential dog owners. Unmet expectations of an owner can put animals at an increased risk of relinquishment (Diesel et al., 2008; Kidd et al., 1992). In one study, when an owner felt their dog was more work to care for than they expected, the dog was 9.9 times more likely to be relinquished than dogs of owners who felt the work was less than expected (Diesel et al., 2008). Receiving helpful advice and engagement in training classes can affect an owner’s perception of their dog’s behaviour and reduce the risk of relinquishment (Bennett & Rohlf, 2007; Diesel et al., 2008; Patronek et al., 1996). For example, in one study conducted in Australia, dog owners who engaged in dog training reported that their dogs were more obedient, more friendly, and less aggressive with others, and were less nervous and less likely to bark (Bennett & Rohlf, 2007). Training classes may help provide tools to minimize undesirable behaviours, increase an owner’s understanding of dog behaviour, and give a sense of
control, thereby potentially enhancing the relationship between owner and animal (Diesel et al., 2008). Development of future educational programs to teach constructive ways to minimize undesirable behaviours would be beneficial, particularly for dog owners. For example, one study found that when owners of adopted dogs that showed aggression towards people did not obtain behaviour advice, the dogs were 11.1 times more likely to be returned than dogs without behavioural problems (Diesel et al., 2008). In contrast, for owners of dogs aggressive towards people who had received advice, the odds of return were reduced to 5.5 times compared to dogs without behavioural problems (Diesel et al., 2008).

Adopters’ expectations for the emotional relationship with companion animals in the present study was influenced by the type of animal the adopter was interested in adopting and the adopter’s relationship status. Individuals interested in adopting cats had lower expectations of the emotional bond with their adopted companion animal than those interested in adopting dogs. This finding supports the results of another study, involving 120 male and 223 female adopters from the San Francisco Bay area shelters, that found dog adopters had higher expectations that their companion animal would be a confidante, companion, and a form of emotional support (Kidd et al., 1992). Although reasons given for adoption satisfaction for cat adopters have been social in nature, cats are generally perceived to be more flighty, more aloof, less playful, less active, less excitable, and more reserved in showing their affection than dogs (Serpell, 1996). The difference in the expectations of cat and dog adopters in the present study may be a reflection of the public’s perception of the personality differences between the two
species; cats are seen as fairly independent whereas dogs are seen as more dependent on

the owner.

Although there is a preconceived notion of dog and cat behaviour, within each

species, behaviour and personality can vary widely. In one study, owners of Siamese and

Persian cats rated their cats as more predictable and interactive than non-pedigree cats

(Turner, 2000). Similarly, dog behaviour varies among breed groups, breeds, and within

breeds (Bradshaw, Goodwin, Lea, & Whitehead, 1996; Starling, Branson, Thomson, &

McGreevy, 2013; Svarthberg, 2006). For example, guardian breed groups tend to be bolder

in behaviour than companion breed groups, which tend to be shyer (Starling et al., 2013).

Matching a companion animal’s behaviour to the needs and personality of an owner is an

important predictor of owner satisfaction (Curb et al., 2013). Therefore, it would be

beneficial to emphasize the importance of animal personality and behaviour to potential

adopters at the time of adoption. One program which aims to match owners and animals

on the basis of personality is American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

(ASPCA)’s Meet Your Match (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to

Animals [ASPCA], 2013ab). Thus far, it has been suggested that the program may be

successful in both increasing adoption rates of adult dogs and decreasing rates of

adoption returns (Nobles, 2006). For example, at the Kansas Humane Society in 2000,

the monthly adoption return rate decreased from between 15% to 20% to around 7% to

9% (Nobles, 2006).

In the present study, the relationship status of adopters was also found to

influence adopters’ expectations regarding the emotional bond with the adopted

companion animal. This is in agreement to a past study, involving 320 companion-animal
owners in Providence, Rhode Island, that found family dynamic and relationship status can influence an owner’s attachment to their companion animal (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988). In the current study, widowed individuals had significantly higher expectations for the human-companion animal relationship than divorced, living common-law, and married individuals. Likewise, single individuals had significantly higher expectations for the human-companion animal relationship than married and divorced adopters. Marital status and frequency of social interaction can affect the level of loneliness felt by an individual. Widowed individuals show higher levels of loneliness than married individuals (Ben-zur, 2012). In addition, widowed individuals tend to be older. Feelings of loneliness have shown to increase with age, and older adults who lose their spouses show the greatest increase in loneliness, compared to older individuals with living partners and those who have remained single (Dykstra, van Tilburg, & de Jong Gierveld, 2005). Similarly, single individuals living on their own tend to be more lonely than those living with companion animals, those living with other people, and those living with both other people and animals (Zasloff & Kidd, 1994). Therefore, relationship status can affect the attachment an individual feels towards a companion animal and may influence the owner’s dependence on the companion animal for company and emotional support, and their expectations for the animal’s role in their life. An individual’s expectations for the role of their companion animal can affect their tolerance of certain behaviours (Cromwell-Davis, 2008) and whether or not these expectations are met can affect the likelihood an animal is retained (Kidd et al., 1992). The findings of the current study suggest that a person’s individual situation is important to shaping their expectations of an adopted companion animal. Therefore, exploring an individual adopter’s expectations
of their future animal will be beneficial in identifying and allocating educational resources that are specific to an adopter’s needs during the adoption process.

Expectations of the effort required in companion-animal ownership were influenced by adopter animal-care knowledge and the type of animal of interest. Individuals with higher knowledge surrounding animal care, health, behaviour, training, and cost, had higher expectations for the effort required to care for their anticipated companion animal than those with lower knowledge scores. Expectations for the effort required to care for a companion animal influence retention of an animal in the home (Diesel et al., 2008; Miller et al., 1996). In one study, conducted at Capital Area Humane Society in Ohio between October 1993 and January 1994, 13% of cats (10/80) and 21% of dogs (12/57) were relinquished because they were considered to be too much work, took up too much time, or cost too much (Miller et al., 1996). The finding of the present study is important because it supports another opportunity for education to help set realistic adopter expectations. Providing pre-adoption counselling on the effort required to own an animal would likely have a beneficial effect on companion animal adoptions and a protective effect on animal relinquishments. For example, in a study conducted in the U.K. in 2005, it was estimated that 8.9% of 662 dog returns could have likely been prevented by educating owners and providing more advice at the time of adoption, ensuring realistic expectations of the effort required (Diesel et al., 2008). Therefore, counselling adopters on the effort required to care for an animal is recommended and may result in more successful animal adoptions.

In the present study, expectations for the amount of effort required in caring for a companion animal was also influenced by the type of animal of interest. Individuals
adopting dogs had significantly higher expectations for the effort required in companion-animal ownership than individuals adopting cats. This finding is supported by past research; cats are perceived to be more flexible and less demanding than dogs, needing less social interaction and are able to be alone for longer periods of time (Hart, 2000). The perception that cats are more independent and more easily cared for than dogs has also been implied in reasons given for acquiring cats, including their use of a litterbox, they are easily kept in small apartments, and they have the ability to endure longer separations from an owner without obvious problems (Bernstein, 2007).

The findings of the current study suggest cat owners may need to be made more aware of the larger responsibilities of owning a cat. Cats are not always valued as much as dogs, and in many circumstances, dogs receive better care (Lue, Pantenburg, & Crawford, 2008; Perrin, 2009; Volk, Felsted, Thomas, & Siren, 2011). For example, a national study, conducted in 2008, reported an estimate that there were 8.5 million cats in 36% of Canadian households and 6 million dogs in 32% of Canadian households (Perrin, 2009). Half of the cats did not receive annual veterinary care, whereas 79% of the dogs had been vaccinated in the past three years (Perrin, 2009). In addition, more than 40% of cats either had not been vaccinated in the last four years or had never been vaccinated, in comparison to only 14% of dogs having never been vaccinated (Perrin, 2009). In another study, veterinarians reported that approximately 39% of their patients were cats, and 59% were dogs, and 70% of 34 responding veterinarians said cat owners seemed more hesitant to bring their cat into the clinic in comparison to dog owners (Volk et al., 2011). Many cat owners obtain their cats free of charge, which can affect the perceived value of cats,
and may make owners less willing to invest money into their care (Perrin, 2009; Volk et al., 2011).

Highlighting the responsibilities of cat ownership to individuals at the time of adoption may be important to increasing the perceived value of cats and creating appropriate expectations for cat ownership. Developing educational programs specifically focused on cat ownership and cat behaviour would help increase owner understanding of typical cat behaviour. The CATalyst council, formed in 2008 in Kansas City, in the United States, is a coalition of the veterinary community, academia, nonprofits, industry and animal welfare organizations, which aims to increase the value of cats, educate owners, and create awareness regarding cat health practices and feline overpopulation (CATalyst Council, n.d.).

