

Animal Adoption and the Pet Acquisition Process

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Introduction

Animal welfare organizations have been battling pet overpopulation since the 1970's. Euthanasia of unwanted animals remains the leading cause of death for both cats and dogs in America. (Olson et al., 1991) Animal shelters have historically focused their efforts on decreasing the supply of animals coming through their doors by preventing litters and preventing relinquishment. (Wenstrup & Dowidchuk, 1999) Shelters have promoted and provided low cost spay and neuter surgeries in order to decrease the numbers of puppies and kittens turned in. Shelters have also adopted new policy solutions such as owner education, obedience training and behavior helplines to decrease the number of animals relinquished by their owners to shelters each year. (Clancy & Rowan, 2003) Thus, pet overpopulation efforts have historically concentrated on the supply side of the equation. The supply of puppies and kittens has been constricted through sterilization and the supply of adult pets has been decreased through retention programs.

Another solution to the pet overpopulation problem that has received recent attention is a focus on increasing adoption rates. Currently only 28% of cats and 44% of dogs in shelters are adopted. (Zawitowski, Morris, and Salman, 1998) Efforts towards increasing adoption rates place a new emphasis on the importance of the demand side of the overpopulation equation. The "overpopulation model myopically focuses on stemming the supply of dogs without even considering the demand side of the equation" (Fennell, 1999). Fennell, a professor of law and economics, favors a more market/economic based approach to the overpopulation issue, which takes both the laws of supply and demand into account. An exploration of the demand side of the

overpopulation equation brings new attention to the choices consumers make in acquiring animal companions and offers new avenues for change. Those within the field tend to think of overpopulation in terms of too many animals and not enough homes. However, there are a lot of homes out there, with 34% of households owning a cat and 39% owning a dog, the households are just not all filled with animals from shelters.

Pet ownership has been steadily increasing since the 1940s. The majority of consumer demand for pets is met through the production of puppies and kittens. Shelters have 16% and 18% of the current market share for cat and dog owners respectively. (APPMA, 2003-2004) Other common sources of companion animals include breeders, pet stores, friends and family, offspring of ones' own pet, and the adoption of stray animals. Please refer to the table below for a breakdown of the common sources for acquiring pets.

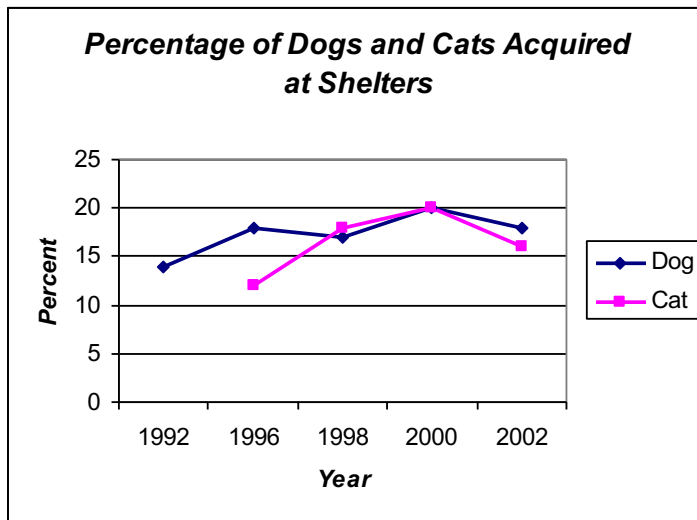
Table 1. Companion Animal Sources

CATS		DOGS	
Percentage of households owning cats	34%	Percentage of households owning dogs:	39%
Number of households owning a cat:	35.4 million	Number of households owning a dog:	40.6 million
Number of owned cats:	77.6 million	Number of owned dogs:	65 million
Percentage of Owners Who Acquired Cats:		Percentage of Owners Who Acquired Dogs:	
From friend/relative:	43%	From friend/relative:	32%
As strays:	30%	From breeder:	28%
From animal shelter:	16%	From animal shelter:	18%
As kitten of own cat:	13%	From newspaper/private party:	14%
From newspaper/private party:	9%	As strays:	8%
From pet store:	5%	As gifts:	7%
As gifts:	4%	As puppy of own dog:	6%
From breeder:	4%	From pet store:	5%
From veterinarian:	3%	From veterinarian:	1%
Other:	6%	Internet:	1%
		Other:	5%

Source: American Pet Products Manufacturers Association National Pet Owners Survey, 2003-2004. The survey was conducted in 2002 using a series of mail-in questionnaires.

Shelters' market share of consumer demand for companion animals has risen since 1992, when its share was only 14% for dogs. (Handy, 1992) However, shelters have experienced a recent drop in their share of the companion animal market since 2000, when their share was at 20% for both dogs and cats. (APPMA, 2001-2002) Please refer to Graph 1 for a depiction of trends in shelters' share of the companion animal market.

Chart 1. Percentage of Dog and Cats Acquired at Shelters.



If shelters could shift consumer demand away from alternative channels towards shelter animals, they could increase adoption rates and lower euthanasia rates. Efforts to increase shelters' share of the companion animal market have often involved legislative efforts to constrict animal reproduction by breeders and pet stores. Shelters have typically blamed breeders and pet stores for providing an ample supply of puppies and kittens. Kim Sturla once declared "each animal produced by breeders provides a death sentence for an adoptable animal at a shelter" (Sturla, 1993). Breeder legislation efforts, such as those in San Mateo California, have resulted in conflict and the emergence of groups like the National Animal Interest Alliance (NAIA), which have posed as a series of challenges

to animal shelter programs and have become the first major organized opponent of shelters and rescue organizations. (<http://www.naiaonline.org>)

The legislative strategies have also had little success in decreasing euthanasia rates at shelters. In a market based economy, asking suppliers (pet stores and breeders) to stop producing a highly desirable product in order to increase a competitor's share of the market is not a promising strategy. According to economic theory, the pressure to decrease supply can only come from a dwindling amount of demand. "Unless consumer's demand for puppies and kittens drops, production from breeders and pet stores will continue" (Fennell, 1999).

A decrease in demand would cause a subsequent decrease in supply as puppies and kittens would no longer turn as high of profits for pet stores and breeders. Also the accidental birth of puppies and kittens from owned animals would no longer be as celebrated an event. Typically, it is easy for an owner to find homes for the entire litter, but if more demand was met from shelter animals not as many neighbors would be lining up at the door for the kittens or puppies and thus owners may be more likely to spay and neuter their pet. "All things being equal, the more demand met by shelter dogs, the less demand for puppies, causing a subsequent decrease in supply and less euthanasia" (Fennell, 1999).

A more effective approach to shift consumer demand to the animals inside shelter cages has been a recent push to make shelters more user-friendly. Shelters had gained a reputation for being dirty, noisy, confusing and depressing places with inconvenient locations and inconvenient hours of operation. The staff had also earned a bad rap; portrayed in the minds of the public as poorly trained, heartless and rude. The adoption

process has also been historically thought of as difficult and lengthy. In contrast, breeders and pet stores are thought to treat customers warmly in organized, cheerful and accessible places, where the purchase of an animal is as simple and convenient as going to the grocery store. (Fennell, 1999)

A number of shelters have fought against these poor public perceptions by revamping their facilities into more animal and user-friendly places. Posh adoption centers are opening, like the seven million dollar San Francisco SPCA's Maddie's Pet Adoption Center, where animals live in replica apartments fitted with furniture, artwork and televisions. (Sawicki, 1998) These imitation 'living rooms' offer a less stressful environment for dogs and cats and also allow prospective owners to interact with the animals available for adoption in a more comfortable, cheery, and home-like atmosphere. Other shelters with smaller budgets have tried to work with what they have by putting up bright posters or creating an alumni board, decorated with stories and pictures of happy endings. The boards and decorations have helped brighten up old facilities and accentuated the positives of adopting.

Shelters have also tried to make their policies and procedures more appealing and inviting to the general public. (Clancy & Rowan, 2003) Shelters have conventionally believed in maintaining restrictive adoption policies in order to ensure animals are adopted into safe and loving homes. To uphold such policies, shelters have typically encouraged workers to screen adopters with the use of lengthy questionnaires and difficult to meet requirements. A recent trend has developed within parts of the sheltering community to implement more trusting and less critical adoptions policies. Such 'open adoption' policies replace lengthy applications with conversation and discussion and less stringent adoption criteria. The process focuses on owner education and providing the

new adopter with numerous resources to ensure a successful adoption. Open adoption policies have led to the rejection of far fewer adopters. (Balcolm and Arluke, 2001) The hope is that by removing the jumps and hoops apparent in the process of adoption, shelters can shift consumer demand away from pet stores and breeders and increase their share of the companion animal market.

Numerous shelter programs have also developed in order to make homeless dogs and cats more accessible to the public. Mobile adoptions have become more frequent, with shelters bringing vans filled with adoptable pets to busy areas of their local community. Also, more than 800 shelters and rescue organizations have taken PetSmart up on their offer to use their stores as adoption centers during the week or on the weekends. Over the last 10 years, these Adoption Centers have yielded more than 2 million adoptions. (PetSmart Charities Quarterly, 2006) Shelters are also utilizing the advantages of advertising on the World Wide Web, many shelters place pictures of their adoptable animals on their own websites or on petfinder.com. Instead of waiting for people to come to the animals, these programs proactively bring the animals to the public.

Raising public awareness about the implications of pet acquisition has been another method used to increase consumer demand for shelter pets. Slogans such as, “until there are none, adopt one,” and the recent publication of a number of books specifically targeting the benefits of shelter adoption have helped raise public awareness on the importance of adopting a pet. (Leigh and Gayer, 2003) (Rubenstein & Kalina, 1996) The hope is that “eventually the acquisition of a canine companion may become an act of conscience, rather than merely the optimizing act of a consumer” (Fennell, 1999).

Such campaigns seem to be having an impact. A recent poll showed that people adopt from shelters for more emotionally based versus rationally based reasons. Fifty-four percent of people polled stated they would adopt from a shelter because they wanted to save a life. (Patronek, 2004) “Empathy for homeless animals appears to be growing...the adoption of mixed breed pets is more and more viewed as a hallmark of an enlightened sense of social responsibility” (Thurston, 1996).

Recent polls also indicate that the user friendly trend and open adoption policies seemed to have made an impact on the public’s perception of animal shelters. Shelters received favorable evaluations on both staff and shelter atmosphere. For example, one study followed up with adopters and found that 97% were satisfied with their adoption experience while 88% were very satisfied with their adoption experience. Also, 98% of adopters would recommend the shelter to a friend. (Neidhart & Boyd, 2002)

In a similar, more recent poll, shelters received high marks for staff friendliness (80%), attitude (76%), and professionalism (81%) as well as cleanliness (84%). The adoption process also received favorable reviews, only 5% thought the adoption fees were too costly, 16% thought the adoption process was too lengthy and 12% thought the adoption process was too difficult. Also, only 12% of participants thought the shelters’ locations were inconvenient. None of these factors, however, were associated with the respondents’ intent to adopt animals from shelters in the future. A subsequent analysis of the data concluded that once consumers arrived at a shelter, they would be encouraged to adopt, since the staff, cleanliness, and adoption process did not seem to be deterrents for adoption. (Patronek, 2004)

The poll, however, hinted towards a different reason people may not adopt from shelters; the selection of pets. The poll found that pet related reasons for not adopting from a shelter were more commonly cited than shelter related reasons. Two thirds of the people interviewed said they would not adopt from a shelter because of their perceptions of shelter animals. These perceptions included the belief that shelter animals had behavior problems (17%), were old (15%), were mixed breeds (14%), had unknown histories (11%), and poor health (11%). Also, a very high percentage of participants, 35%, believed the selection of young animals was poor at shelters, while 47% of people believed shelters had an insufficient selection of purebred. (Patronek, 2004)

Another survey of random households in upstate New York showed similar results; 68% of people cited concerns about the selection of pets as the reason they did not adopt, while 15% stated they had gone to a shelter but could not find the type of animal they wanted. (Frank & Carlisle-Frank, 2001) The polls indicate that the major hindrance to increasing shelters' market share and adoption rates is the public's negative perceptions of shelter animals. (Neidhart and Boyd, 2002)

But are these public perceptions a fallacy or a reality? The success of spay and neuter campaigns has led to a shift in the composition of shelter animals. Puppies and kittens in some regions (New England, California, and parts of the Midwest) now encompass only a small portion of the shelter population; while the predominance of traffic through shelters is comprised of adolescent to adult dogs and cats. (Wenstrup and Dowidchuk, 1999)

Several studies have been conducted to characterize shelter animals in terms of breed, size and age. A study of one Pennsylvania shelter found that 72.5% of dogs at the

shelter were one year of age or older. (Patronek, Glickman & Moyer, 1995) The age distribution was similar in a national study conducted by the National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy (NCPSP), which surveyed several different shelters across the United States. The survey found that puppies and kittens comprised only 9% and 8% of the shelter population respectively. (Salman et al., 1998) The most recent study provided further evidence of the skewed age population of shelter animals; 186 shelters were surveyed and only 13% of the animals entering shelters were puppies and kittens. (Wenstrup and Dowidchuk, 1999) Some shelters that have experienced this shortage of young animals have begun flying animals in from out of state shelters where the age demographics are less skewed; this practice is commonly referred to as animal relocation, and has concentrated mostly on dogs.

The studies have also demonstrated a higher concentration of mixed breed animals at shelters. The Pennsylvania shelter study found that 41% of dogs at the shelter were purebred. (Patronek, Glickman and Moyer, 1995) The NCPSP national study found purebred dogs and cats to be an even smaller minority group, comprising only 30% of the shelter dog population and 6% of the shelter cat population. (Salman et al., 1998)

The composition of purebred dogs at shelters also seemed to be skewed towards large-sized purebreds. The Pennsylvania study found 50% of incoming purebred dogs consisted of German Shepards, Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers, Siberian Huskies, Beagles, and Cocker Spaniels. Toy breeds were the most underrepresented in the shelter population while sporting breeds were the most overrepresented. (Patronek, Glickman and Moyer, 1995)

Smaller dogs seem to be harder to come by at shelters in general. A study conducted at a California shelter found that mixed breed dogs also tended to consist of mainly large mixed breeds. Shepard mixes, Labrador Retriever mixes, Staffordshire Terrier mixes (commonly referred to as Pit Bulls), and Rottweiler mixes were all impounded in large numbers at the shelter. (Lepper, Kass and Hart, 2002) The studies validate the public's perceptions of the physical characteristics of shelter animals.