The present study was restricted to questionnaires of 234 potential companion animal owners in a single Canadian province, limiting the scope to which the findings of the study may be generalized. Future studies should consider including a larger sample of potential adopters to further explore their prior expectations. In addition, shelter staff members recruited participants. Although this could not be avoided due to the large number of study locations in different geographical areas, this may have introduced a potential selection bias. In particular, shelter staff might have been more likely to approach specific types of people, such as friendly, enthusiastic individuals or overt animal-enthusiasts, and these individuals may have been more likely to participate in the study. This may have resulted in non-response bias, where the participants of the study may have had different characteristics and expectations than those who did not.
Individuals acquiring companion animals from breeders, pet stores, or online sources were not represented. Future research should consider broadening recruitment of individuals to include these sources, as the expectations of individuals may vary across sources. Comparing the expectations of people acquiring companion animals from different sources would further our knowledge on individual expectations and influential factors.

Only five participants (2.1%) relinquished their companion animals within three months post-adoption; therefore, due to this small sample size, it was not possible to explore how adopter expectations prior to acquiring an animal affected whether the animal stays in the home. It is recommended that future studies follow participants for a longer period of time and explore how the expectations of those who keep their companion animals differ from those who relinquish them.

Adopters’ expectations for companion-animal ownership can influence their satisfaction with, and attachment to their companion animals, and the likelihood an animal will be kept. The current study has found that these expectations are affected by lifestyle and animal-care knowledge. It is important that animal sources gather information regarding an individual’s lifestyle and expectations in order to provide resources that are specific to an individual’s needs. In addition, educational interventions should focus on managing adopters’ expectations for animal behaviour and the effort required to care for companion animals. Providing educational interventions and resources pre-adoption may make adopters feel more prepared and in control of their adoption experience, and help to manage their expectations, potentially resulting in more successful human-animal relationships.
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Table 3.1. Shelter Characteristics