The public's perceptions on the behavior and health of shelter pets may be slightly less accurate. Several studies conducted on the reasons for relinquishment indicate that animal behavior is the most common reason for relinquishment. (Salman et al., 1998) (Patronek et al., 1996a and 1996b) However, upon further exploration many of the behavior problems animals are relinquished for are more minor behavior issues such as hyperactivity, digging, chewing and scratching. One study found that less than 10% of the animals in shelters were surrendered because of aggression issues. (Salman et al., 1998) The more common minor behavior issues are normal animal behaviors that can be easily controlled through proper training.

Studies have also shown that animals come to shelters in good health, with 94-95% of the animals reported as healthy upon arrival. (Salman et al., 1998) The findings of shelter demographic studies suggest that there are many suitable companion animals in shelters, however they tend to be older, larger, mixed breed animals.

The change in shelter demographics has highlighted the influence of consumer demand. The question left unanswered is whether shelters can compete with new production and increase their market share of consumer demand with a poor selection of puppies, kittens and purebreds animals.

Studies have uncovered established human preferences for certain physical characteristics. Young age, purebred status, small size, and certain color coats were all identified as factors that increase an animal's chances at adoption. (Posage, Bartlett, & Thomas 1998) (Patronek, Glickman & Moyer, 1995) (Lepper, Kass & Hart, 2002)

Young age was the most significant factor in adoption. The likelihood of adoption in all three studies decreased with age for both dogs and cats. (Posage, Bartlett, & Thomas, 1998) (Patronek, Glickman & Moyer, 1995) (Lepper, Kass & Hart, 2002) In general, shelters seem to be able to easily adopt out their puppies and kittens, leaving adolescent and adult animals as the predominant age group that is euthanized at shelters.

Purebred preferences for dogs were also evident in two studies. The Pennsylvania study found that purebred dogs had a higher adoption rate; mixed breed dogs were 1.8 times more likely to be euthanized. (Patronek, Glickman & Moyer, 1995) A similar study conducted in Michigan found that mixed breed dogs were twice as likely to be euthanized as purebred dogs. Preferences for certain types of breeds were also evident; terrier, hound, toy and other non-sporting breeds were the most commonly adopted breeds. (Posage, Bartlett, & Thomas, 1998)

The Pennsylvania study also demonstrated that size effected adoption chances; heavier dogs were more likely to be euthanized in comparison to lighter weight dogs. (Patronek, Glickman, and Moyer, 1995) The Michigan study found that smaller dogs were significantly more likely to be adopted than larger dogs (Posage, Bartlett & Thomas, 1998). The California based study found that 41% of lap dogs that arrived at shelters were adopted compared to only 2% of pit bulls. (Lepper, Kass and Hart, 2002)

Another study conducted in Australia also found that larger dogs typically took longer to adopt than smaller dogs. (Marston, Bennett, and Coleman, 2004)

The Michigan study also found that coat color was an important predictor of adoption for dogs; dogs with gold, white and grey coat colors had a better chance at adoption than brindle and black color coated dogs. (Posage, Bartlett & Thomas, 1998) The California based study also found black and brindle coat colored dogs were least likely to be adopted. For cats, the California study found white, grey and color print coats were adopted more often than cats with brown and black coats. (Lepper, Kass & Hart, 2000)

The study also found the gender of animals to play a factor in their adoption. Intact male dogs were less likely to be adopted than intact female dogs. Neutered males and spayed female dogs were more likely to be adopted than unaltered dogs. This rang true for cats as well, intact cats were less likely to be adopted than altered cats. In comparison, intact male cats were more likely to be adopted than intact female cats. (Lepper, Kass and Hart, 2002) The other studies, however, did not find sex to be an important predictor of adoption. The studies quantitatively demonstrate the preferences adopters harbor towards certain physical animal characteristics; specifically people tend to prefer younger, smaller, purebred animals.

The importance of behavioral characteristics in the selection of a pet, however, has been harder to demonstrate. Studies have had conflicting results about the importance of a pets' behavioral history on adoption. The California study found that dogs and cats which were relinquished for behavioral reasons were less likely to be adopted. (Lepper, Kass and Hart, 2002) A second study discovered that dogs with known behavior

problems spent a longer time at the shelter waiting to be adopted than dogs with no history of behavior problems. (Barnes, 1995)

However, another study that examined the importance of the behavioral history of a pet had conflicting results. Behavior problems including chewing, housebreaking issues, and aggression towards people and animals were not found to be significant factors in the likelihood of adoption. (Posage, Bartlett, & Thomas, 1998) The study brings into question how much the behavioral histories of animals figure into the animal acquisition process.

A separate study examined the importance of a different aspect of animal behavior on adoption; the behavior of a dog at the shelter. The study found that visitors were attracted to dogs which sat at the front of their cages and were quiet and alert. Visitors also preferred dogs that interacted with them in a friendly manner. The study emphasizes the importance of the behavior of dogs while they are at the shelter versus the importance of the behavioral history of a dog. (Wells and Hepper, 2001) Shelters have paid homage to the study's findings and have made efforts to improve animal behavior during and after an animal's stay at the shelter. Behavior programs such as daily walks with a trainer and weekly shelter animal behavior classes have been implemented in several shelters across the country. (Lawson, 2000)

The study also indicated that visitors to animal shelters only show an interest in a small proportion of the dogs available for adoption. The study found that visitors expressed interest in only a small (29%) portion of dogs. When asked, however, no visitors acknowledged that they had come into the shelter with a predetermined type of dog in mind. (Wells and Hepper, 2001) A similar study found that visitors looked at an

average of three out of twenty dogs and an even smaller number of cats. (Irvine, 2004)

The findings suggest that people come to shelters with an unconsciously established idea of what they are looking for in a future pet.

One sociological study examined adopters' behavior and segregated adopters into three categories based on the way they choose their animal: Planners, Impartials, and Smittens. Planners come to a shelter knowing what kind of animal they want. They have typically narrowed down the type of animal they are interested in before arriving at the shelter to a specific breed, sex, age, size and temperament. The second category of adopters, the Impartials, come to the shelter with a few ideas of what they are interested in, but are typically more open minded and interested in finding an animal that matches well with their lifestyle. Impartials typically focus on the sense of connection they feel with an animal instead of any specific physical or behavioral trait. The Smittens are a subset of the Impartials; Smittens base their selection of an animal purely on a sense of connection. This sense of connection oftentimes leads them to adopt an animal that is the opposite of what they originally thought they would be interested in. (Irvine, 2004) The study does not indicate which category of adopters is most common. For example, are a majority of visitors coming in with a laundry list of physical and behavioral characteristics or are they coming in with an open mind, hoping to fall in love?

The preferences people seem to hold for certain physical attributes may indicate that if a shelter doesn't have a wide selection of young and purebred animals, the public may depend on other sources to acquire a companion animal. "The extent to which adoptable canine and feline companions being routinely destroyed at animal shelters could meet the demand for puppies, kittens and purebreds is unclear" (Fennell, 1999).

The question remains whether shelters can shift consumer demand in their direction without the purebred puppies and kittens people tend to prefer.

The malleability of consumer demand for companion animals has never been studied. Whereas thousands of dollars are spent each year for consumer research on cereal brands and a myriad of other consumer goods, little market research has been conducted on the consumer demand aspect of pet acquisition. “At present, millions of animals are destroyed each year as a result of consumer a decision about which very little is known” (Fennell, 1999).

Studies have looked extensively into the decisions consumers make in discarding their pets but this study will profile the choices that pet owners make in acquiring their pets. “Research into what pet caregivers want may ultimately give animal shelters the tools they need to shift consumer demand in their direction” (Clancy and Rowan, 2003). Identifying what factors hinder the adoption of shelter animals will provide insight on the development of interventions that could increase the likelihood of adoption and retention.

The current study explores the characteristics and roots of consumer choice regarding companion animals and profiles the choices prospective pet owners make in acquiring their pets. The study focuses on examining the portion of the general public that already include shelters in their search for a companion animal.

The malleability of demand will be explored by looking at how concrete and how important different factors are in the selection of a pet and how those factors match up with the animal the shelter visitor ends up acquiring. For example, how many physical and behavioral demands do people come into shelters with, and how important are these demands on their selection of a pet? The reasons why visitors do not adopt from a shelter

will also be explored in order to determine whether the reasons given are more shelter or selection related.

The study will also follow up with visitors after they leave the shelter to determine where they end up acquiring a pet in order to measure the perseverance and loyalty visitors hold towards acquiring an animal from a shelter. Exit interviews will also investigate the influential power of shelter staff and compare staff satisfaction levels with the persistence of a visitor to find an animal from a shelter.

My hypothesis is that most people coming to shelters have physical specifications for the type of dog and cat they want, which can not met by the animals generally present at shelters. I further hypothesize that the variability of shelter selection and the difficulty of finding the animal they want at a shelter leads many visitors to seek out other sources. Buying from breeders and pet stores, or looking in the local paper for a purebred or a puppy reduces both the cost and energy of companion animal searches. I also hypothesize that people are more flexible in their demands for cats than for dogs.

The second purpose of the study is to explore the pet acquisition process and where shelters fit in the process. Surprisingly little research has been conducted on the characteristics and demographics of people visiting animal shelters to adopt. The current study will record the general demographics of visitors and adopters to better understand the population of the general public that is already including shelters in the acquisition process. The study will also explore whether there is a subset of the general population that is more likely to come to shelters and whether any characteristic makes a person more likely to adopt.

The study also investigates the process people go through when adopting a pet. The study will take a look for the first time at how much time, discussion and thought people devote to finding a pet. The study also examines how visitors discover shelters and how far along they are in their decision making process when they come to a shelter.

It is important to figure out where animal shelters fit into the scheme of pet acquisition. Understanding their place in the pet acquisition process can help shelters figure out the role they can play in the process. “Research about adoption and adopters will provide valuable guidance to shelters as they continue to evaluate how to best serve their animals and patrons” (Balcolm and Arluke, 2001). I hypothesize that more people come to shelters at the beginning of their search. People who have just embarked on their search might be more open to suggestions and guidance on where they should look next. If so, shelters can act as a resource of information for potential pet owners.

The final purpose of the study is to further explore the outcomes of adoption. The study followed up with adopters 4-5 weeks after they had adopted an animal in order to assess retention rates and determine pet satisfaction and staff satisfaction levels. The follow ups also examined pet behavior and pet health problems that owners may have encountered after adoption. Further exploration of the difficulties owners face after adoption will help shelters determine what to focus on in adoption follow up programs.

Methodology

Study Sites

Surveys and interviews were conducted at four different shelters in the suburbs of Massachusetts; Sterling Animal Shelter, Pembroke Animal Rescue League of Boston, Baypath Humane Society, and Buddy Dog Humane Society. The shelters vary in size and

the numbers of animals they are capable of housing. Please refer to Table 2 below, which provides the number of cat cages and dogs runs present at each shelter.

Table 2. Shelter Capacity

Shelter	Number of Cat Cages	Number of Dog Runs
Sterling Animal Shelter	24 cages	19 dog runs
Pembroke Animal Rescue League	32 cages, 1 cat community room (5 cat capacity), 2 small cat community rooms (2 cat capacity for both)	12 dog runs
Baypath Humane Society	32 single cages, 1 large outdoor cat community room	18 dog runs (8 puppies)
Buddy Dog Humane Society	20 single cages, 3 double cages	32 dog runs

Shelters also varied on the type of animals they housed. The four shelters had a similar population of cats; mostly adult cats of varying coat colors and on occasion a few litters of kittens. Dog populations varied more depending on the shelters' involvement with animal relocation programs. Sterling Animal Shelter is involved in two different relocation programs, the Homebound Hounds program and the Save a Sato Program. The Homebound Hounds program rescues puppies from areas where they are at a greater risk of being euthanized. The Save a Sato program takes animals off the streets of Puerto Rico and flies them to Sterling Animal Shelter. Typically the dogs transferred from Puerto Rico are also puppies and they tend to be smaller in size. Buddy Dog Humane Society is also involved in relocation but receives mostly small and medium adult sized dogs. Pembroke Animal Rescue League and Baypath Humane Society are less involved with relocation and generally house a population of large breed adult dogs.

Subjects

The study involved a convenience sample of 107 animal shelter visitors. Subjects were asked to participate upon entry to the shelter. Only participants that came to the

shelter with the intention to adopt a cat or a dog qualified for inclusion in the study. The breakdown of the numbers of participants from each shelter who were involved in the study is listed in the table below.

Table 3. Number of participants from each shelter.

Shelter	Frequency	Percent
Pembroke Animal Rescue League	32	29.9%
Sterling Animal Shelter	28	26.2%
Baypath Humane Society	23	21.5%
Buddy Dog Humane Society	24	22.4%
Total	107	100.0%

Design

Interviews were conducted throughout the months of July and August 2005 during the shelters' operating hours, generally from 12pm–5pm. Each shelter was visited five times on five different days of the week and weekend in order to ensure consistency.

Participants were asked one initial interview question and then asked to complete a two and a half page survey. The survey was completed by the participants either before or while they were viewing the animals available for adoption. No contact was made with the participants as they viewed the animals and interacted with the staff. Upon their departure from the shelter, participants underwent a quick in person exit interview. They were also asked to provide their first name and phone number on a note card for follow up purposes. Sixteen participants exited the shelter without undergoing an exit interview. No requests for exit interviews were denied; instead the primary researcher was not able to catch up with these participants upon their departure from the shelter.

Follow up interviews were conducted 4-5 weeks after their initial interview date. If participants could not be reached during the first follow up phone call attempt, four more attempts were made over a two week period to try and contact the participant. Participants who were not reached upon the completion of the fifth attempt were marked as no response. A total of ten participants were unable to be reached; one participant's phone was disconnected, one participant did not want to provide their phone number to the researcher, one participant wasn't asked for their number due to a time constraint, and the other eight participants were not able to be reached after five attempts. The overall response rate was 75.7% (81 out of 107 participants). Please see Appendix A, B, and C for survey and interview instruments.