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<th>Type of shelter</th>
<th># of weeks of recruitment of participants</th>
<th># of questionnaires submitted</th>
<th>% of total questionnaires</th>
<th># of animals admitted per year</th>
<th># of animals adopted per year</th>
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<td>3.42</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>3501–4000</td>
<td>1401–1600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>500–1000</td>
<td>401–500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>Less than 500</td>
<td>Less than 300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>3001–3500</td>
<td>701–800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Characteristics of 20 animal shelter locations across southern Ontario, Canada, that participated in a study of companion-animal adopter expectations from early February to the end of June 2013. Type of shelter was coded as follows: A = OSPCA-affiliated animal shelter, B = OSPCA branch, M = municipal pound.
Table 3.2. Participant Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>27.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>72.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age (in years)</strong>^a^</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-29</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>32.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>20.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>22.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 or older</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Area</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>36.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>35.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>25.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Living situation</strong>^b^</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>27.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>67.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship status</strong>^c^</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>21.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living common-law</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>23.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>40.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of children 13 years or less in household</strong>^d^</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>64.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>14.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>16.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or more</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school or equivalent</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>20.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational/technical school</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college/university</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>16.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College diploma</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>29.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>19.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral degree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional degree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annual household income</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under $10,000</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000 - $19,999</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000 - $39,999</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000 - $59,999</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>14.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>Frequency (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual household income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,000 - $79,999</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>21.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$80,000 - $99,999</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000 - $119,999</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$120,000 - $139,999</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$140,000 - $159,999</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than $160,000</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Descriptive statistics of categorical demographic information of 234 participants completing the questionnaire from early February 2013 to end of June 2013 in various locations in southern Ontario, Canada (numerical variation due to missing values). aThe original categories for age in years were: 18-19, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45-49, 50-54, 55-59 and 60 or older. bThe original categories in the questionnaire for living situation were: renting an apartment, renting a house, own a house/condo, and other. cThe original categories used in the questionnaire for relationship status were: single, living common-law, married, separated, divorced, widowed, and other. dThe original categories used in the questionnaire for number of children 13 years or younger in the household were: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or more, and none.
Table 3.3. Participant Companion-Animal Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Childhood animal experience</strong>&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>94.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Previously owned companion animal(s)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>94.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Currently owned companion animal(s)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>76.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>23.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Animal of interest</strong>&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cat</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>63.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>36.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>43.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>50.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Either</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Previous and current companion-animal experience and ownership, and type of animal interested in adopting, for 234 participants who filled out questionnaires from early February 2013 to end of June 2013 in various animal shelters across southern Ontario, Canada (numerical variation due to missing values).<sup>a</sup>Childhood animal experience captured whether participants had had companion animals in their household as a child. <sup>b</sup>The original categories used in the questionnaire for the type of animal of interest were: kitten, adult cat, senior cat, puppy, adult dog, and senior dog.
Table 3.4. Participant Knowledge Regarding Companion-Animal Care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge item</th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>I don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are no behaviour differences between breeds.</td>
<td>4 (1.71%)</td>
<td>203 (86.75%)*</td>
<td>21 (8.97%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspayed female dogs go into heat about twice per year.</td>
<td>85 (36.32%)*</td>
<td>28 (11.97%)</td>
<td>112 (47.86%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogs and cats need shots or can get sick/die.</td>
<td>200 (85.47%)*</td>
<td>14 (5.98%)</td>
<td>13 (5.56%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a pet gains or loses a lot of weight, it could be a sign that the pet is sick.</td>
<td>216 (92.31%)*</td>
<td>2 (0.85%)</td>
<td>10 (4.27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One must catch dog/cat in the act of doing something wrong to correct them.</td>
<td>167 (71.37%)*</td>
<td>39 (16.67%)</td>
<td>19 (8.12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspayed female cats go into heat twice per year.</td>
<td>48 (20.51%)*</td>
<td>45 (19.23%)</td>
<td>133 (56.84%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s better for both female dogs and cats to have 1 litter before being spayed (i.e. “fixed”).</td>
<td>11 (4.70%)</td>
<td>138 (58.97%)*</td>
<td>76 (32.48%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cats scratch/pounce/bite as a form of play.</td>
<td>187 (79.91%)*</td>
<td>16 (6.84%)</td>
<td>22 (9.40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubbing the pet’s nose in animal messes is a good way to discipline them.</td>
<td>14 (5.98%)</td>
<td>172 (73.50%)*</td>
<td>39 (16.67%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s cruel to keep cats indoors.</td>
<td>15 (6.41%)</td>
<td>191 (81.62%)*</td>
<td>18 (7.69%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cats and dogs misbehave out of spite.</td>
<td>40 (17.09%)</td>
<td>142 (60.68%)*</td>
<td>42 (17.95%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutering/fixing an animal changes its relationship with its owner.</td>
<td>18 (7.69%)</td>
<td>160 (68.38%)*</td>
<td>48 (20.51%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It costs less than $400 per year to maintain a cat.</td>
<td>55 (23.50%)</td>
<td>97 (41.45%)*</td>
<td>74 (31.62%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a critical period for socialization for puppies and kittens.</td>
<td>167 (71.37%)*</td>
<td>10 (4.27%)</td>
<td>48 (20.51%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whether an adult dog bites is mostly determined by its genetic makeup/breed, regardless of training.</td>
<td>13 (5.56%)</td>
<td>170 (72.65%)*</td>
<td>42 (17.95%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The first year of owning a kitten will cost less than $800.</td>
<td>68 (29.06%)</td>
<td>59 (25.21%)*</td>
<td>98 (41.88%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s important to gradually introduce new pets to existing pets.</td>
<td>203 (86.75%)*</td>
<td>6 (2.56%)</td>
<td>15 (6.41%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A clean litterbox is very important to a cat.</td>
<td>216 (92.31%)*</td>
<td>3 (1.28%)</td>
<td>8 (3.42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cats do not really need exercise</td>
<td>8 (3.42%)</td>
<td>202 (86.32%)*</td>
<td>16 (6.84%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a pet starts drinking a lot of water, it could be a sign that the pet is sick.</td>
<td>168 (71.79%)*</td>
<td>18 (7.69%)</td>
<td>40 (17.09%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The first year of owning a puppy will cost over $1500.</td>
<td>85 (36.32%)*</td>
<td>33 (14.10%)</td>
<td>105 (44.87%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s important that as the owner, I establish myself as “Alpha” or the “pack leader”.</td>
<td>165 (70.51%)</td>
<td>17 (7.26%)*</td>
<td>42 (17.95%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A child should never be left unattended with a dog.</td>
<td>148 (63.25%)*</td>
<td>53 (22.65%)</td>
<td>21 (8.97%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s important to have at least one litterbox per cat in the household.</td>
<td>166 (70.94%)*</td>
<td>28 (11.97%)</td>
<td>28 (11.97%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving pets a reward is better for training a pet than punishment.</td>
<td>199 (85.04%)*</td>
<td>9 (3.85%)</td>
<td>16 (6.84%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge item</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>False</td>
<td>I don’t know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kittens <strong>do not</strong> need as much socialization as puppies.</td>
<td>29 (12.39%)</td>
<td>140 (59.83%)*</td>
<td>53 (22.65%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It costs more than $600 per year to maintain a dog.</td>
<td>124 (52.99%)*</td>
<td>23 (9.83%)</td>
<td>74 (31.62%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogs that are properly trained do not bite people, regardless of what provokes the dog.</td>
<td>55 (23.50%)</td>
<td>127 (54.27%)*</td>
<td>40 (17.09%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most municipalities require dog owners to license their dog(s) every year.</td>
<td>191 (81.62%)*</td>
<td>3 (1.28%)</td>
<td>28 (11.97%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pets should be prepared for the arrival of a new baby by exposing them to baby-related objects before bringing the baby home.</td>
<td>170 (72.65%)*</td>
<td>9 (3.85%)</td>
<td>46 (19.66%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children often are scratched by cats or bitten by dogs because of the child’s behavior.</td>
<td>133 (56.84%)*</td>
<td>41 (17.52%)</td>
<td>51 (21.79%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When off the property of their owner, pets must be on a leash, contained and/or under control of the owner except in designated areas (e.g., leash-free dog parks).</td>
<td>197 (84.19%)*</td>
<td>5 (2.14%)</td>
<td>16 (6.84%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different breeds have different energy levels.</td>
<td>207 (88.46%)*</td>
<td>1 (0.43%)</td>
<td>10 (4.27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour problems in pets can be a result of stressful events and/or changes to the pet’s environment.</td>
<td>203 (86.75%)*</td>
<td>4 (1.71%)</td>
<td>11 (4.70%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Knowledge regarding cost of companion-animal ownership, dog and cat reproductive health, socialization, companion-animal behaviour, and training among 234 people adopting companion animals from animal shelters across southern Ontario, Canada, from early February 2013 to end of June 2013 (number discrepancies due to missing values). *Correct answer. When “I don’t know” was chosen by participants, a score of 0 was given for that item in calculating participant knowledge scores.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Factor value</th>
<th>Min. value</th>
<th>Item mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Item median</th>
<th>Max. value</th>
<th>Oblimin-rotated factor loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factor 1, “animal behaviour”:</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.43</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to not cause injury to me</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to not be nervous</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.77</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to come when I call it</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to be obedient</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to not be hyper</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.06</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to not be destructive</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to not catch rodents/wildlife</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to get along with other animals and pets</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.44</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to not be aggressive</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to be good with children</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to be quiet</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 2, “adopter sense of responsibility”:</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>6.73</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect getting a pet is a long-term commitment</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>6.46</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect there may be unexpected costs associated with my pet</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>6.48</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect to take an active role in helping my pet adjust to its new surroundings</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>6.29</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect to be the primary caregiver of my pet</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>6.48</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect to take my pet to the veterinarian yearly</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>6.26</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to be spayed/neutered</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>6.85</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Factor 3, “human-companion animal relationship”:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Min. value</th>
<th>Item mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Item median</th>
<th>Max. value</th>
<th>Oblimin-rotated factor loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to be a form of emotional support</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.05</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>-0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect my pet will make me feel safe</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>-0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect to consider my pet my “child”</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>-0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to be able to sense how I’m feeling</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>-0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to reduce my stress</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>-0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to be excited to see me when I come home</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.63</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>-0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to be my companion</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>6.07</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>-0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect having a pet will benefit my health</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>-0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect I will have to play with my pet</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>6.44</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>-0.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Factor 4, “effort required in companion-animal ownership”:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Min. value</th>
<th>Item mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Item median</th>
<th>Max. value</th>
<th>Oblimin-rotated factor loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I do not expect I will have to make changes to my schedule to accommodate my new pet</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to be low-maintenance</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to be independent</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect taking care of a pet just requires common sense</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to be able to be home alone for extended periods of time (e.g., during the work day)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect my pet’s personality to be the same at home as how it was at the shelter</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to be housetrained (i.e., not urinate/defecate in the house)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to shed only a small amount</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Expectation factors determined via an exploratory factor analysis. Items were rated using a 7-point Likert response format where 1 was “strongly disagree”, 2 was “moderately disagree”, 3 was “slightly disagree”, 4 was “neutral”, 5 was “slightly agree”, 6 was
“moderately agree”, and 7 was “strongly agree”, for the 234 adopters who filled out questionnaires from early February to end of June 2013, in various animal shelters across southern Ontario, Canada (number discrepancies due to missing values).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.414</td>
<td>0.339</td>
<td>0.227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.073</td>
<td>0.052</td>
<td>0.775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area</td>
<td>0.537</td>
<td>0.473</td>
<td>0.229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living situation</td>
<td>0.448</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>0.219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship status</td>
<td>0.432</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children aged 13 years or younger</td>
<td>0.558</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>0.162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.371</td>
<td>0.736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual household income</td>
<td>0.688</td>
<td>0.253</td>
<td>0.773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood animal experience</td>
<td>0.577</td>
<td>0.946</td>
<td>0.076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous animal ownership experience</td>
<td>0.617</td>
<td>0.572</td>
<td>0.510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current animal ownership status</td>
<td>0.799</td>
<td>0.508</td>
<td>0.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of animal of interest</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of animal of interest</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.753</td>
<td>0.586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal field experience</td>
<td>0.245</td>
<td>0.313</td>
<td>0.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of shelter</td>
<td>0.678</td>
<td>0.442</td>
<td>0.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal-care knowledge</td>
<td>0.129</td>
<td>0.151</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The first stage of linear mixed model building consisted of conducting univariate models with each of the four expectation factors. Outcome variables calculated as follows: factor = mean (sum of ratings for items loading onto factor). All variables associated with the expectation factor(s) at $\rho \leq 0.2$ were included in the initial multivariate model for the relevant expectation factor. Bolded p-values indicate significance at the univariate level ($\rho \leq 0.2$). Factor 2 was excluded from analysis due to
pattern of residuals plotted against predicted values being highly left skewed, and the impossibility of a transformation resulting in biologically plausible results due to the variable being a score.
Table 3.7. Final Linear Mixed Model for the Expectation Factor, “Animal Behaviour” (Factor 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>Standard error</th>
<th>95% C.I.</th>
<th>ρ-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of animal of interest</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>4.92, 5.341</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cat</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>4.43, 4.75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Derived from questionnaire data from 205 people who adopted cats or dogs from animal shelters across southern Ontario, Canada, from early February 2013 to end of June 2013. Predicted values were scored out of 7.
Table 3.8. Final Linear Mixed Model for the Expectation Factor, “Human-Companion Animal Relationship” (Factor 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>95% C.I.</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of animal of interest</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>5.65</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>5.35, 5.95</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cat</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>4.90, 5.43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced&lt;sup&gt;ab&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>4.46, 5.30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living common-law&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>5.03, 5.66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married&lt;sup&gt;de&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>4.80, 5.33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single&lt;sup&gt;ad&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>5.24, 5.90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed&lt;sup&gt;bce&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>6.19</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>5.44, 6.94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Derived from questionnaire data from 207 people who adopted cats or dogs from animal shelters across southern Ontario, Canada, from early February 2013 to end of June 2013. Superscript letters a to e identify significant (p<0.05) differences. Predicted values were scored out of 7.
Table 3.9. Final Linear Mixed Model for the Expectation Factor, “Effort Required in Companion-Animal Ownership” (Factor 4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>95% C.I.</th>
<th>ρ-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of animal of interest</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>3.67, 4.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cat</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>4.33, 4.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Animal-care knowledge</strong></td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Derived from questionnaire data from 221 people who adopted cats or dogs from animal shelters across southern Ontario, Canada, from early February 2013 to end of June 2013. Predicted values were scored out of 7. A high score reflected an expectation that a companion animal would require minimal effort.*
CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusions
Companion animal ownership is prominent in Western society, where approximately one-third of Canadian and U.S. households own at least one dog or at least one cat (Perrin, 2009; American Veterinary Medical Association [AVMA], 2012). Most individuals acquire cats and dogs for companionship and become highly attached; many owners consider their companion animals to be a friend, family member, or child (Belk, 1996; Cohen, 2002; Hirschman, 1994; Walsh, 2009).

Although most adopters tend to be satisfied with their adoption experience and with the animal they have adopted (Neidhart & Boyd, 2002), a variety of factors, including owner life stage, previous and childhood companion-animal experience, animal behaviour, and owner expectations for animal ownership, affect an owner’s attachment to an animal (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988; Cromwell-Davis, 2008; Curb, Abramson, Grice, & Kennison, 2013; Kidd & Kidd, 1989; Serpell, 1996; Woodward & Bauer, 2007). An owner’s expectations for companion animal ownership play a crucial role in an owner’s attachment to their companion animal, their satisfaction with their adoption and animal ownership experience, and the retention of a companion animal in an owner’s home (Curb et al., 2013; Diesel, Pfeiffer, & Brodbelt, 2008; Kidd, Kidd, & George, 1992; Serpell, 1996; Woodward & Bauer, 2007). Compatibility between the needs and expectations of an owner, and the behaviour of a companion animal, can increase an owner’s satisfaction with, and attachment to, a companion animal (Curb et al., 2013; Woodward & Bauer, 2007). However, unrealistic and unmet owner expectations and undesirable companion-animal behaviour can have a negative impact on the human-companion animal relationship and increase the risk of relinquishment of a companion
animal (Diesel et al., 2008; Houpt, Honig, & Resiner, 1996; Kidd et al., 1992; Miller, Staats, Partlo, & Rada, 1996; New et al., 2000; Scarlett, Salman, New, & Kass, 1999).

Although an owner’s expectations can greatly affect the human-companion animal relationship, few scientific studies have been conducted to identify the expectations individuals have for themselves as owners, for their companion animal, and for the effort required to care for an animal, or how other factors shape these expectations. A more thorough understanding of owner expectations offers a valuable evidence-based resource to understand what information is needed by adopters and owners. This could be used to develop an educational program to better inform adopters prior to acquiring an animal in the hopes of increasing the success of companion animal adoptions.

The current thesis has added to, and built upon, the research on owner expectations by gaining a deep understanding of adopter thoughts and expectations, specifically, concerns and challenges foreseen prior to acquiring an animal, and by identifying influential factors on certain aspects of adopter expectations.

**Summary of findings**

This thesis is comprised of two studies: a qualitative study regarding adopter thoughts and expectations prior to acquiring an animal, and a survey to explore how adopter lifestyle characteristics and knowledge regarding animal care are associated with certain aspects of adopter expectations. The qualitative study involving 17 one-on-one interviews with individuals interested in adopting a cat or dog was used to enhance understanding of the thought process and preparation individuals go through in deciding to acquire an animal, to raise awareness of the similarities and differences between
adopters in what is seen as undesirable and desirable animal behaviour, describe owner expectations in terms of time, behaviour, and the emotional bond they expected to form with their adopted animal, and gain a deeper understanding of the concerns adopters have prior to bringing their adopted animal home. Through thematic analysis, five central themes were found including: “adopter concerns of, and perceived challenges to, companion-animal ownership”, “adopter and animal factors taken into consideration in the decision to adopt”, “perceived emotional benefits in the human-companion animal relationship and relationship with others”, “advice and sources for acquiring information”, and “adopter considerations surrounding the required care of a companion animal”. The theme, “adopter concerns of, and perceived challenges to, companion animal ownership”, was chosen for inclusion in the current thesis for two main reasons. First, this theme was very data-rich, suggesting these thoughts were predominant in participants’ minds. Secondly, this theme appeared to most threaten the relationship between human and companion animal.

Through thematic analysis, it was found that animal behaviour is a common concern for individuals who are in the process of adopting a cat or dog. Specifically, concerns regarding lack of companion-animal history, aggression towards the owner and/or other people and animals, incompatibility between current animal(s) and the adopted animal, shy or aloof behaviour, and destructive and vocal behaviour were raised by participants. Individuals who considered their companion animal a family member or child were more likely to indicate a willingness to seek advice or participate in training classes than one individual who felt owners should have mastery over their animal. In addition, those who discussed adoption “deal-breakers” were more likely to discuss
specific traits they wanted and did not want in an adopted animal than participants who were willing to seek advice; the latter individuals were more likely to make a statement about accepting their adopted animal for its own personality. Although discussed less frequently and by fewer participants, it was also discovered that owner-related concerns surrounding living situation, allergies, companion-animal care, and future grief related to companion-animal loss, were also concerns and challenges considered in the decision to adopt. Although animal-related concerns and undesirable behaviour received much more attention than owner-related concerns in the current interviews, other literature has shown that owner-related factors are also common reasons for relinquishment (Diesel et al., 2008; Kidd et al., 1992; New et al., 1999; Salman, New, Scarlett, & Kass, 1998; Scarlett et al., 1999). Therefore, it is important to gain a deeper understanding of owner-related concerns prior to adoption, which may help reduce relinquishment of companion animals for these reasons.

The second study built on the findings from the qualitative study. The content from the interviews in the qualitative study were used in conjunction with content from articles pooled as an ancillary part of a scoping study (Coe et al., In press) to create the expectation section of the questionnaire. The observational study involved 234 participants, interested in adopting a cat or dog, filling out a questionnaire at the time of adoption and being involved in two follow-up phone calls one month- and three months following adoption. Study locations included a combination of the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA) branches, OSPCA-affiliated animal shelters, and municipal pounds. The questionnaire given to participants was used to collect demographic information, adopter expectations for companion-animal ownership,
adopter knowledge regarding animal care, and adopter attitude towards animals. Factor analysis was conducted to identify factors being measured by the expectation section of the questionnaire, which were then used as outcome variables in linear mixed models.

The type of animal being adopted was found to influence animal behaviour expectations. Individuals interested in adopting dogs had higher expectations for their animal’s behaviour than individuals interested in adopting cats. The type of animal being adopted and adopter relationship status influenced adopter expectations for the human-companion animal relationship. Individuals interested in adopting dogs had higher expectations for the bond they would form with their animal than those interested in adopting cats. Widowed individuals had significantly higher expectations for the human-companion animal relationship than divorced, living common-law, and married individuals. Likewise, single individuals had significantly higher expectations than married and divorced adopters for their relationship with their companion animal.

Influential factors on adopter expectations for the effort required in companion-animal ownership included the type of animal an individual was adopting and an adopter’s knowledge regarding animal care. Those planning on adopting a dog had significantly higher expectations for the effort required in companion-animal ownership than those planning to adopt a cat. Those who had greater animal-care knowledge also had higher expectations for the effort required to care for an animal. These findings support the hypothesis that owner lifestyle characteristics and knowledge can shape expectations for companion-animal ownership. Therefore, animal sources should aim to obtain this information from potential adopters in order to aid in the selection of a companion animal.
that would best suit the individual’s lifestyle, and also provide resources and advice that would be helpful to the individual’s situation.

**Limitations**

Both of the studies in this thesis had their own specific limitations. The in-person interview approach provided a method for gaining a deep understanding behind the meaning of the data and the ability to look for important connections. However, due to the data having been obtained from a small sample size and the interview data being contextualized to the participants’ experiences, the ability to generalize the findings of the qualitative study to a broader population is limited. In the second study, shelter staff were asked to recruit individuals to participate in the study due to travel limitations. However, this could have resulted in selection bias, where shelter staff may have approached enthusiastic individuals more than other individuals. Future studies on adopter expectations would benefit from a larger sample size, which would increase the power of the study and may result in the detection of other influential factors.

An overall limitation of both studies was the narrow focus on expectations of individuals choosing to adopt an animal from an animal shelter or municipal pound. Therefore, individuals choosing to acquire an animal through another avenue (e.g., pet store, breeder, rescue groups, online sources) were not considered in these studies. Future research should explore the role of animal source in the adoption process and its effect on potential animal acquirers’ expectations. Gaining a broader understanding of owner expectations will help identify areas where owners would benefit from advice and information, and also provide a basis for implementing an educational program for potential adopters or animal acquirers.
Key recommendations

The findings of this thesis provide a foundation for a number of key recommendations:

- Animal sources should evaluate the time they are allocating to adoption counseling to the discussion of adopters’ prior concerns with or challenges to adopting a companion animal.
- Animal sources should implement or develop programs that assist individuals in choosing an animal that is suitable to their lifestyle, needs, and expectations.
- Animal sources should develop specific educational opportunities and materials to inform individuals acquiring a companion animal about animal behaviour and the effort required to care for an animal.
- A variety of constructive methods to minimize common behavioural problems, such as aggression, shy or aloof behaviour, vocal behaviour, and destructive behaviour, should be discussed with individuals prior to them taking an animal home.
- Animal sources should consider offering counseling or resources to assist individuals with introducing a new animal to a current household animal.
- Programs should be developed or implemented by animal sources to create greater awareness surrounding the effort required in cat ownership, cat behaviour, and the emotional benefits that can be gained through owning a cat.
- Animal sources should explore people’s individual situations (e.g., renters, parents, current companion-animal owners) in order to provide counseling and resources that are specific to that individual.
Future directions for research

The findings of this thesis suggest several areas for future research.

Animal behaviour has been found to be an area of concern for adopters. Continued research is needed to determine the most effective way to provide helpful pre- and post-adoption information and assistance that addresses how to deal with problem behaviours. In addition, it would be beneficial to determine how different methods of knowledge transfer and strategies for behaviour management affect the prevalence of behaviour problems and the relinquishment of animals for this reason.

Owner-related factors were also found to concern adopters prior to acquiring an animal and very little research has been conducted to investigate these concerns prior to adoption. Future research should be conducted to gain a deeper understanding regarding what these concerns are, the underlying reasons for these concerns, and what adopters do to try to counteract them.

Due to the small number of relinquishments occurring during the follow-up period in the second study of this thesis, it was not possible to investigate how adopter expectations and knowledge prior to acquiring a companion animal influences the retention of an animal in the home. Few studies have been conducted in this area; therefore, future research should further investigate this potential association. This information would be useful in identifying common misconceptions and gaps in knowledge surrounding animal ownership contributing to relinquishment, which could be used in building targeted education programs for adopters and companion-animal owners.