Data Analysis

Survey and interview responses were analyzed using the SPSS Statistical Software Program for Windows Version 13.0. Univariate, bivariate, and multivariate statistical techniques were used to explore relationships between and among variables. Pearson's Chi Squared tests were used to make comparisons between categorical variables. T-tests were used to make comparisons between categorical and scale variables. All results reported were statistically significant ($p < .05$) unless otherwise noted.

Results

Demographics

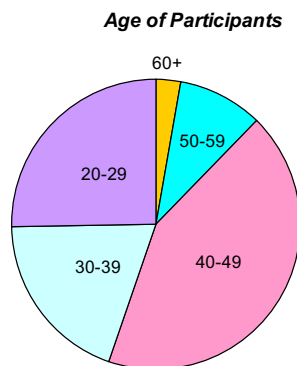
Of the 107 participants, 73.8% were female (79 women, 28 men). The high percentage of female participants may indicate that more women visit shelters than men. The majority of participants were involved in serious relationships, 67.3% were married

and 14% lived with a significant other, while only 15.9% were single and 2.8% were divorced. Fifty-eight percent of participants also had children, and of the participants with children, 62.9% had children that were 10 years old or younger. The average number of people residing in the households of participants was 3.2.

Income levels were also evaluated (although nine participants did not provide income information). Participants visiting shelters came from mainly middle to upper class homes; 42.9% of participants earned a yearly household income of over \$80,000, 41.8% made between \$40,000-\$79,999 a year, while only 15.3% made below \$40,000 a year.

The age of participants was also recorded. Senior citizens comprised a very small minority of the respondents, only 2.8% of participants were over the age of 60. The highest percentage of respondents, 43%, were between the ages of 40-49, while 25.2% were 20-29 years of age, 19.6% were between 30-39, and 9.3% were 50-59.

Pie Chart 1. Age of Participants.



The study looked into whether certain demographic characteristics make people more likely to adopt. More single people adopted than people who lived with a significant other, 53.8% vs. 39.1%, however this difference was not significant, ($p=.055$,

$\chi^2=7.605$). Also, participants who had children were slightly more likely to adopt than participants who did not have children, 42.6% vs. 31.1%, though, again, this difference was not significant. There were also no age groups, marital status or income level that was significantly more likely to adopt, please refer to Chart 2-4.

Chart 2.

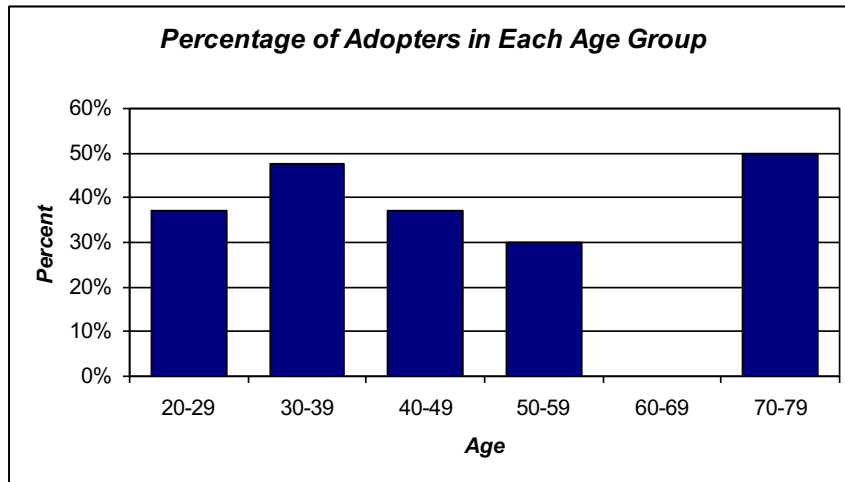


Chart 3.

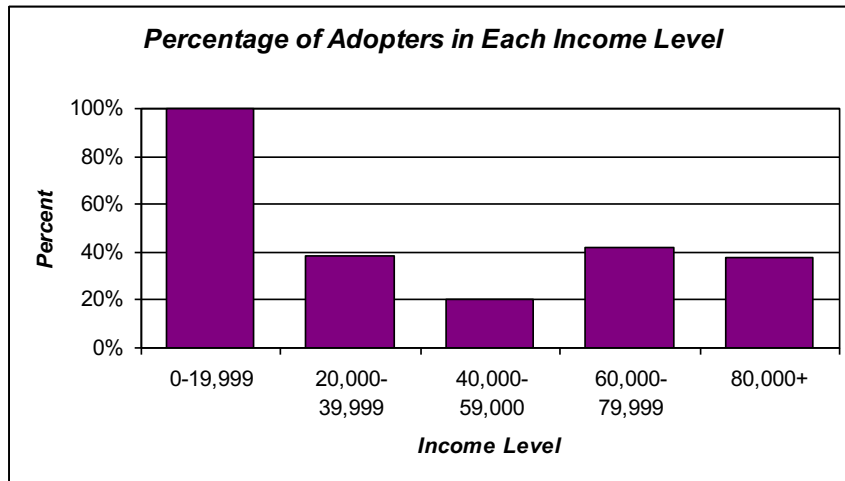
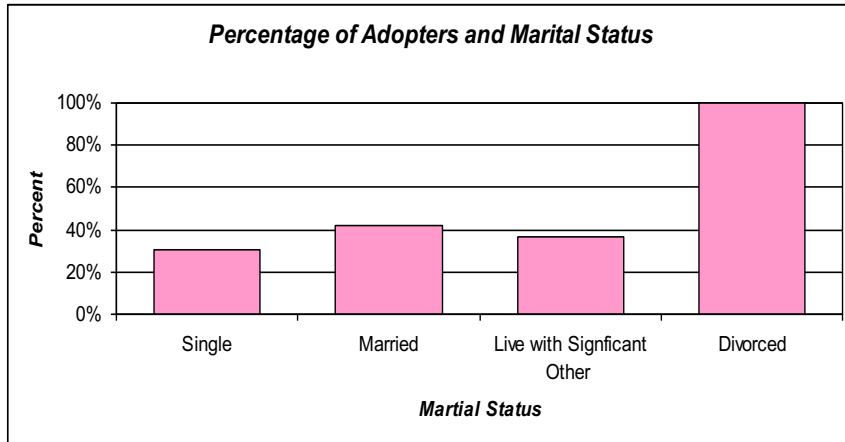


Chart 4.



No significant gender differences were apparent in adoption behavior. Men and women were equally likely to adopt; 35.7% of male participants adopted whereas 39.2% of female participants adopted a pet. A slightly lower percent of male participants, 67.9%, were looking to adopt a dog than female participants, 69.6%. A slightly higher percentage of male participants, 36.8%, adopted dogs than female participant, 32.7%; however this difference was not significant. A slightly higher percent of male participants, 32.1%, were looking to adopt a cat versus female participants, 30.4%. However, a higher percentage of female participants actually adopted cats 54.2%, compared to only 33.3% of male participants, again, this difference was not significant.

Animal Ownership and Experience

The majority of participants, 58.9%, owned pets. Twenty-nine percent had dogs, 34.6% had cats and 17.8% owned another type of pet besides a dog or a cat (i.e. horse, gerbil, or rabbit). Participant dog ownership statistics were ten percent lower than the national ownership statistics for dogs of 39%. Participants’ cat ownership levels were almost equal to the national average of 34%. (APPMA, 2002-2003)

Many participants were interested in adopting another animal of the same species. For example, 35.1% of participants looking for a dog already had a dog and 39.4% of

participants interested in adopting a cat already had a cat. In fact, those participants who had dogs at home were more likely to be looking to adopt a dog than a cat ($p = .035$, $\chi^2=4.429$). This finding bespeaks to the importance of shelter animals' compatibility with other pets. If a shelter animal is known to be compatible with most dogs or cats, this may be a great selling point for the animal. One way shelters can stress the benefits of adopting an older shelter animal, is that their compatibility with other animals is oftentimes well known due to their recorded behavioral history, behavior evaluations, and established personality.

Participants also had a strong background in pet ownership, 72% of potential adopters had been the main caretaker of a dog and 67.3% had been the main caretaker of a cat. Participants who had been the main caretaker of a dog were significantly more likely to want to adopt a dog than a cat, ($p=.000$, $\chi^2 = 13.036$); 82.4% of participants looking to adopt dog had been the main caretaker of a dog. Also, participants who had been the main caretaker of a cat were significantly more likely to want to adopt a cat than a dog, ($p =.002$, $\chi^2=9.19$); 87.9% of participants looking to adopt a cat had been the main caretaker of a cat.

Potential adopters also had a strong history of past experience with companion animals, 88.8% of participants grew up with dogs and 62.6% grew up with cats. Again significantly more participants looking to adopt a dog had grown up with dogs than cats, ($p =.004$, $\chi^2=8.813$). Also, more participants interested in adopting cats had grown up with cats versus dogs; however, this difference was not significant. The findings suggest that most visitors to shelters have a strong knowledge and background in animal care.

Shelters may want to tailor their educational efforts based on the participants' animal care background.

Pet Acquisition Process- Before the Shelter

The study also explored participants' experiences before they came to the shelter. The internet seemed to play an important role in the pet acquisition process, with 70.1% of participants using the internet in their search for a pet. Out of those participants who used the internet, 50.7% used the internet to research basic dog and cat care information, 49.3% used the internet to research different breed types, and 78.7% of participants used the internet to look at animals available for adoption at shelters and rescues. A higher percent of participants, 44%, who used the internet in their search for a pet ended up adopting a pet than participants who did not use the internet in their search, 25%, however this difference was not significant, ($p=.064$, $\chi^2=3.426$). This high percentage of internet use speaks to the importance of the internet in the pet acquisition process, specifically the use of shelter websites and petfinder.com.

Results also showed that more than two thirds of participants discussed the decision to get a pet with their family. Participants who had children were significantly more likely to discuss the decision to get a pet with their family than those who did not have children, ($p=.041$, $\chi^2=4.193$). Also the percentage of participants who discussed the decision with their family increased as the number of people in the household increased. Still, 8.2% of participants with children did not discuss the decision to get a pet with their family. Interestingly, however, participants who discussed the decision with their family were significantly more likely to adopt than participants who did not discuss the decision

to adopt with their family, with only one participant who did not discuss the decision with their family adopting a pet, ($p=.007$, $\chi^2=7.394$).

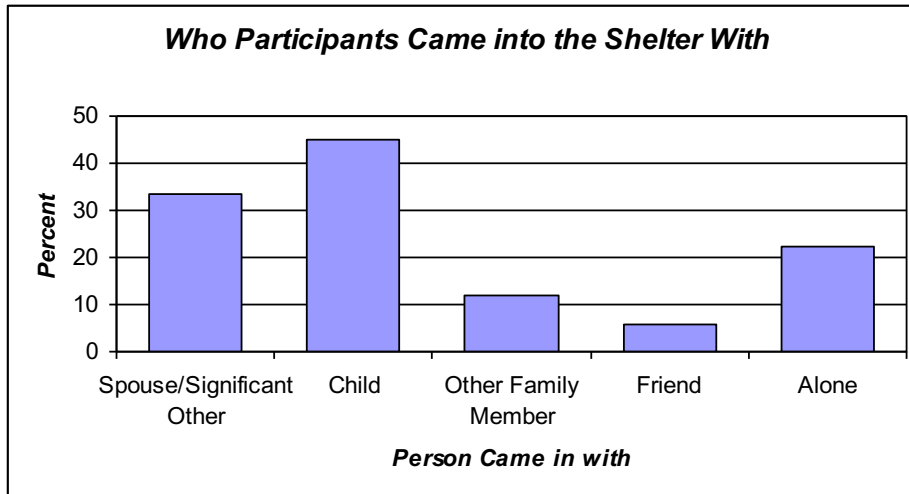
A majority of participants, 57.9%, also spoke with their friends about the decision. A significantly greater amount of participants talked to their friends about getting a dog versus getting a cat, ($p=.03$, $\chi^2=4.716$; 64.9% vs. 42.4%) Discussing the decision to acquire a pet with a friend did not increase the likelihood of adoption.

On the other hand, a very small minority discussed the decision to acquire a pet outside of their friends and family. Only 3.7% of participants talked with their veterinarians about the decision and only one participant spoke with a trainer. No participants reported speaking with a groomer or any other person in regards to their decision to adopt a pet. Taken in context with the earlier stated high ownership statistics, these percentages seem quite low.

Pet Acquisition Process - Contents of Participants' Search

Most participants came to the shelter with a family member; 33.6% came with their spouse or significant other, 44.9% came with their children, and 12.1% came with a different member of the family. Only 5.6% of participants came to the shelter with a friend and 22.4% of participants visited the shelter on their own.

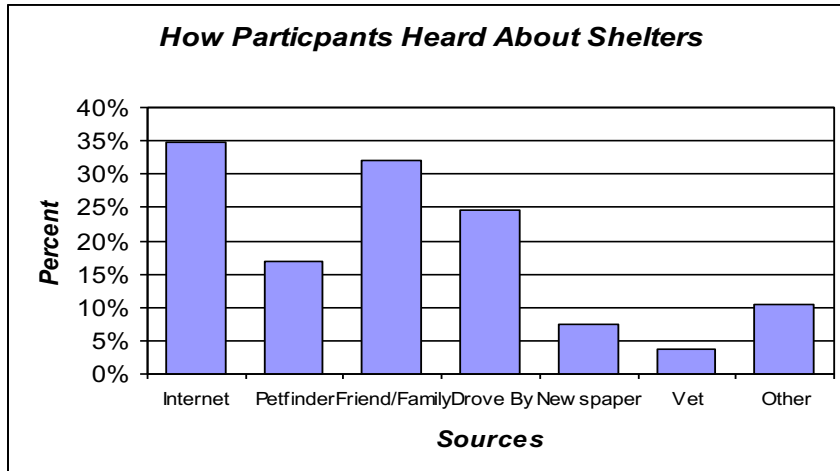
Chart 5.



Participants who came in alone were less likely to adopt than those that came in with another person, ($p=.013$, $\chi^2=6.136$). Participants who came in with children or their spouse were significantly more likely to adopt, (children: $p=.008$, $\chi^2=6.979$; spouse: $p=.009$, $\chi^2=6.821$). This finding contradicts the findings of previous studies. This contradiction may be due to the policy many shelters have which requires the entire family to meet the pet before they are allowed to adopt.