In this thesis, the thoughts and concerns of potential adopters, and the effect of adopter lifestyle characteristics and knowledge on expectations for animal ownership
were investigated in the animal shelter environment. Studying the impact of different animal sources on pre-adoption expectations, adoptions, relinquishment, and other related areas is a topic of research itself and would provide a broader understanding of these areas.

An individual’s expectations for animal ownership and their companion animal can greatly affect the relationship formed between an owner and animal. The present thesis has provided another step forward in understanding these expectations as it relates to adopters acquiring companion animals from an animal shelter. Many opportunities exist for improving our understanding of owner expectations and their effect on various aspects of the human-companion animal relationship. Future studies would benefit from using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to gain a deeper understanding of owner needs and the impact they have on owner attachment and satisfaction with their companion animal.
References


APPENDIX A

Exploring the Anticipated Concerns and Challenges of Adopters Prior to Acquiring a Dog or Cat from an Animal Shelter

A.1: Recruitment Scripts
A.2: Recruitment Postcard
A.3: Consent Form
A.4: Interview Guide
A.5: Demographic Survey
A.1. Recruitment Scripts

Shelter Staff Recruitment Script

**Shelter staff:** “We’re collaborating with the University of Guelph on a study regarding adopters’ thoughts and expectations prior to acquiring a pet. Do you have a couple minutes to speak with the student researcher so she can explain the study further?”

IF NO - “Ok, no problem!”

IF YES – Direct to researcher (RO)

Researcher Recruitment Script

**Researcher:** “We are doing a study to explore common thoughts and expectations individuals who are looking into adoption have for their future pet. The study is important because it can be used by shelter staff and veterinarians to ensure the information they are providing to pet owners is the information needed by the general public.

Participation in the study would involve talking to me one-on-one about your past pet experience, your thoughts and ideas about your next pet as well as, filling out a short survey about yourself. The interview would be audio-taped but you will have complete confidentiality. The interview will take approximately thirty minutes of your time. You will be given a $10 Tim Horton’s gift card after participating as a token of appreciation for taking the time out of your day to participate in this study.

We would really appreciate your input, would you have time to sit down and talk about your pets?”

**IF INDIVIDUAL ANSWERS NO,**
Researcher: “I understand. Thanks for your time!”

IF INDIVIDUAL ANSWERS YES,

Researcher: “I really appreciate you taking the time for this! So before we begin, I have a few questions I’d like to ask you:

1.) What type of pet are you interested in adopting today?

2.) Have you owned this type of pet before?”

FOR THOSE THAT DO NOT MEET THE SCREENING CRITERIA,

“Right now, we are conducting this study with an interest in future cat and dog owners only. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today; have a great day!”

FOR THOSE THAT MEET THE SCREENING CRITERIA,

“So before we get started with the survey and interview, there is a consent form I’d like to go over with you. As I said, participation involves an interview and a survey about yourself. The interview will be audio-taped but you will have complete confidentiality. Professional transcribers and my advisor and I will be the only ones that will be able to hear your interview and read your completed survey and all material will be kept locked in a filing cabinet at the Ontario Veterinary College. You have the right to not answer any questions you do not wish to and to withdraw from the study at any point. Take your time to read through it, if you have any questions, feel free to ask me. Once you’ve signed it, we can start!”
A.2. Recruitment Poster

‘Adopters’ thoughts and expectations prior to acquiring a pet.’
Research study conducted by Rachel O’Connor, MSc candidate, and Dr. Jason Coe, DVM, PhD, faculty advisor.

Purpose:
• To discover common thoughts and expectations adopters have when acquiring a pet.

Participation requires:
Demographic survey:
• Five minute survey regarding demographic information.

Interview:
• 30 minute interview, involving questions about past pet experience, reasons for adopting, and expectations for pets.

Please contact Rachel O’Connor, roconnor@uoguelph.ca, if interested in participating.

$10 Tim Hortons gift card for participating!

UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH
REB# 12AP022
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

ONTARIO VETERINARY COLLEGE
Department of Population Medicine
REB# 12AP022

‘Adopters’ thoughts and expectations prior to acquiring a pet’

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Dr. Jason Coe, DVM, PhD and Ms. Rachel O’Connor from the Department of Population Medicine at the University of Guelph. The results of this study will contribute to Ms. O’Connor’s MSc thesis. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Dr. Jason Coe at 519-824-4120 Ext. 54010 or jcoe@uoguelph.ca.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to discover common thoughts and expectations individuals adopting pets have prior to adoption. Information gathered during this study may be used for publication as well as to develop educational materials for individuals interested in acquiring a new pet. It may also be used in directing future research projects.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher. The interview will be audio-taped and will take approximately thirty minutes. Questions about past pet experience, pet expectations, and reasons for adopting will be covered.

2. Fill out a short survey about yourself. This survey should take approximately five minutes to complete.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
Since the interview will ask questions about previous pets and your experience with and feelings towards previous pets, you may feel an emotional response when remembering experiences with previous pets.

The interview will be carried out in a very respectful and compassionate manner. As a participant, you have the right to refuse to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or judgment. Every effort will be made to ensure the confidentiality of participants in connection with this study.

Since the interview will be recorded, there is a privacy risk. This risk will be minimized through storing interview recordings on an encrypted laptop, giving surveys, interviews and consent forms unique codes, and having only study researchers and a professional transcriber have access to study data.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

You may enjoy talking about your current and previous pets with researchers, and reliving funny and loving memories of pets.

Information from the study will be used to inform future research in this area. It is hoped that these studies will provide insight into the expectations and needs of individuals who adopt from animal shelters and that this information will be used to better understand what information will be helpful to pet owners before and after adopting a pet.

**PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

Participants will receive a $10 Tim Horton’s gift card after the interview has occurred as a token of appreciation for participating in the study.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study. Interview recordings will be stored on an encrypted laptop, and consent forms and surveys will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the Ontario Veterinary College and only the study researchers and professional transcribers will have access to them. Data will be kept for approximately seven years, after which, the audiotapes will be deleted and written material will be shredded. Any findings released from the outcome of this study will not be directly linked to any of the project participants. In signing this consent you are aware and agreeable to the use of non-identifying verbatim quotes in published materials and presentations.

**PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to
answer any questions you don’t want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise that warrant doing so.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact:

Director, Research Ethics
University of Guelph
437 University Centre
Guelph, ON N1G 2W1

Telephone: (519) 824-4120, ext. 56606
E-mail: sauld@uoguelph.ca
Fax: (519) 821-5236

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

1. I have read the information provided for the study “Adopters’ thoughts and expectations prior to acquiring a pet” as described herein. I agree to give permission to the _______________________ (fill in respective Humane Society name) to allow the researchers of this study to have access to my adoption application in the assurance that the application and my identity will remain completely confidential.

   • Yes, I agree to give permission.
   • No, I do not want my application viewed.

2. I have read the information provided for the study “Adopters’ thoughts and expectations prior to acquiring a pet” as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study with the assurance that my identity on written materials and audio recordings will remain completely confidential. However, I agree to the use of verbatim quotes in any published materials and presentations as long as my identity remains protected. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant (please print)

__________________________________________
Signature of Participant _________________________

Date

Code:
SIGNATURE OF WITNESS

Name of Witness (please print)

Signature of Witness

Date
*Turn on tape recorder*

**Researcher:** “This study is about adopters’ thoughts and expectations prior to adopting a pet. The questions I would like to ask you deal with your interest in adopting an animal, your expectations for pets, and past experiences you have had with pets. I will ask you to think about what traits in a pet are important to you and to reflect upon previous experiences. This interview has no bearing or reflection on the Kitchener Humane Society or the adoption outcome.

Your participation in this study is strictly confidential. This interview will be recorded to make sure information is gathered accurately. All responses will be kept confidential as this recording will only be available to me and transcribers and will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the Ontario Veterinary College. All identifying information will be removed during transcription and when reporting quotes in written reports. Data will be deleted seven years after the study. Your participation in this study is extremely appreciated and important. If any of the questions I ask make you uncomfortable or you wish to stop at any point, you have the right to do so without penalty or judgment.

If you have any questions about the interview or study, please ask me at anytime. I may be writing down notes while you’re speaking, just to make sure I don’t miss anything, but please feel free to continue talking. May we begin?”

**Opening:**
1.) Tell me about the pets you have at home or pets you have had in the past.

**Introductory:**
2.) What brought you to the shelter today?
   • **Prompt:** What brought you to be interested in adopting?
   • **Probe:** You said [ ], can you explain what you mean?
   • **Probe:** What do you mean by [ ]?

**Key Questions:**

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**A.4. Interview Guide**

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Current experience:

3.) How do you see your new pet fitting into your current lifestyle?
   • Prompt: What are your thoughts on its behavior?
   • Prompt: What are your thoughts on the cost of owning a pet?
   • Prompt: What are your thoughts on the time requirement of owning a pet?
   • Prompt: What do you think your first week with your new pet will be like?
   • Probe: You said [], can you explain what you mean?
   • Probe: What do you mean by []?