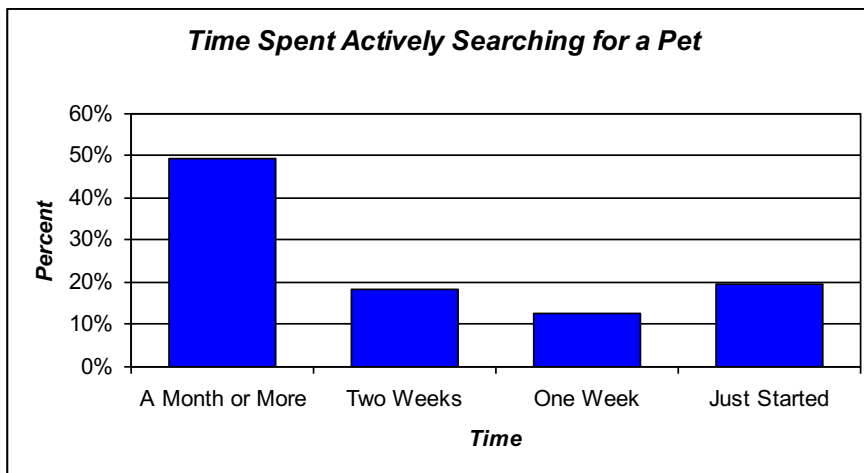
Participants heard about the shelters they visited from an assortment of sources. A high percentage of participants, 34.9%, heard about the shelters they visited via the internet, and petfinder.com, 17%. Those participants who heard about shelters through the internet were also found to be significantly more likely to adopt than participants who heard about the shelters through other sources, ($p=.05$, $\chi^2=3.848$). Also it is interesting to note the high percentage, 24.5%, of participants who heard about the shelter simply by driving by it and the low percentage of participants who heard about the shelter through veterinarians.

Chart 6.



The time participants had spent looking for a pet was well dispersed, almost half of the participants, 49.5 % had already spent a month or more actively searching for a pet, 18.4% had been searching for two weeks, 12.6% had been searching for a week, and 19.4% had just started their search that day. Considering the data of time spent searching for a pet is a cross section of the population, 49.5% is a high proportion of participants who had already spent a long time searching for a pet.

Chart 7.



Participants who were looking to adopt a dog spent a significantly longer amount of time searching for a pet than participants looking to adopt a cat, ($p=.013$, $\chi^2=12.664$,

4df). More specifically, 58.9% of participants looking to adopt a dog had spent over a month in their search, while only 27% of participants looking to adopt a cat had spent over a month in their search. The finding indicates that people devote more time when looking for a dog than looking for a cat. The length of time participants had been searching for a pet did not affect the likelihood participants would adopt a pet that day.

When asked why they included a shelter in their search for a pet, 60.5% of participants reported an emotion based reasons for their visit (i.e. “I felt like it was the right thing to do”, “I wanted to give an animal a home that really needed one”). A smaller percentage, 23.3%, reported more practical reasons for including a shelter in their search for a pet (i.e. “I live nearby”, “It’s the only way I know how to get a cat” or “Breeders wanted too much money”). Also, 12.8% of participants gave both practical and emotional reasons for including a shelter in their search and 3.5% included a shelter because they thought highly of shelters as a source for a companion animal (also 21 of the participants, 19.6%, were not asked the question due to procedural difficulties). The reason given for including a shelter in their search did not affect the likelihood that a participant would adopt.

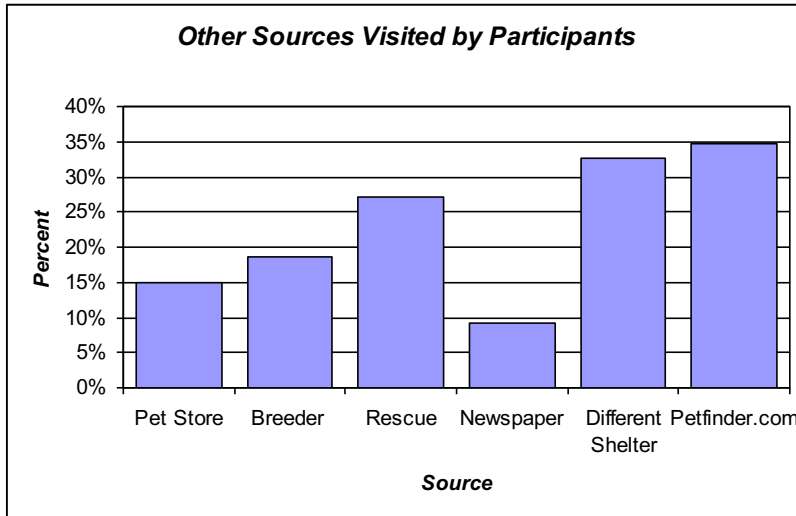
Participants spent an average of 21.95 minutes traveling to the shelter, with a range from 1 to 90 minutes of travel. Participants looking to adopt a dog traveled significantly longer to shelters than participants looking for a cat, ($p=.036$, $t=2.125$). Participants also traveled significantly longer to get to the shelters which was involved most in relocation, ($p=.014$, $t=2.605$). People traveled an average of 30.18 minutes to Sterling Animal Shelter, which generally has a large variety of puppies to choose from, whereas the average travel time for the rest of the shelters was 18.92 minutes. This

finding indicates that participants are willing to travel a greater distance in order to adopt a puppy. Also participants who traveled longer to get to shelters were significantly more likely to adopt, ($p=.005$, $t=2.895$).

A surprisingly high percentage of participants, 59.8%, had previously visited the shelter. Participants visited the particular shelter an average of 4.36 times, with the number of times visited ranging from 1 to 40. The highest percentage of participants, 46.4%, visited the shelter only once. Participants who had been to the shelter before were significantly more likely to adopt, ($p=.028$, $\chi^2=5.019$). Survey questions failed to decipher what percentage of these previous visits were directly related to participants' current search for a pet. However, 47.1% of the visits were over two months prior to their current visit, while 52.9% were within the past 2 months. This finding gives some indication as to the percentage of participants whose previous visits were related to their current search for a pet. More participants who had visited the shelter within the past two months adopted a pet, 37%, than participants who had visited the shelter over two months ago, 25%; however this difference was not significant, ($p=.355$, $\chi^2=.855$).

Participants also relied on a variety of sources for pet acquisition. Other shelters and petfinder.com were the most frequently visited sources. Participants who included different shelters in their search for a pet visited 2 other shelters on average, with a range of 1-6 shelters. Also, a third, or 33.7%, of participants visiting shelters included pet stores and breeders in their search for a pet. Please refer to chart 8 below.

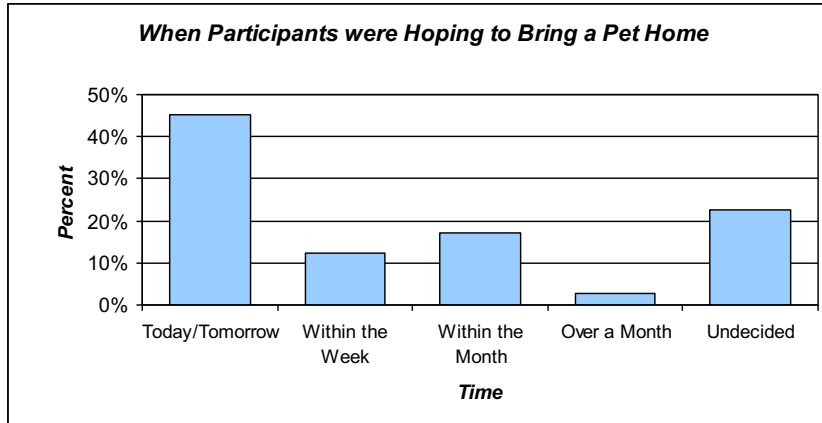
Chart 8.



Participants who were looking to adopt a dog were more likely to go on petfinder.com and also include breeders in their search for a pet than participants who were searching for a cat, (petfinder: $p=.006$, $\chi^2=7.701$, breeder: $p=.001$, $\chi^2=10.639$). The amount and types of places participants had included in their search for a pet before coming to the shelter did not affect the likelihood they would adopt.

Participants were also asked when they were hoping to bring their new pet home with them; 45.3% answered today or tomorrow, 12.3% wanted to bring an animal home within the week, 17% within the month and only 2.8% wanted to wait for over a month before bringing a pet home. Also, 22.6% hadn't yet decided when they wanted to bring a pet home with them.

Chart 9.



Interestingly, 30% of those who had started looking for a pet that day were also interested in bringing a pet home with them the same or next day. Participants who hoped to take animals home with them that day or the next were more likely to adopt than those who stated a later date, ($p=.000$, $\chi^2=20.987$). There was no significant difference between participants looking for cats and those looking for dogs in the time when they hoped to take the animal home.

Physical Preferences of Shelter Visitors

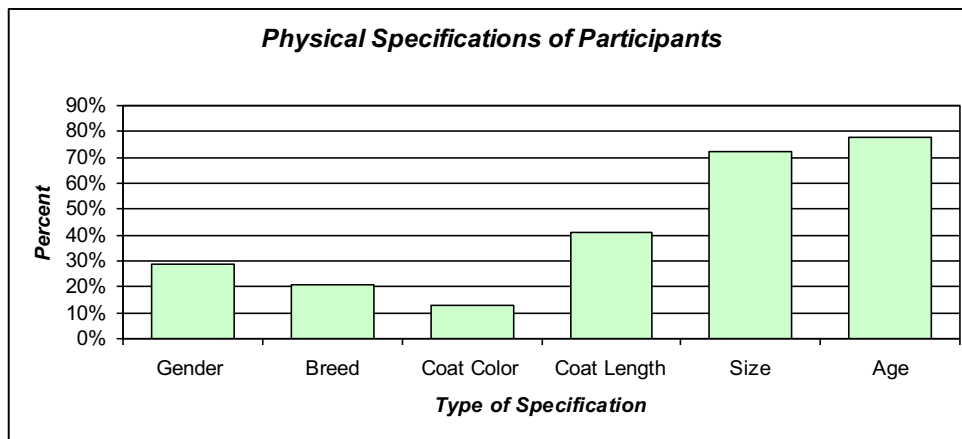
Participants also answered questions about the type of pet they hoped to adopt. Of the participants, 69.2% were looking for a dog and 30.8% were looking for a cat. Only 28.9% of participants had specifications on the gender of the pet they hoped to acquire, 9.3% wanted to adopt a male pet while 19.6% wanted to adopt a female.

An even smaller proportion of participants, 20.6%, had a specific breed in mind. Only one participant looking for a cat had specifications on the breed, they wanted a Maine Coon cat. For dogs, eleven of the breed specifications were for certain mixes, including 6 lab mixes, 4 shepherd mixes, and one golden retriever mix. The other specifications included one participant who was looking for a Rottweiler, two who

wanted a non-shedding/hypoallergenic dog, two who wanted a beagle, two who wanted a bulldog, one who wanted a black lab, and another who wanted a yellow lab.

Also, only 13.1% of participants had specifications on coat color. Interestingly, a larger percentage of participants, 41.1%, had specifications for coat length. Of the participants who had specifications on coat length, 95.5% wanted a pet with either a short or medium length coat, while only 4.5% wanted a pet with a long haired coat. A much higher percentage of participants had size and age specifications. Seventy-two percent of participants had size specifications and 77.6% of participants had age specifications.

Chart 10.



The specific size and age specifications of potential adopters can be seen in Chart 11 and 12 below. A breakdown of the size specifications shows most participants wanted a small to medium sized animals. However, the results may have been skewed towards smaller animals as some of the participants may have said they wanted a small animal because they wanted a puppy or kitten not because they wanted a small full grown dog or cat.

Chart 11.

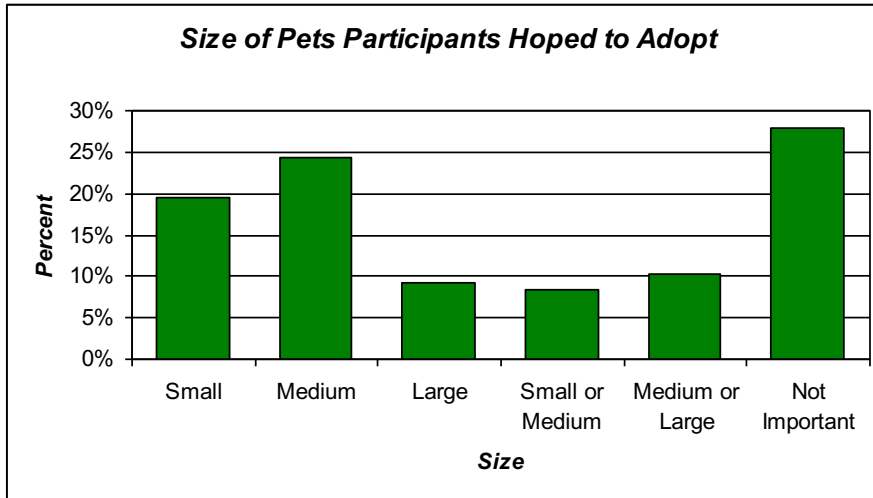
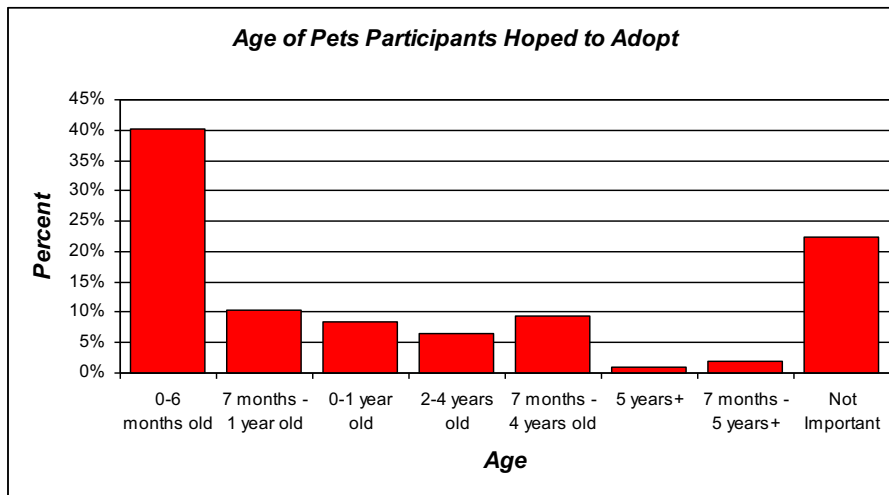
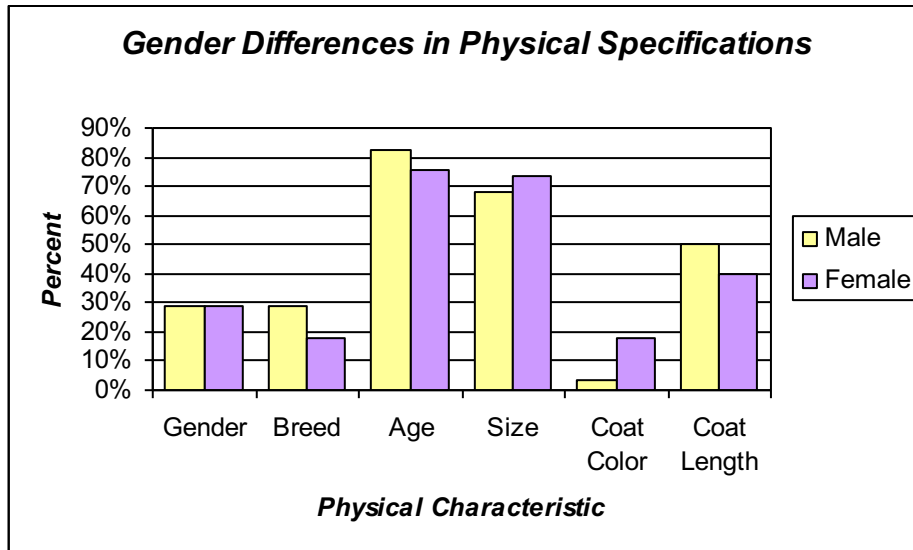


Chart 12.