4.) What preparations have you made for a new pet?
   • Prompt: What changes do you plan to make to accommodate your new pet?
   • Prompt: What kind of things have you explored before now?
   • Prompt: What research have you done?
   • Probe: You said [], can you explain what you mean?
   • Probe: What do you mean by []?

5.) Do you have children?
   Prompt: How do you expect your child(ren) to get along with your new pet?
   Prompt: Have you done anything to prepare your child(ren) for the new pet?
   • Probe: You said [], can you explain what you mean?
   • Probe: What do you mean by []?

6.) What concerns do you have in relation to getting a new pet?
   • Prompt: What would stop you from adopting a new pet?
   • Prompt: What might you find challenging in having a new pet?
   • Probe: You said [], can you explain what you mean?
   • Probe: What do you mean by []?

7.) Please describe your ideal pet.
   • Prompt: What role would you like your pet to play in your household?
   • Prompt: What kind of relationship would you like to have with your pet?
   • Prompt: What kind of behaviour/personality would your ideal pet have?
   • Prompt: What behaviour traits would not be in your ideal pet?
   • Prompt: Of the behaviour traits you listed that you did not want in your pet, which traits would be deal-breakers?
   • Probe: You said [], can you explain what you mean?
   • Probe: What do you mean by []?

8.) What do you think pet owners need in order to create a successful relationship with a new pet?
• What makes a relationship with a pet successful?
• What factors make an adoption a successful one?
• What kind of resources would be helpful for a new pet owner?
• What information do you think is needed by adopters?

• Probe: You said [], can you explain what you mean?
• Probe: What do you mean by []?

Past experience:

9.) Have you had pets in the past? If yes, please tell me about them.
• Prompt: What did you enjoy in past experiences with a pet?
• Prompt: What traits would you want again in a pet?
• Prompt: What traits could you do without in your next pet?
• Prompt: What things would you do differently this time around?

• Probe: You said [], can you explain what you mean?
• Probe: What do you mean by []?

Cool down:

10.) In terms of creating successful relationships between people and their pets is there anything we have missed? Is there anything else you would like to add?

Researcher: In summary, you said [give summary of key points from interview]. Is this a fair summary of what you said?
If participant says no, researcher will ask participant to elaborate.

If participant says yes,

Researcher: Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. I really appreciate it and I enjoyed hearing about your pets (If no previous pet experience but interested in adopting, will say I enjoyed hearing about your future pet owning plans). Here is your Tim Horton’s gift card. If you could sign here to say you have received it, that would be great (Appendix VIII: Payment receipt). Thanks again. If you would like a copy of the results of the final report, feel free to email me. Have a great day.
For each question, please check the box that best suits you.

1.) What is your gender?
   - Male
   - Female

2.) What is your age?
   - 18 - 25
   - 26 - 33
   - 34 - 41
   - 42 - 49
   - 50 - 57
   - 58 - 65
   - 66 or older

3.) What type of area do you live in?
   - Rural
   - Suburban
   - Urban

4.) What is your current living situation?
   - Renting a house
   - Own a house
   - Apartment
   - Other, please specify ____________________________

5.) What is your current marital status?
   - Single
   - Married
   - Separated
   - Divorced
   - Widowed
□ Other, please specify: ________________________________

6.) How many children under the age of 13 live in your household?
□ None
□ 1
□ 2
□ 3
□ 4
□ More than 4

7.) Have you owned a pet before?
□ Yes, please specify the type of pet(s): ________________________________
□ No  (Skip question 8 and 9)

8.) Where did you obtain your current/past pet(s)? Please check all that apply.
□ Pet store
□ Animal shelter / rescue
□ From a friend
□ It was a stray
□ Breeder
□ Online (e.g. Kijiji, Craig’s list)
□ Other, please specify ________

9.) Have you given up a pet before?
□ Yes
□ No

10.) What is the highest level of education you have completed?
□ High school or equivalent
□ Vocational / technical school
□ Some college
□ College diploma
□ Bachelor’s degree
□ Master’s degree
□ Doctoral degree
□ Professional degree (MD, etc.)
□ Other, please specify: ________________________________

11.) What is your current household income?
□ Under $10,000
□ $10,000 - $19,999
□ $20,000 - $29,999
□ $30,000 - $39,999
□ $40,000 - $49,999
□ $50,000 - $74,999
□ $75,000 - $99,999

156
☐ $100,000 - $150,000
☐ Over $150,000

Please feel free to share any other comments regarding your participation today.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX B

The Effect of Lifestyle and Animal-Care Knowledge on Adopters’ Expectations Prior to Companion-Animal Ownership

B.1: Geographical Representation of Study Locations

B.2: Questionnaire Regarding Adopter Demographics, Expectations for Animal Ownership, Animal-Care Knowledge, and Attitudes Towards Pets

B.3: Additional Notes for Questionnaire Development

B.4: Recruitment Script

B.5: Recruitment Poster

B.6: Consent Form
B.1. Geographical Representation of Study Locations

Legend

- Area encompassing study locations (n=20)

http://www.ontario-canada-travel.com/map-of-ontario.html#.UtBfXBBaKAE
B.2. Questionnaire Regarding Adopter Demographics, Expectations for Animal Ownership, Animal-Care Knowledge, and Attitudes Towards Pets

OWNER THOUGHTS ABOUT PETS AND PETCARE SURVEY

ONTARIO VETERINARY COLLEGE
Department of Population Medicine
REB#12OC008

Section I. Background information

For each question, please check the circle of the answer that best suits you.

1.) What is your gender?
   ○ Male ○ Female ○ Other

2.) What is your age (in years)?
   ○ 18 – 19 ○ 20 – 24 ○ 25 – 29 ○ 30 – 34
   ○ 35 – 39 ○ 40 – 44 ○ 45 – 49 ○ 50 – 54
   ○ 55 – 59 ○ 60 or older

3.) What type of area do you live in?
   ○ Rural ○ Suburban ○ Urban

4.) What is your current living situation?
   ○ Renting an apartment
   ○ Renting a house
   ○ Own a house/condo (Please skip question 5)
   ○ Other, please specify ________________________

5.) If renting, did you speak to your landlord about wanting to get a pet before deciding to adopt a pet?
   ○ Yes ○ No

6.) What is your current marital status?
   ○ Single ○ Living common-law ○ Married
   ○ Separated ○ Divorced ○ Widowed
   ○ Other, please specify: ________________________________

7.) How many children aged 13 years old or younger live in your household?
   ○ None ○ 1 ○ 2
If you have children in your household, please list the gender and age of each child 13 years old or younger:

8.) How many people (excluding yourself) are in your household currently?
   - 1 – 2 other people
   - 3 – 4 other people
   - 5 – 6 other people
   - More than 6 other people

9.) Was everyone in your household involved in the decision to adopt a pet?
   - Yes
   - Some, please list which family members were involved (e.g. mom, child, etc.):

   - No, just me
   - Not applicable; I am the only person in my household currently.

10.) Did you have pets in your house when you were a child?
    - Yes, please specify the type of pet(s):
    - No

11.) Have you personally owned a pet before?
    - Yes, please specify the type of pet(s):
    - No (Skip question 12, 13 and 14)

12.) Do you personally own a pet right now?
    - Yes, please specify the type of pet(s):
    - No

13.) Where did you obtain your current/past pet(s)? Please check all that apply.
    - Pet store
    - Animal shelter / rescue
    - From a friend
    - It was a stray
    - Breeder
    - Online (e.g. Kijiji, Craig’s list)
    - Other, please specify: ____________________

14.) Have you personally ever had to give up a pet before?
    - Yes
    - No

15.) What type of pet are you interested in adopting today?
    - Kitten
    - Puppy
    - Adult cat
    - Adult dog
    - Senior cat
    - Senior dog

16.) On average, how many hours a day will your adopted pet be home alone?
    - Less than 2 hours
    - 2 – 4 hours
17.) What is the **maximum** amount of money you would be willing to spend to purchase the type of pet you’re interested in getting?

- Nothing
- $0 - $50
- $51 - $100
- $101 - $200
- $201 - $300
- $301 - $400
- $401 - $500
- More than $500

18.) Do you plan on getting pet insurance for your pet?

- Yes
- No

19.) What is the highest level of education you have **completed** and/or are in the **process** of completing?

- High school or equivalent
- Vocational / technical school
- Some college/university
- College diploma
- Bachelor’s degree
- Master’s degree
- Doctoral degree
- Professional degree (MD, etc.)
- Other, please specify: _________________________________

20.) What is your current household income?

- Under $10,000
- $10,000 - $19,999
- $20,000 - $39,999
- $40,000 - $59,999
- $60,000 - $79,999
- $80,000 - $99,999
- $100,000 - $119,999
- $120,000 - $139,999
- $140,000 - $159,999
- More than $160,000

21.) Is anyone in your household allergic to pets?

- Yes, to cats.
  - Please specify the household member (e.g. child, father, boyfriend):
  - ________________________________

- Yes, to dogs
  - Please specify the household member (e.g. child, father, boyfriend):
  - ________________________________

- No
- I don’t know

22.) Where will you most likely get your pet advice from? **Please check all that apply.**

- Internet
- Behaviourist
- Shelter staff
- Books
- Obedience classes
- Veterinarian
- Family/friends
- Television
- Other, please specify: ________________________________
Section II. Parents’ thoughts about the relationship between their child(ren) and pet

Please consider the following statements in terms of when you first bring the pet you’ve applied for home.