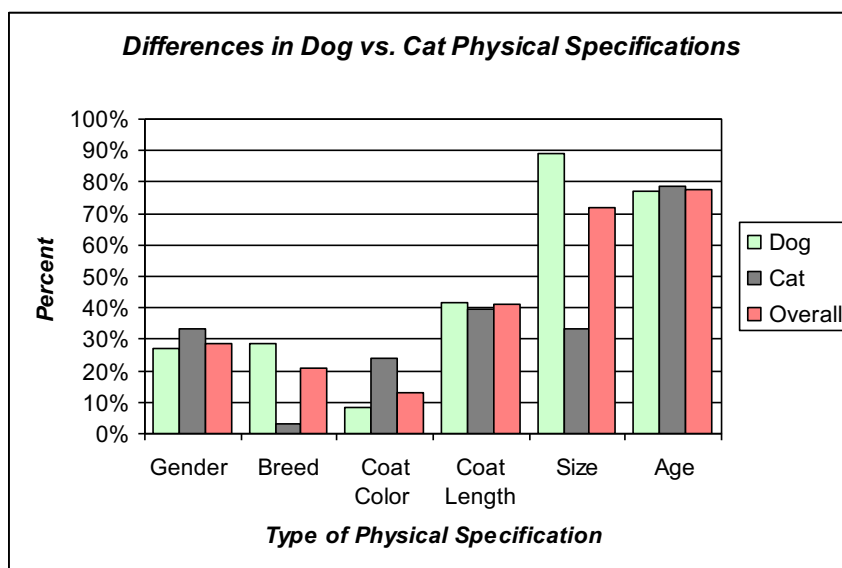
Interestingly, significantly more participants who visited Sterling Animal Shelter had specifications on age than visitors to all other shelters, ($p=.024$, $\chi^2=5.094$). Sterling Animal Shelter has mostly puppies available for adoption due to its relocation programs. Also participants who visited the two shelters involved in relocation had more breed specifications than the other shelters ($p=.011$, $\chi^2=6.455$). Male and female participants had the same number of physical requirements placed on their potential pets; please refer to Chart 13 below.

Chart 13.



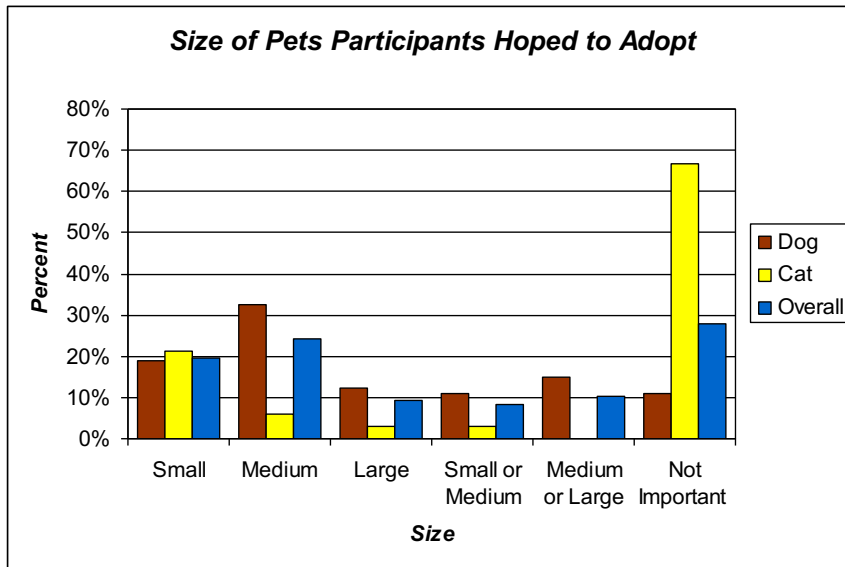
There were some interesting differences in physical specifications between participants looking to adopt a dog and those looking to adopt a cat. Please see Chart 14 below for a depiction of the difference in percentages of participants looking for dogs versus cats.

Chart 14.



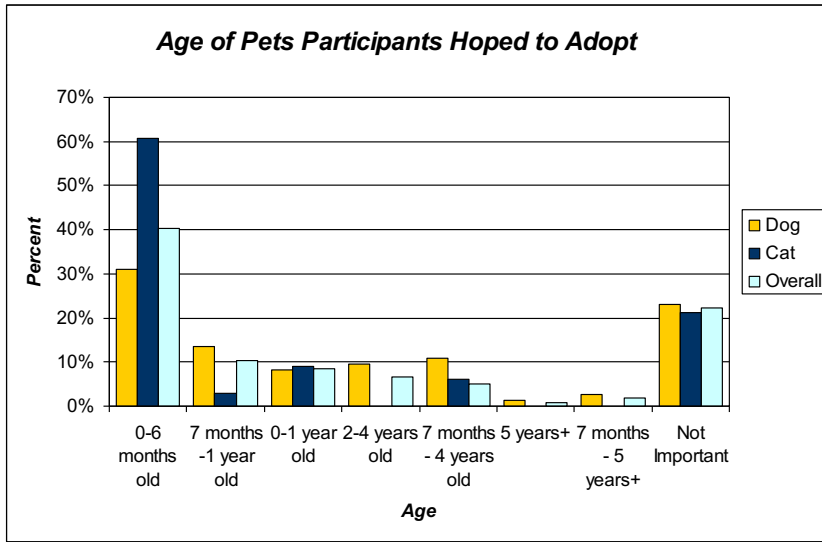
Potential dog adopters indicated a breed preference significantly more often than potential cat adopters, with 28.4% of dog owners looking for a certain breed and only 3% of cat owners having a certain breed in mind, ($p=.003$, $\chi^2=8.978$). Also, participants looking for dogs were significantly more likely to have size specifications than participants looking for cats; 89.2% of participants looking for a dog had size specifications while only 33.3% of participants looking for cats had size specifications, ($p=.000$, $\chi^2=35.290$). Please see Chart 15 below for a breakdown of the size specifications for cats vs. dogs.

Chart 15.



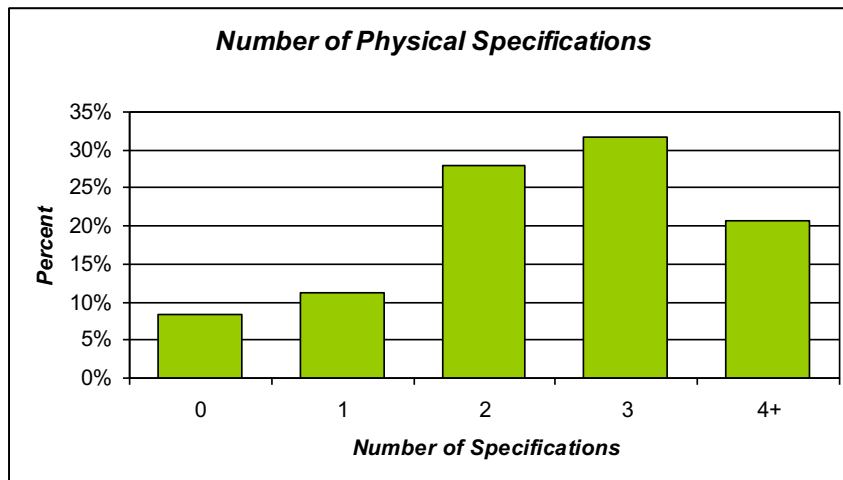
There was an equally high amount of participants who had age specifications for both dogs and cats, but more participants were looking for only kittens (60.6%) than puppies (31.1%), with almost no participants looking for a cat over a year old. However, there was small group who came in specifically not wanting a puppy or kitten; 8.4% of participants with demands wanted a two to four year old animal and 12% wanted a seven month to four year old animal. Please refer to Chart 16 below.

Chart 16.



It is also interesting to look at the number of physical specifications each participant had; 8.4% of participants had no physical specifications, 11.2% had one physical specification, 28% had two specifications, 31.8% had three specifications, and 20.6% had four or more physical specifications. Please see Chart 17 below. Upon further exploration 59.8% of participants had both size and age specifications for the type of pet they hoped to adopt.

Chart 17.

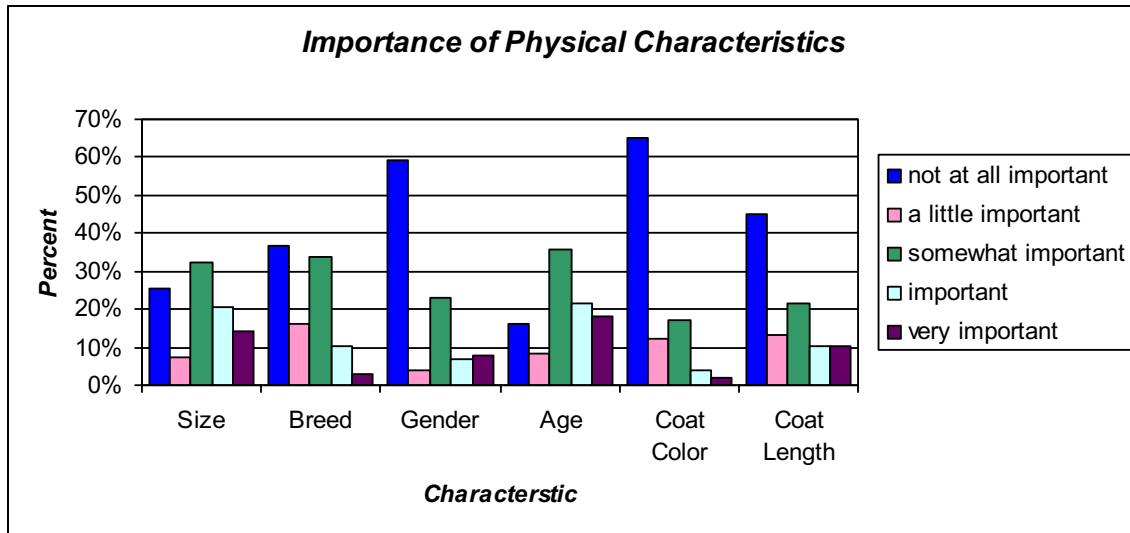


Participants looking for a dog had significantly more physical specifications for their potential pet than participants looking for a cat, ($p=.02$, $\chi^2=9.841$). 58.1% of participants looking for dogs had three or more physical specifications, while only 39.4% of participants looking for cats had three or more physical specifications. The findings indicate participants were more flexible in their demands for cats than for dogs. However, for coat color, more participants looking for cats had specifications than participants looking for dogs, ($p=.022$, $\chi^2=5.224$). The number of specifications a participant had did not significantly affect the likelihood of adoption or the likelihood that a participant would end up getting a pet from a shelter at the end of their search.

Importance of Physical Preferences

Participants were also asked to rank the importance of each physical characteristic in their selection of a pet on a scale from one to five with one being not at all important and five being very important. Comparing the modes among each physical characteristic shows that most participants rated gender (59%), breed (36.8%), coat length (44.9%) and coat color (65.1%) as not at all important. The modes of both age (35.8%) and size (32.1%) was 3, or somewhat important, which indicates that participants rated these physical characteristics higher in importance to their selection of a pet. Chart 18 shows the spread of importance for each physical characteristic.

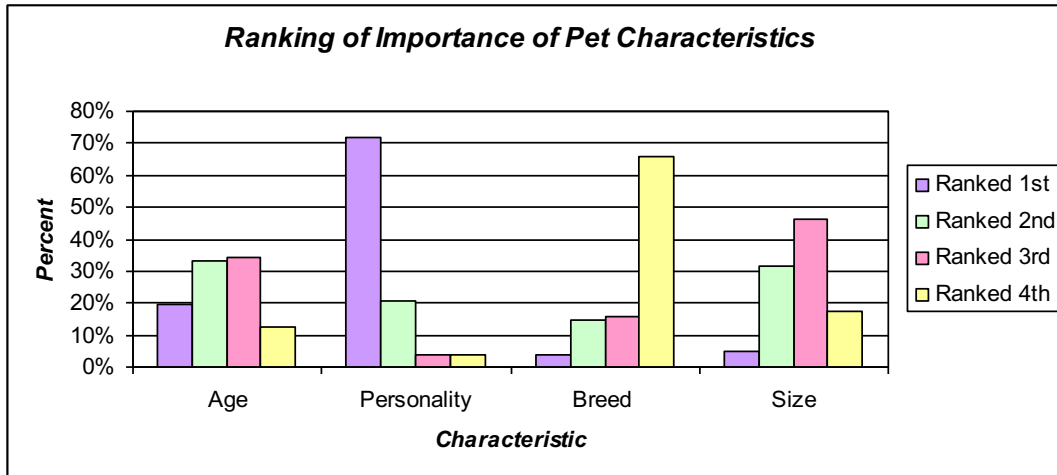
Chart 18.



In comparing the importance of different physical characteristics, participants looking for dogs rated breed and size as significantly more important than participants looking for cats, (breed: $p=.000$, $t=4.497$, 2.57 vs. 1.56; size: $p=.000$, $t=6.582$, 3.39 vs. 1.78). Coat color was significantly more important in participants' selection of cats than dogs ($p= .045$, $t = 2.068$, 2 vs. 1.5).

Participants were also asked to rank the importance of three different physical characteristics (age, breed, and size) and the pets' personality against each other. The majority of participants', 71.6%, ranked personality as the most important characteristic. Age was the 2nd most important in their selection of a pet (33.3%), size 3rd (46.1%) and breed 4th (65.7%). See Chart 19 below for a spread of the rankings.

Chart 19.



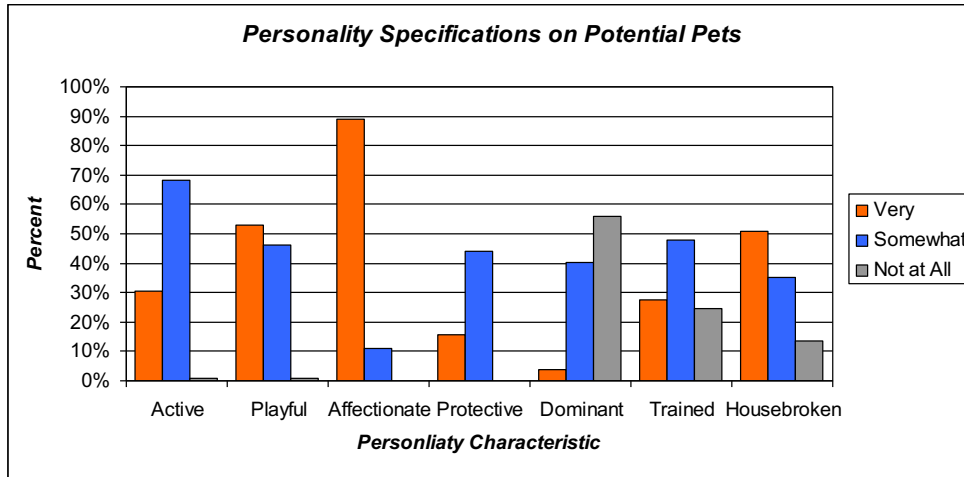
Again there were interesting differences in the ranking of characteristics between those participants who were looking for dogs and those looking for cats. Significantly more participants looking for cats ranked age as the most important characteristic, ($p=.008$, $\chi^2=7.121$, $p=.000$, $t=4.013$, 1.87 vs. 2.63). Participants looking for dogs ranked size and breed as more important than participants looking for cats, (size: $p= .031$, $\chi^2=8.841$, $p=.011$, $t=2.598$, 2.65 vs. 3.03; breed: $p= .191$, $\chi^2=4.749$, $p=.012$, $t=2.566$, 3.31 vs. 3.71). Interestingly, there were no significant differences in the ranking of personality between participants looking for dogs versus cats.

Personality Preferences of Shelter Visitors

Participants were also asked to describe the personality characteristics they were looking for in a pet. Almost all participants, 89.1%, wanted a very affectionate pet. Ninety-nine percent of participants wanted a somewhat to very active and playful pet. Few participants wanted a protective (15.7%) or dominant (3.9%) pet with most preferring a somewhat or not at all protective and dominant pet. Interestingly, a large percentage of participants wanted a very or somewhat trained (75.5%) and housebroken

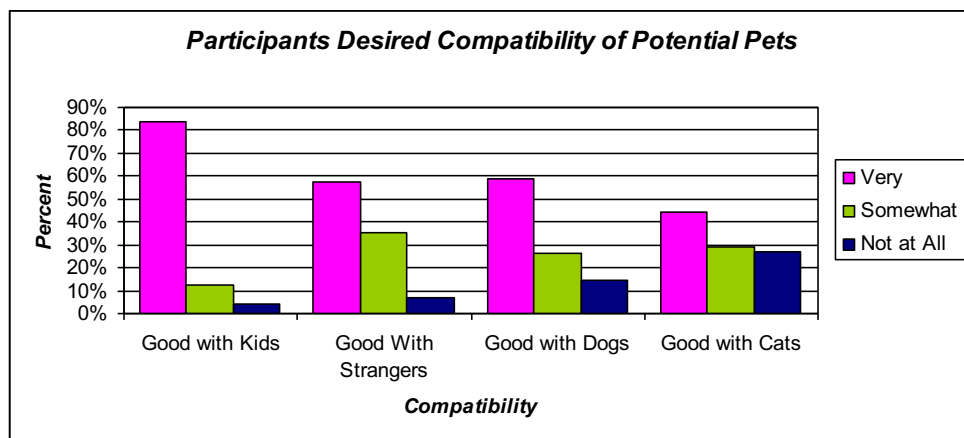
(86.3%) pet. This finding is interesting when contrasted with the percentage of participants interested in a puppy.

Chart 20.



Participants were also asked how sociable they would like their pets to be with cats, dogs, kids and strangers. Answers are presented in Chart 21 below. Almost all participants wanted their pets to be very good with kids, followed by dogs, strangers, and finally cats.

Chart 21.



Again differences arose when comparing personality specifications for participants looking for dogs versus cats. Significantly more participants who were

looking to adopt a dog wanted their pet to be more protective and well trained than those participants looking to adopt a cat, (protectiveness: $p=.031$, $\chi^2=6.943$, $df=2$, $p=.032$, $t=2.175$, 2.14 vs. 2.47; well trained $p=.009$, $\chi^2=9.426$, $p=.003$, $t=3.090$, 1.83 vs. 2.3). Interestingly, more potential dog adopters wanted their dogs to be good with other dogs than potential cat adopters wanted their cat be good with dogs, ($p=.000$, $\chi^2=23.693$, $p=.000$, $t=5.399$, 1.3 vs. 2.1). Also potential dog adopters wanted their dog to be good with strangers more than potential cat adopters, ($p=.041$, $t=2.067$, 1.42 vs. 1.7, $p=.123$, $\chi^2=4.188$).

Importance of Personality Preferences

Participants were also asked to rate the importance of various personality characteristics in their selection of a pet on a scale from one to five with one being not at all important and five being very important. In comparing modes across personality characteristics, affection level and housebreaking level were the most important, with a majority of participants ranking the characteristics as five (very important), followed by playfulness with a ranking of four (important). Activity level, training level and protectiveness received a majority of somewhat important ratings, with a mode of three, while dominance was least important with a mode of one (not at all important).

All compatibility characteristics received a mode of five, meaning that pets' sociability with dogs, cats, kids and strangers were all very important factors in participants' selection of a pet. Upon further examination, more participants found compatibility with children to be very important, followed by dogs, strangers and finally cat compatibility. Please refer to Charts 22 and 23 to view a comparison of importance between characteristics and compatibility.

Chart 22.

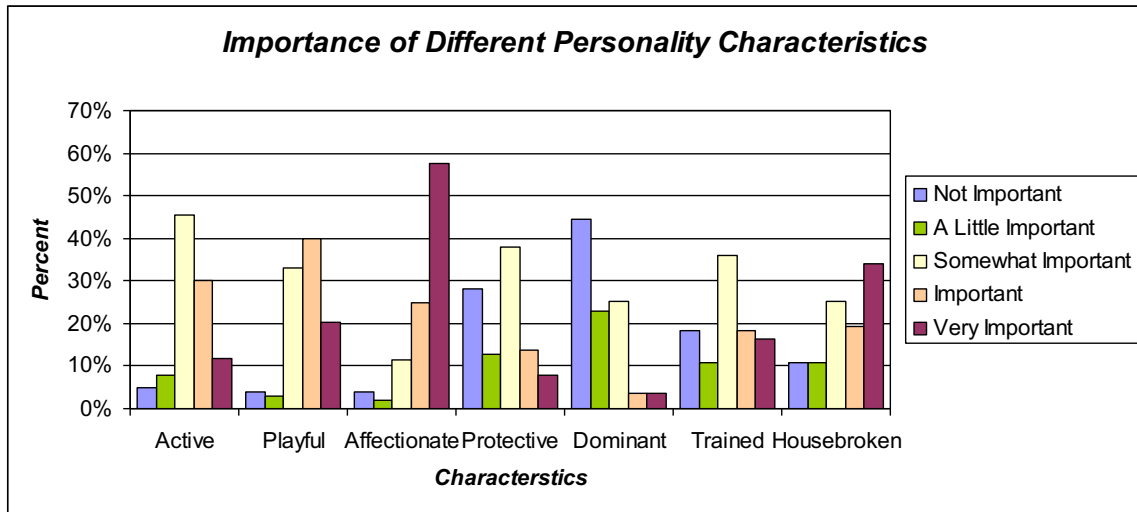
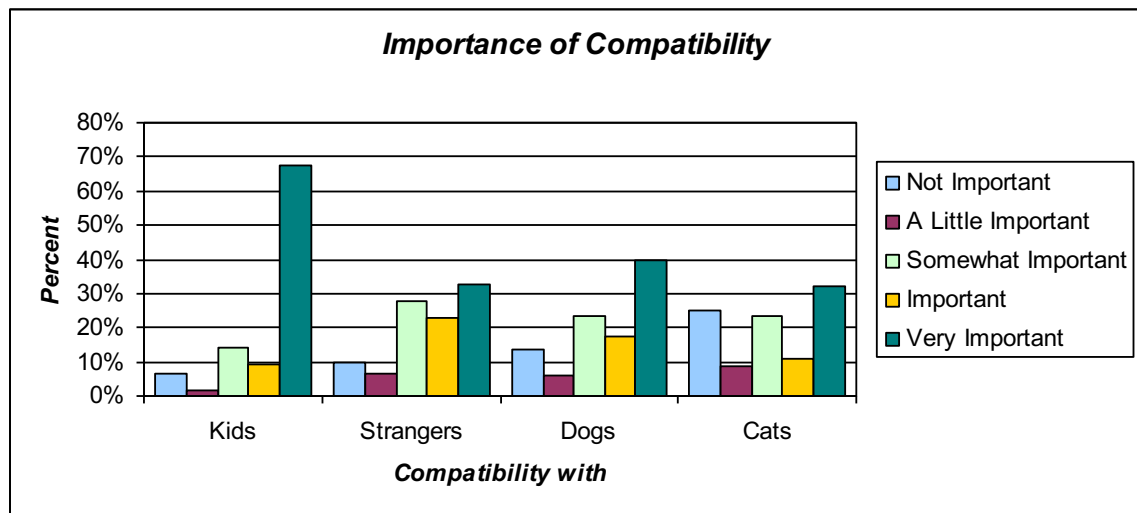


Chart 23.



Differences in the importance of personality characteristics were again seen between those participants looking for cats versus dogs. Participants who were looking for dogs viewed the protectiveness and training level of dogs as more important than participants looking for cats, (protectiveness: $p=.000$, $t= 3.876$, 2.39 vs. 1.9; training level: $p=.007$, $t= 2.844$, 3.31 vs. 2.47). Participants looking for dogs also found compatibility with strangers and other dogs to be more important in their selection than

participants looking for cats, (Strangers: $p=.001$, $t= 3.575$, 3.92 vs. 3; Dogs: $p=.000$, $t = 6.172$, 4.18 vs. 2.43).

Personality and Physical Preferences and Chances of Adoption

Participants who were looking for cats were more likely to adopt (48.5%) than participants looking for dogs (33.8%), however this difference was not significant. The number and types of requirements did not seem to affect the likelihood a participant would adopt, with one exception. People who had specifications on the size of the animal they were interested in adopting were less likely to adopt than those who did not care about the size of their pet, ($p=.004$, $\chi^2=8.292$, 29.9% vs. 60%). Upon further exploration, the effect of size specifications on adoption only held true for participants looking for dogs, ($p=.009$, $\chi^2=6.811$). Size specifications did not decrease the likelihood of cat adoptions. However for dogs, participants looking for small dogs were significantly less likely to adopt a dog than participants looking for medium or large size dogs, ($p=.043$, $\chi^2=4.090$; 38.3% vs. 16.7%). The effect of size specifications on adoption were only apparent in the shelters that were not involved in relocation ($p=.000$, $\chi^2=12.811$). Size specifications did not decrease the likelihood of adoption at the shelters involved in relocation, ($p=.812$, $\chi^2=.057$).

The importance of certain physical characteristics was also found to be significantly related to the likelihood of adoption. Participants who did not adopt rated size as significantly more important than participants who did adopt ($p=.002$, $t=3.21$; 2.39 vs. 3.23). Looking at the ranking scores, participants who did not adopt also ranked size as more important than participants that did adopt ($p=.008$, $t=2.728$; 3.03 vs. 2.6).

Interestingly, the opposite effect occurred with age, participants who adopted ranked age higher in importance than participants who did not adopt ($t=2.664$, $p=.009$, 2.1 vs. 2.6, $p=.48$, $\chi^2=7.916$). Upon further exploration, participants looking to adopt a dog who ranked age as the most important characteristic were more likely to adopt a pet than those that did not rank age as most important, ($p=.034$, $\chi^2=4.470$). This finding did not ring true for participants looking for cats.

Another interesting relationship between adoption and physical specifications arises when participants are split into those looking for cats and those looking for dogs. Gender becomes a significant determinant of adoption for both dogs and cats but with opposite effects. Participants with gender specifications for dogs are more likely to adopt, while participants with gender specifications for cats are less likely to adopt, ($p= .019$, $\chi^2=5.515$, 55% vs. 25.9%; $p= .014$, $\chi^2=6.066$, 18.2% vs. 63.6%).