If you have a child and/or children 13 years old or younger who live(s) with you, please rate the following statements about your thoughts about the relationship between your child(ren) and the adopted pet by checking the circle of the appropriate answer beside each statement.

Please read each question carefully; your answers will be kept confidential so please express your true thoughts. Your participation in this study will have no impact on your adoption application and/or outcome.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1 Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4 Neutral</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7 Strongly Agree</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to be a companion for my child(ren)</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>I expect my pet to comfort my child(ren)</td>
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<td>I expect my pet to protect my child(ren)</td>
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<td>I expect my pet to be affectionate with my child(ren)</td>
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<td>I expect my pet to help my child(ren) learn to be sensitive to others</td>
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<td>I expect my pet to help my child(ren) learn responsibility</td>
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<td>I expect my pet to keep my child(ren) busy so I can work or relax.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect my child(ren) to be involved in helping to take care of the pet</td>
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Section III. Owner thoughts about pet and pet ownership

Please consider the following statements in terms of when you first bring the pet you've applied for home.

Rate the following statements about your thoughts and what role you want the adopted pet to have in your life by checking the circle of the appropriate number beside each statement. This survey is confidential and no one will know which were your answers, so please express your true thoughts. Your participation in this study will have no impact on your adoption application and/or adoption outcome.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1 Strongly Disagree</th>
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<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7 Strongly Agree</th>
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<tr>
<td>I expect to consider my pet part of my family</td>
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<td>I expect my pet to be independent</td>
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<td>I expect my pet to reduce my stress</td>
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<td>I expect I will have to play with my pet</td>
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<td>I expect my pet to be a form of emotional support</td>
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<td>I expect my pet will make me feel safe</td>
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<td>I expect to consider my pet my ‘child’</td>
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<td>I expect to take my pet into consideration when making plans or decisions</td>
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<td>I expect to talk to my pet</td>
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<td>I expect my pet to be excited to see me when I come home</td>
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<td>I expect to take my pet to training classes</td>
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<td>I expect having a pet is a big responsibility</td>
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<th>4 Neutral</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7 Strongly Agree</th>
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<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to not be aggressive</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to be quiet</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect having a pet will benefit my health</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to be my companion</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to be able to sense how I’m feeling</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to get along with other animals and pets</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to not be destructive</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect to have a very close relationship with my pet</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to shed only a small amount</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Expectation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to be good with children</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to be low-maintenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to <strong>not</strong> cause injury to me</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to <strong>not</strong> catch rodents/wildlife</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to <strong>not</strong> be nervous</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to <strong>not</strong> be hyper</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to <strong>not</strong> run away</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect the physical appearance of a pet to play a big</td>
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<tr>
<td>role in deciding which pet to adopt</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect to adapt to my pet's personality</td>
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<tr>
<td>When I adopt a pet, I expect it to be healthy</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to be spayed/neutered</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to be able to be home alone for extended periods of time</td>
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<td>(e.g. during the work day)</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to come when I call it</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect to take an active role in helping my pet adjust</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>to its new surroundings</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect I will have to train my pet</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect taking care of a pet just requires common sense</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to be obedient</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect getting a pet is a long-term commitment</td>
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<tr>
<td>I <strong>don't</strong> expect I will have to make changes to my schedule to</td>
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<tr>
<td>accommodate my new pet</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect my pet to be housetrained (i.e. not urinate/defecate in the house)</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect to be the primary caregiver of my pet</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect the training of my pet will be an ongoing commitment</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect there may be unexpected costs associated with my pet</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect my pet's personality to be the same at home as how it was at the</td>
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<tr>
<td>shelter</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect to take my pet to the veterinarian yearly</td>
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<tr>
<td>I expect members of my household to help take care of my new pet</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1 Strongly Disagree, 2 Neutral, 4 Strongly Agree

165
Section IV. General questions about pets

Please answer the following true and false questions about care and behavior of dogs and cats by checking the circle of the appropriate option beside each statement. Please answer as honestly as possible. This survey is confidential; no one will know which were your answers. Your participation in this study will have no impact on your adoption application and/or adoption outcome.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>I don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are no behaviour differences between breeds.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unspayed female dogs go into heat about twice per year.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dogs and cats need shots or can get sick/die.</td>
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<tr>
<td>If a pet gains or loses a lot of weight, it could be a sign that the pet is sick.</td>
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<tr>
<td>One must catch dog/cat in the act of doing something wrong to correct them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unspayed female cats go into heat twice per year.</td>
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<tr>
<td>It's better for both female dogs and cats to have 1 litter before being spayed (i.e. “fixed”).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cats scratch/pounce/bite as a form of play.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rubbing the pet’s nose in animal messes is a good way to discipline them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>It's cruel to keep cats indoors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cats and dogs misbehave out of spite.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neutering/fixing an animal changes its relationship with its owner.</td>
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<tr>
<td>It costs less than $400 per year to maintain a cat.</td>
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<tr>
<td>There is a critical period for socialization for puppies and kittens.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Whether an adult dog bites is mostly determined by its genetic makeup/breed, regardless of training.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The first year of owning a kitten will cost less $800.</td>
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<tr>
<td>It's important to gradually introduce new pets to existing pets.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A clean litterbox is very important to a cat.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cats do not really need exercise.</td>
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<tr>
<td>If a pet starts drinking a lot of water, it could be a sign that the pet is sick.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The first year of owning a puppy will cost over $1500.</td>
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<tr>
<td>It’s important that as the owner, I establish myself as ‘Alpha,’ or the ‘pack leader.’</td>
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<tr>
<td>A child should never be left unattended with a dog.</td>
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<tr>
<td>It is important to have at least one litterbox per cat in the household.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Giving pets a reward is better for training a pet than punishment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kittens do not need as much socialization as puppies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>It costs more than $600 per year to maintain a dog.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dogs that are properly trained do not bite people, regardless of what provokes the dog.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Most municipalities require dog owners to license their dog(s) every year.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Small dogs do not need to be walked as often as large dogs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pets should be prepared for the arrival of a new baby by exposing them to baby-related objects before bringing the baby home.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cats that are afraid of a new baby will hide.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Children often are scratched by cats or bitten by dogs because of the child’s behavior.  ○ ○  ○

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>I don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When off the property of their owner, pets must be on a leash, contained and/or under control of the owner except in designated areas (e.g. leash-free dog parks).</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different breeds have different energy levels.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour problems in pets can be a result of stressful events and/or changes to the pet’s environment.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Section V. Attitudes towards pets

Please rate the following statements about your attitude towards dogs and cats by checking the circle of the appropriate number beside each statement.

Please answer as honestly as you can, by how you feel right now. This survey is confidential, so don’t worry about how others may answer these questions. Your participation in this study will have no impact on your adoption application and/or adoption outcome.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I really like seeing pets enjoy their food.</td>
<td>①</td>
<td>②</td>
<td>③</td>
<td>④</td>
<td>⑤</td>
<td>⑥</td>
<td>⑦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My pet means more to me than any of my friends (or would if I had a pet).</td>
<td>①</td>
<td>②</td>
<td>③</td>
<td>④</td>
<td>⑤</td>
<td>⑥</td>
<td>⑦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like a pet, or to continue to have a pet, in my home.</td>
<td>①</td>
<td>②</td>
<td>③</td>
<td>④</td>
<td>⑤</td>
<td>⑥</td>
<td>⑦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having pets is a waste of money.</td>
<td>①</td>
<td>②</td>
<td>③</td>
<td>④</td>
<td>⑤</td>
<td>⑥</td>
<td>⑦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House pets add happiness to my life (or would if I had a pet).</td>
<td>①</td>
<td>②</td>
<td>③</td>
<td>④</td>
<td>⑤</td>
<td>⑥</td>
<td>⑦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that pets should always be kept outside.</td>
<td>①</td>
<td>②</td>
<td>③</td>
<td>④</td>
<td>⑤</td>
<td>⑥</td>
<td>⑦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I spend time every day playing with my pets (or I would if I had a pet).</td>
<td>①</td>
<td>②</td>
<td>③</td>
<td>④</td>
<td>⑤</td>
<td>⑥</td>
<td>⑦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have occasionally communicated with a pet and understood what it was trying to express.</td>
<td>①</td>
<td>②</td>
<td>③</td>
<td>④</td>
<td>⑤</td>
<td>⑥</td>
<td>⑦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The world would be a better place if people would stop spending so</td>
<td>①</td>
<td>②</td>
<td>③</td>
<td>④</td>
<td>⑤</td>
<td>⑥</td>
<td>⑦</td>
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</table>
much time caring for their pets and started caring more for other human beings instead.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I like to feed animals out of my hand.</td>
<td>①</td>
<td>②</td>
<td>③</td>
<td>④</td>
<td>⑤</td>
<td>⑥</td>
<td>⑦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I love pets.</td>
<td>①</td>
<td>②</td>
<td>③</td>
<td>④</td>
<td>⑤</td>
<td>⑥</td>
<td>⑦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals belong in the wild or in zoos, but not in the home.</td>
<td>①</td>
<td>②</td>
<td>③</td>
<td>④</td>
<td>⑤</td>
<td>⑥</td>
<td>⑦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you keep pets in the house you can expect a lot of damage to furniture.</td>
<td>①</td>
<td>②</td>
<td>③</td>
<td>④</td>
<td>⑤</td>
<td>⑥</td>
<td>⑦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like house pets.</td>
<td>①</td>
<td>②</td>
<td>③</td>
<td>④</td>
<td>⑤</td>
<td>⑥</td>
<td>⑦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pets are fun, but it’s not worth the trouble of owning one.</td>
<td>①</td>
<td>②</td>
<td>③</td>
<td>④</td>
<td>⑤</td>
<td>⑥</td>
<td>⑦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I frequently talk to my pet (or would if I had a pet).</td>
<td>①</td>
<td>②</td>
<td>③</td>
<td>④</td>
<td>⑤</td>
<td>⑥</td>
<td>⑦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hate animals.</td>
<td>①</td>
<td>②</td>
<td>③</td>
<td>④</td>
<td>⑤</td>
<td>⑥</td>
<td>⑦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You should treat your house pets with as much respect as you would a human member of your family.</td>
<td>①</td>
<td>②</td>
<td>③</td>
<td>④</td>
<td>⑤</td>
<td>⑥</td>
<td>⑦</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Thank-you for taking the time to fill out this survey!