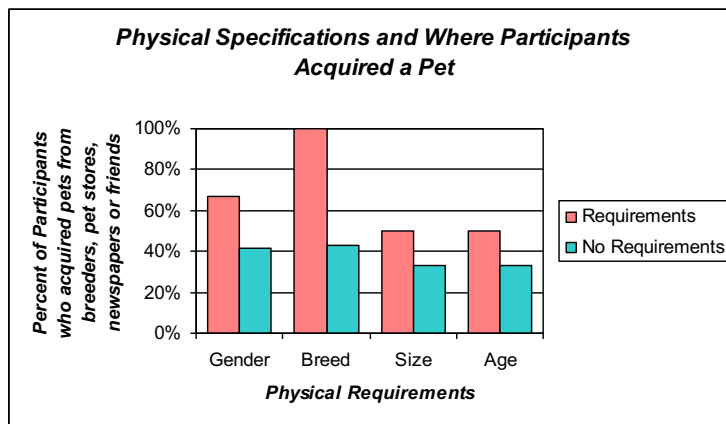
As far as personality characteristics and adoption, participants who adopted wanted a pet who was more dominant and a pet who was more compatible with dogs than participants who did not adopt, (dominant: $p=.000$, $t=3.834$, 2.76 vs. 2.36, compatible with dogs: $p=.035$, $t= 2.147$, 1.76 vs. 1.43).

Different shelters also had significantly different adoption rates, ($p=.004$, $\chi^2=13.081$). Sterling Animal Shelter, which houses mainly puppies and a larger percent of kittens than the other shelters, had a significantly higher adoption rate, 64.3%, than the other three shelters, 29.1%, ($p=.001$, $\chi^2=10.82$).

Physical Preferences and Loyalty to Shelters

No significant trends were found between the physical demands participants had for the type of pet they wanted and the persistence to adopt a pet from a shelter. This may be mostly due to the small number of participants who continued their search for a pet.

Chart 24. Physical Requirements and Where Participants Acquired a Pet



Adoption Outcomes- Physical Characteristics

The affect of physical specifications take on new meaning when the outcomes of adoption are explored. Forty-one out of the 107 participants, or 38.3% of participants adopted a pet. Twenty-five participants adopted a dog and 16 participants adopted a cat. 33.8% of participants looking for a dog adopted a dog, while 48.5% of participants looking for a cat adopted a cat. The majority of adopted animals were puppies and kittens; 70.7% of the adopted animals were under six months old, and an additional 19.5% were under a year old. Only two cats and two dogs were adopted that were older than a year of age.

Since most of the adopted animals were young they also tended to be small. Sixty-four percent of the dogs were small because they were still puppies, and only 2 of the 16 puppies would remain small to medium as most were large breed puppies. Also all the cats classified as small were kittens with a total of 81.3%. Only one large and two

medium sized cats were adopted. One of the medium sized cats was under one year of age.

Slightly more male animals were adopted than females, 56% of dogs and 56.3% of cats, were adopted than females. The vast majority of adopted animals had short hair, 90.2%, with only one dog and cat having medium length hair and 1 dog and cat having long hair. The breeds of dogs adopted included mostly large breed dogs such as Lab mixes (including one Yellow Lab) and Shepard mixes. Only one small breed adult dog, a senior Yorkshire terrier, was adopted. Please refer to Table 4 for a complete list of dog breeds adopted.

Table 4. Breeds of Adopted Dogs

	Breed Mixes	Number
Large Breeds	Lab	8
	Shepard	6
	Husky	2
	Vizla	2
	Doberman	1
Medium Sized Breeds	Beagle	3
	Bassett Hound	1
	Australian Cattle Dog	1
Small Breed	Yorkie	1

For cats, the coat colors of the adopted animals are presented in the Table 5 below. No real patterns emerged, though there seemed to be a preference for orange cats.

Table 5. Coat Colors of Adopted Cats

Cat's Coat Color	Number
White	1
Orange	5
Black	3
Tiger	0
Black and White	2
Grey and White	1
Calico	2
Brindle	1
Buff	1

Adoption Outcomes – Personality Characteristics

Animals were evaluated by the researchers as far as their personality characteristics. Almost all the adopted animals were labeled as very affectionate, with only 4.9% labeled as somewhat affectionate. Most of the dogs and cats adopted were classified as very playful (75.6%) and active (68.3%). The rest were labeled as somewhat active with no dogs or cats being labeled as not at all active or playful. Only one dog of the 41 adopted animals was labeled somewhat protective while the rest were not at all protective. Also, 12% of adopted dogs were considered somewhat dominant while the rest were not at all dominant.

Housebreaking levels had an interesting split; only 8% of adopted dogs were very housebroken, while 100% of cats were very housebroken. Sixty-four percent of dogs were not at all housebroken largely due to the fact that most of the dogs that were adopted were puppies. Sixty-eight percent of adopted dogs were not at all trained, again due to the large amount of puppies adopted. The rest of the adopted dogs were labeled as somewhat trained.

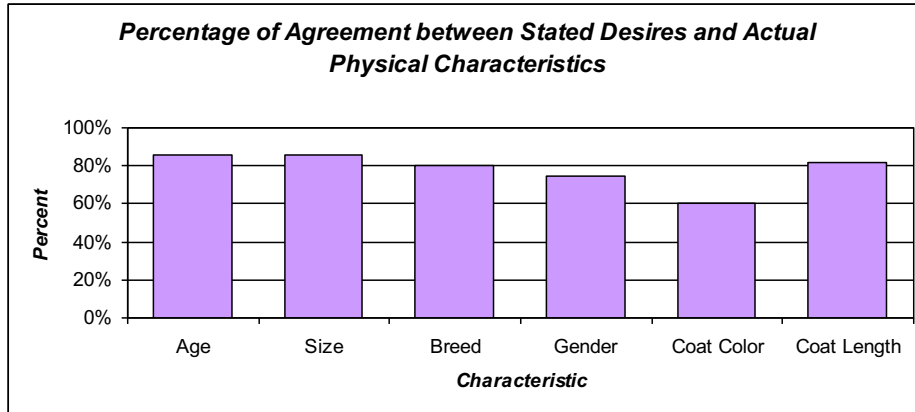
Adopted animals were also rated on their compatibility with kids, strangers, dogs and cats. One hundred percent of cats and 72% of dogs were thought to be very good with kids, while the rest of the adopted dogs' compatibility with kids was unknown. Most

adopted pets, 95.1%, were also considered to be very good with strangers. As far as dog compatibility, 76% of adopted dogs were very compatible with other dogs, 12% were somewhat good with other dogs, while the other 12% of adopted dogs' compatibility was unknown. On the other hand, 93.7% of adopted cats' compatibility with dogs was unknown. Compatibility of adopted dogs with cats was also commonly unknown, 88%, while only 8% of dogs were known to be good with cats and 4.5% of dogs were known to be bad with cats. 68.8% of adopted cats were very good with other cats while the rest of the adopted cats' compatibility with other cats was unknown.

Physical Trait Match Up

The study also explored how well the stated desires the participants gave on the type of pet they wanted matched up with the pet they ended up acquiring. All of the participants ended up acquiring the type of pet they wanted, i.e. dog/cat. Of the participants that stated a physical preference and acquired a pet by the end of the study, 85.7% (30/35) got the size and age (36/42) of the pet they wanted, 81.8% (18/22) got the coat length they wanted, 80% (8/10) got the breed they wanted, 75% (12/16) ended up getting the gender they had specified, and 60% (6/10) got the coat color they wanted. Please refer to the Chart 25 below.

Chart 25.



These percentages could be interpreted as a measure of the flexibility participants have on their physical preferences. If this were the case, participants were most flexible when it came to coat color preferences, followed by gender, and coat length. Age and size were the least flexible physical pet preferences of participants. Agreement could also be a measure of what is available at shelters.

Upon further exploration of the times when what the participants wanted was different from what they ended up getting, 2 participants wanted a female dog and got a male dog, one participant wanted a male dog and got a female dog and one participant wanted a female cat but ended up getting a male cat. As far as size mismatches, two participants wanted small cats and ended up getting larger cats, while two participants wanted a small dog and ended up getting a puppy who was small but would end up being a large breed dog. One participant who wanted a medium sized dog ended up getting a large sized dog. As far as age, four participants got a younger animal than they originally wanted (three dogs, one cat) and two participants ended up getting an older animal than they had originally wanted (one dog, one cat).

Breed mismatches were both in dog adopters who wanted a Labrador Retriever mix but instead one participant got a Vizsla mix and the other adopted a Beagle mix. For

coat length, three participants wanted medium but got short haired animals (two dogs, one cat) and one participant wanted a short haired cat and got a long haired cat. And finally coat color, two participants got different colored coats than they had originally wanted – one went from wanting a tiger to getting a tortie, the other from wanting an orange to getting an orange and white cat. Also two participants looking for a dog got different coat colors than they originally desired: one wanted a black and white coat colored dog and got an orange, black, white and brown colored dog; the other wanted a dog with a yellow coat and got a dog with a mostly white and orange, black and brown colored coat.

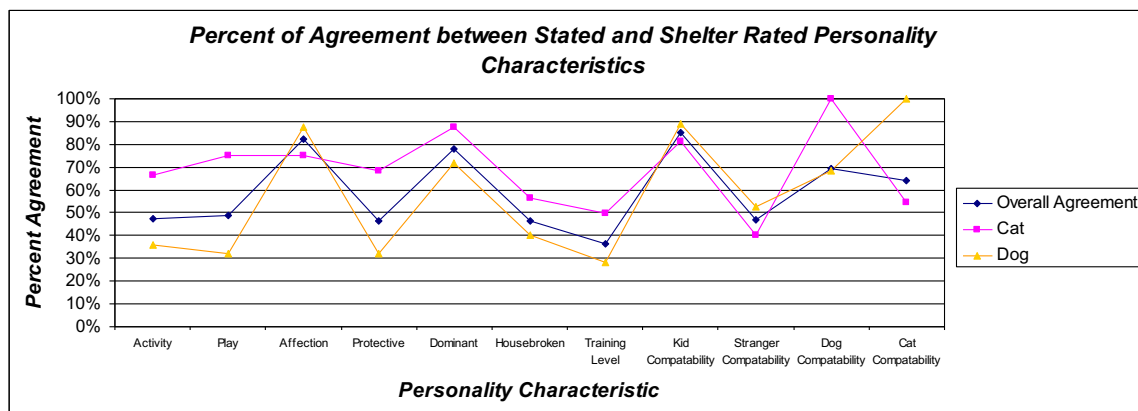
There were no significant differences between participants looking for dogs and participants looking for cats as far as physical trait agreements. However, participants looking for dogs had a generally higher agreement percentage than participants looking for cats for all physical traits except for age and coat color. Also, there were no significant differences in agreement between participants who initially adopted a pet from the shelter and those who acquired pets elsewhere after their shelter visit.

Personality Trait Match Up

Personality agreement was measured in two ways. First, the desired personality trait was compared to the shelter rated personality trait (which was assessed by the evaluator at the time of adoption). Second, the desired personality trait was matched with the owner rated personality trait (which was assessed during the 4-5 week follow up phone call). Chart 26 displays the percentage of agreement between stated desires and shelter rated personality characteristics while Chart 27 shows the agreement between stated desires and owner rated personality characteristics.

Big differences in agreement between desired personality characteristics and shelter rated personality characteristics may be an indication of a lack of perceived importance or higher flexibility of the personality characteristic in participants' selection of a pet. If this were the case, participants were most concerned about personality characteristics such as a potential pets' compatibility with children, affection level and their dominance level, since these characteristics had the highest agreement levels. Participants seemed to be least concerned, on the other hand, with the pets' training and housebreaking levels. Please refer to Chart 26 below.

Chart 26.

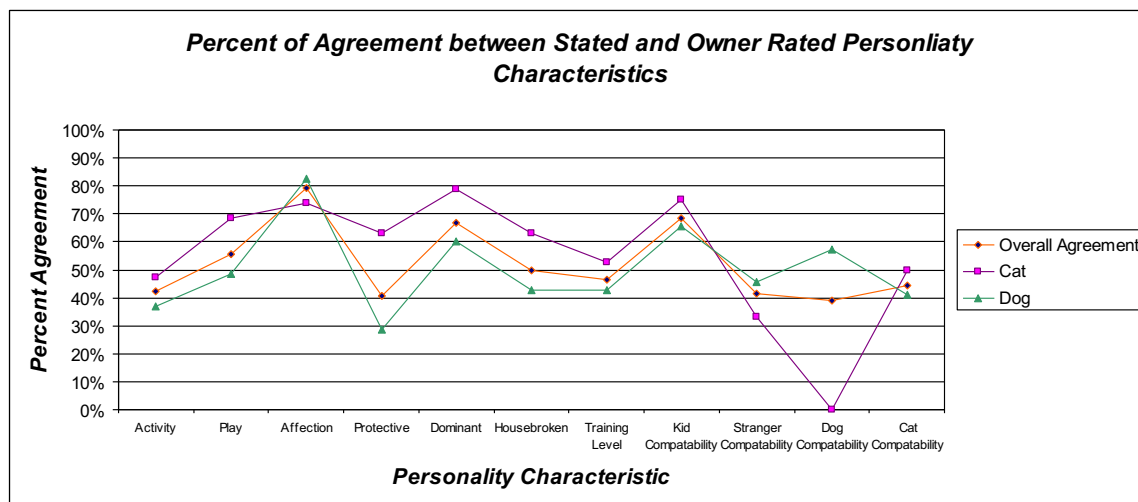


There were some significant differences between participants looking for dogs and participants looking for cats as far as personality trait agreements. Participants looking for dogs had a significantly lower agreement percentage than participants looking for cats as far shelter rated playfulness agreement, ($p=.007$, $\chi^2=7.22$). ($p=.004$, $\chi^2=13.083$). Dog compatibility was much more in agreement with originally stated desires for people getting dogs versus people acquiring cats as far as shelter rated agreement. For cat compatibility, on the other hand, there was more agreement with

stated desires and shelter rated compatibility for participants getting cats versus dogs (p=.031, $\chi^2=8.876$).