Please feel free to share any other comments regarding your participation today.

__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
B.3. Additional Notes for Questionnaire Development

*Phase I. Expectation item generation and compilation*

The scoping study search strategy involved using a combination of various population and exposure terms, including (pets or cats or dogs or companion animals) and (homeless or abandon* or surrender* or relinquish* or rehom* or ownership or owning or owner or adopt* or acquisition*) and (expect* or attitude* or experience* or responsib* or relationship* or interaction* or animal welfare or human-animal bond or veterinarian*) or (population or overpopulation or behavio*) and (rescue* or shelter*), in MEDLINE, Scopus, CAB Direct, PsychINFO, and the websites of six humane societies and organizations. The scoping study captured both published primary research and published reviews and commentaries. As part of the scoping study process, identified citations were screened by two independent reviewers to determine relevance to the topics of companion-animal relinquishment and expectations of companion-animal ownership.

The qualitative study involved one-on-one interviews with 17 individuals recruited from three animal shelters in Ontario, Canada, who were filling out adoption application forms at the time of recruitment. The interviews explored participants’ reasons for adopting, perceived desirable and undesirable traits in a companion animal, concerns or perceived potential challenges participants foresaw with the adoption or adjustment period, and past experiences with companion animals.

*Phase II. Expectation item elimination*

The two lists of generated items were combined and categorized to group similar items. Items that were repetitive but used different wording were kept, in order to choose language that would be most easily understood. Item elimination involved two rounds.
Phase III. Knowledge, attitude, and demographic sections

Two colleagues familiar with the topic reviewed the generated-knowledge statements for breadth and repetition. If items were repetitive, the author and one colleague through consensus chose the item with the most easily understood language for inclusion in the final questionnaire.

Phase IV. Pre-test of questionnaire

The pre-test involved a convenient sample of 13 people known to one author (RO). The participants were recruited via email and asked to complete the questionnaire electronically and email a completed copy back to the author. In-person meetings between the author and each participant were arranged when possible to obtain verbal feedback. Otherwise, participants were asked to provide written feedback based on a series of open-ended questions, emailed after questionnaire completion, relating to the questionnaire content and construction.
B.4. Recruitment Script

At shelter locations, staff members will introduce the study to individuals completing adoption application forms:

Shelter staff: “We’re collaborating with the University of Guelph on a study regarding adopters’ thoughts about their pet, themselves as owners and pet care prior to acquiring a pet. Participation in the study would involve completing a survey and having three short follow-up phone conversations with the student researcher. The survey will take approximately twenty minutes to complete and each phone call will be about ten minutes.

To thank-you for participating, you will be entered to win an iPad! There will be four iPads to raffle off; therefore, you have a 1/500 chance of winning! Please take some time to read through the consent form to see whether you’re interested in participating. If you do choose to participate, please be sure to include your name and telephone number so the researcher is able to do the follow-up phone calls and contact you if you win the iPad. Whether you choose to participate, or decline to participate, the services provided to you by the shelter will not be affected.”

Participants will be asked to read the consent form for more detailed information about the study, its importance and what is involved in participating. If participants choose to participate, they must sign a paper copy of the consent form prior to filling out the initial survey.
YOU HAVE A 1/500 CHANCE TO WIN AN IPOD!

Tell us what YOU’RE looking for in a pet by filling out a survey

Ask your adoption counsellor about participating!

A study conducted by Rachel O’Connor, MSc Candidate, and Dr. Jason Coe, DVM, PhD, Faculty Advisor.
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
ONTARIO VETERINARY COLLEGE
Department of Population Medicine
REB#12OC008

‘Pet adopters’ perspectives at the time of filling out an adoption application’

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Dr. Jason Coe, DVM, PhD and Ms. Rachel O’Connor from the Department of Population Medicine at the University of Guelph. The results of this study will contribute to Ms. O’Connor’s MSc thesis. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Dr. Jason Coe at 519-824-4120 Ext. 54010 or jcoe@uoguelph.ca

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to discover pet adopters’ thoughts and perspectives prior to getting a pet. Information gathered during this study may be used for publication as well as to develop educational materials for individuals interested in acquiring a new pet. It may also be used in directing future research projects.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete a survey. The survey will take approximately fifteen minutes to complete. Questions about your thoughts on pet care will be covered.

2. Be involved in three follow-up phone conversations with a researcher. These will occur one month-, three months- and one year after you adopt your pet. These one-on-one conversations will be approximately ten minutes long and will be audio-recorded. Questions about how your pet is doing will be covered.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Since the survey includes thoughts about pet care and follow-up phone calls involve questions about how the pet is doing, you may feel an emotional response.
Both the survey and follow-up phone conversations will be carried out in a very respectful and compassionate manner. As a participant, you have the right to refuse to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or judgment. Every effort will be made to ensure the confidentiality of participants in connection with this study.

Since the follow-up phone conversations will be recorded, there is a privacy risk. This risk will be minimized through storing audio recordings on an encrypted laptop and/or on CDs which will be locked in a filing cabinet at the Ontario Veterinary College (OVC), giving surveys, recordings and consent forms unique codes and storing them in a locked filing cabinet at OVC, and having only study researchers and a professional transcriber have access to study data.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

After filling out the survey, you may learn something new about yourself and what you expect out of your pet.

Information from the study will be used to inform future research in this area. It is hoped that these studies will provide insight into the expectations and needs of individuals who adopt from animal shelters and that this information will be used to better understand what information will be helpful to pet owners before and after adopting a pet.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Your survey code will be entered into a raffle to win an iPad after survey completion as a token of appreciation for participating in the study. Four survey codes will be drawn to determine the winner of each of the four iPads; therefore, the odds of winning are 1 in 500.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study. Audio recordings will be stored on an encrypted laptop and CDs. Consent forms, surveys and CDs will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the Ontario Veterinary College and only the study researchers and professional transcribers will have access to them. Data will be kept for approximately seven years, after which, the audiotapes will be deleted and written material will be shredded. Any findings released from the outcome of this study will not be directly linked to any of the project participants. In signing this consent you are aware and agreeable to the use of non-identifying verbatim quotes in published materials and presentations.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL
You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don’t want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise that warrant doing so.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact:

Director, Research Ethics
University of Guelph
437 University Centre
Guelph, ON N1G 2W1

Telephone: (519) 824-4120, ext. 56606
E-mail: sauld@uoguelph.ca
Fax: (519) 821-5236

Your willingness to participate in this study is much appreciated. If you choose to participate in the study and would like a copy of the final written report, please email Rachel O’Connor, roconnor@uoguelph.ca

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

1. I have read the information provided for the study, ‘Pet adopters’ perspectives at the time of filling out an adoption application,’ as described herein. I agree to give permission to the _______________________ (fill in respective Humane Society name) to allow the researchers of this study to have access to my adoption application in the assurance that the application and my identity will remain completely confidential.

   • Yes, I agree to give permission.
   • No, I do not want my application viewed.

2. I have read the information provided for the study, ‘Pet adopters’ perspectives at the time of filling out an adoption application,’ as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study with the assurance that my identity on written materials and audio recordings will remain completely confidential. However, I agree to the use of verbatim quotes in any published materials and presentations as long as my identity remains protected. I have been given a copy of this form.
*A telephone number is needed to contact you for the follow-up phone conversations and to get ahold of you if you win the iPad.

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS

Name of Witness (please print)

Signature of Witness

Date