Big differences in agreement between desired and owner rated personality characteristics may be areas of concern for shelters. Discrepancies between desired personality characteristics and what the pet actually acts like in the home may result in presumed behavior problems and grievances with the pet. For example, if the pet ends up being much more active than the owner had desired, the pet may be viewed as hyper-active by the owner and this may result in the return of the animal to the shelter. The personality characteristics that had the lowest agreement levels were a pets' protectiveness and also a pets' compatibility with other pets and strangers.

Chart 27.



There was one significant difference between cats and dogs as far as owner rated agreement. Protectiveness owner agreement for dogs was significantly lower than agreement in cats, (p=.022, $\chi^2=7.651$). Significant differences between participants looking for dogs and participants looking for cats also arose when comparing dog and cat compatibility. Dog compatibility was much more in agreement with originally stated

desires for people getting dogs versus people acquiring cats for owner related agreement, ($p=.000$, $\chi^2=22.158$). Also there were no significant differences in personality agreement between participants who initially adopted a pet from the shelter and those who acquired pets elsewhere after their shelter visit.

Experience at Shelters

Results were also collected in regards to participants' behavior at shelters. On average, participants took 1.74 animals out of their cages upon their visit to the shelter, with a range of 0-12. Interestingly, 38% of participants did not take any animals out of their cages to interact. Participants were interested in adopting an average of 1.27 animals, with 25% of participants not interested in any animals. Participants who adopted were interested in and interacted with a significantly greater amount of animals, (interested in: $p=.002$, $t=3.146$, 1.68 vs. .94; interacted with: $p=.000$, $t=4.592$, 2.93 vs. .78).

Participants looking for cats were interested in a significantly greater amount of animals than participants looking for dogs, ($p=.031$, $t=2.195$, 1.11 vs. 1.69). People looking for cats also interacted with more animals than people looking for dogs, however, this difference was not significant, ($p=.084$, $t=1.749$, 1.47 vs. 2.42). Also male participants were interested in a significantly greater number of animals than female participants, ($p=.036$, $t=2.195$, 1.81 vs. 1.06).

Adopters and participants that eventually ended up getting a pet were asked what attracted them to the particular animal they adopted. An equal percentage, 37.5% each, of participants were attracted to a physical characteristic versus a personality characteristic, while 19.6% cited both personality and physical characteristics as their reason for picking

a particular pet. A small percent, 5.4%, described an emotional connection as their reason for picking a particular pet.

Men were more likely to pick an animal out for adoption based on a physical characteristic, 56.3%, than women, 30%; whereas women were more likely to base their selection on a personality characteristic 45% than men, 18.8%. However, neither of these differences was significant. Also, three women based their selection of a pet on an emotional connection they felt they made with the animal, whereas no male participant based his selection on such an emotional connection.

Interestingly, 42.9% of participants looking for dogs attributed their selection of a particular pet based on personality, whereas only 28.6% of participants looking for cats based their selection on personality. This difference however was not significant. Also more people who acquired their pet from a shelter gave personality as their basis for attraction versus those that got their pets from other sources, ($p=.005$, $\chi^2=12.999$, 43.9% vs. 20%).

Participants who had come to the shelter with another person were asked who picked out the pet; 28.6% of participants' children picked out the pet, 28.6% of participants themselves picked out the pet, 4.8% of participants' spouse or partner picked out the pet, and 14% of the decisions were mutual. When broken down by the type of pet adopted, a significantly higher percent of participants picked out their own dog, while cat selection decisions were more often allotted to children or partners, ($p=.012$, $\chi^2=6.310$).

The majority of participants, 80.5%, brought their newly adopted pet home with them the day of adoption. Out of the eight participants that did not take their adopted pet home with them that day, two wanted to take the day to think about it and make their

final decision, five had to wait for the dog or cat to be spayed or neutered and one needed to bring in proof of home ownership before the shelter would allow them to bring the animal home.

Staff Interaction

Upon exiting the shelter, participants were asked various questions to determine the extent and influence of their interactions with the staff. In their search through the animals at the shelters, 81.5% found the animals they were interested in on their own, while 18.5% of participants were directed by the staff. A higher percentage of participants looking for cats were directed by the staff than participants looking for dogs, 30.8% versus 13.6%, however this difference was not quite significant, ($p=.057$, $\chi^2=3.635$). Staff direction did not influence the likelihood of adoption, ($p=.190$, $\chi^2=1.716$).

Participants also rated shelter staff on their knowledge of the individual animals at the shelter and their level of staff satisfaction. On a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the most knowledgeable, staff received an average knowledge score of 8.68. Staff satisfaction ratings were even higher, with an average of 9.45. Satisfaction with staff and knowledge level of staff did not vary with participants looking for dogs versus cats. The perceived level of knowledge and staff satisfaction did not have a significant affect on the adoption behavior of participants. Staff satisfaction and knowledge level ratings also did not have an effect on where participants ended up getting pets. This finding indicates that staff does not have an influence on the persistence or loyalty of participants to ultimately get their pet from a shelter.

The staff was also rated on the influence they had on participants' decisions to adopt or not to adopt a particular animal. Staff received an average of only 2.91 on the level of influence they had on participants' decisions to adopt or not to adopt a particular animal. 63.6% of respondents rated the influence of staff as one while only 16.9% rated the staff influence as higher than five.

The low influence of staff on respondent's selection of a pet may indicate that adoption is an extremely personal decision. Also, in some cases, it was evident that the staff did not know much about a particular animal, due to, for example, the animal's recent arrival to the shelter. Therefore, the staff often times could not tell the participants much in regards to whether the animal would be a good fit. There were also only two cases where the staff refused an adoption because of particular requirements that were not met.

Out of the participants who did not adopt from the shelter, 28% reported having no interaction with the staff and only 26% received advice on where to go next in their search for a pet. Three were given a list of other shelters or told about other shelters to look at and 10 were told to come back later. Only 4 participants were offered advice without having to ask. Fifty percent of the participants who received advice on where to go next ended up getting a pet in four to five weeks time, whereas 33.3% of participants who did not receive advice found a pet in the same time length, this difference was not significant ($p=.373$, $\chi^2=.793$).

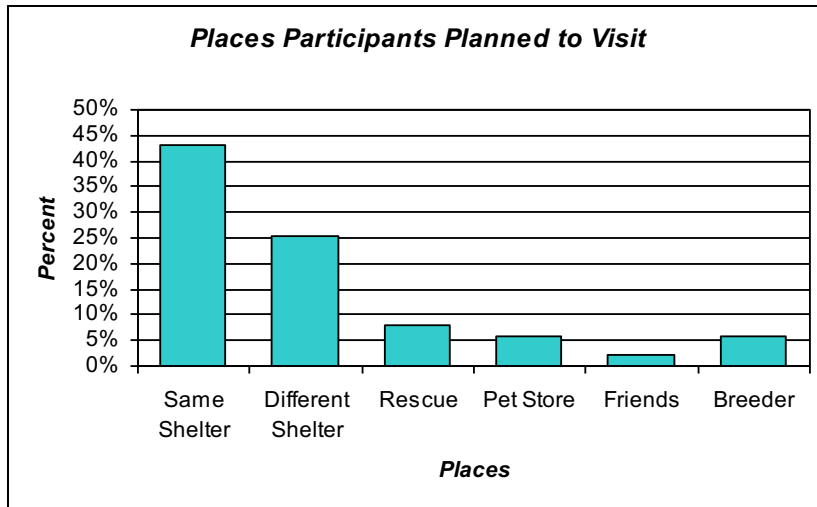
Non-Adoption Outcomes

Participants who did not adopt were asked why they left empty-handed. The majority of participants, 62.7%, stated they did not adopt because they did not find the

type of pet they were looking for in the selection of shelter animals available for adoption. The other 31.4% cited personal reasons, such as wanting to think about it more and not being ready to adopt yet. Only three participants, or 5.9%, based their non-adoption on shelter related reasons. All three of these reasons were related to the shelters refusals to adopt to the participant at that time. One participant was asked by the shelter to bring in the rest of their family (including her children) before they adopted out a dog to her, another participant was asked to bring in her other dog to meet the dog she was interested in adopting, and one participant was turned down because of conduct and appearance.

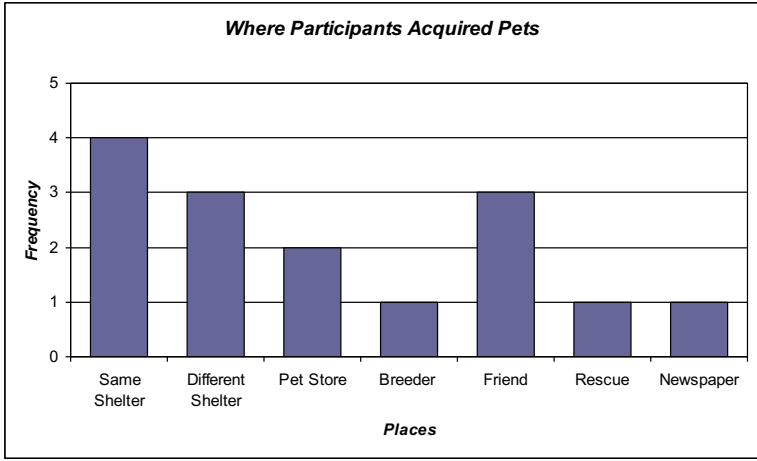
All of the participants planned to continue their search for a pet. When asked where they were planning to look for a pet next, 43.1% said they would come back to the same shelter, 25.5% planned to look at other shelters, 5.9% planned to look at pet stores, 2% knew of friends who were having kittens, 7.9% planned to look at rescues, 5.9% at breeders and 11.8% didn't know what they would do next. Interestingly, all the participants looking for cats that did not adopt said they would stick with shelters in their search for a cat, except for one couple who knew of a friend who was having kittens. Please see Chart 28 for a depiction of places participants planned to visit next in their search for a pet.

Chart 28.



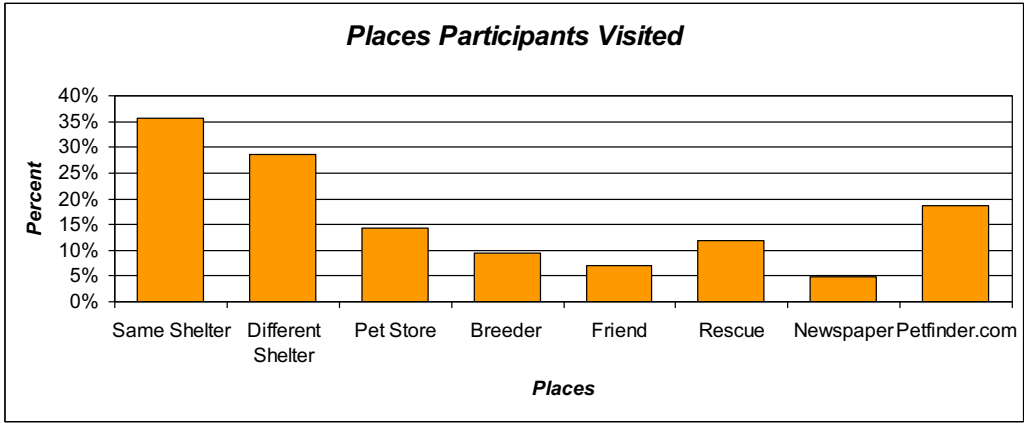
Participants who did not adopt were also followed up with 4-5 weeks after their visit to the shelter. Ten out of the thirty-five participants (28.6%) contacted had found a dog and five out of the eight (62.5%) participants contacted had found a cat. Participants who had found a pet acquired their pets from various sources, three dogs were acquired from the same shelter the participants originally visited, two dogs were acquired from a different shelter, one dog from a rescue, two dogs from a pet store, one dog from a breeder, and one dog from a newspaper. For cats, one cat was acquired from the same shelter, one cat from a different shelter, and three cats were acquired from friends. Please see Chart 29 for an illustration of the places participants acquired a pet.

Chart 29.



Participants were also asked where they had been since the shelter, 35.7% had gone back to the shelter, 28.6% had been to other shelters, 14.3% had been to a pet store, 18.6% had looked on petfinder.com, 11.9% had been to a rescue, 9.5% had been to a breeder, 7.1 % had looked at friends’ places and 4.8 % had looked in the newspaper. Please refer to Chart 30 below.

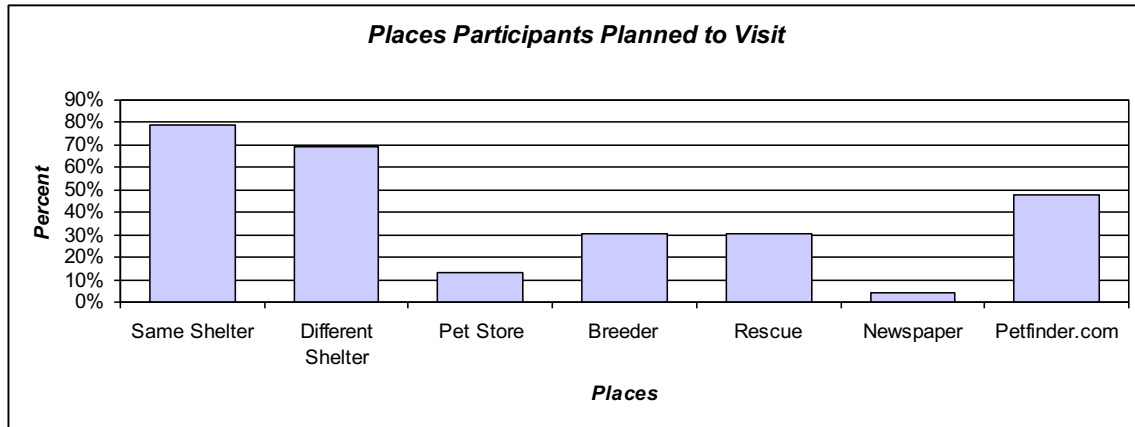
Chart 30.



The 29 participants who had still not found a pet yet were also asked if they were planning to continue their search. 82.8% planned to continue their search. Only three participants had still not found a cat and all three planned to continue their search. Interestingly, one participant stopped looking for a dog and decided to start looking for a

cat, as they believed a dog would be too much responsibility. Those that planned to continue their search planned to look at the same shelter (79.2%), different shelters (69.5%), pet stores (13%), petfinder.com (47.8%), rescues (30.4%), breeders (30.4%), and the newspaper (4.3%). Please refer to Chart 31 below.

Chart 31.



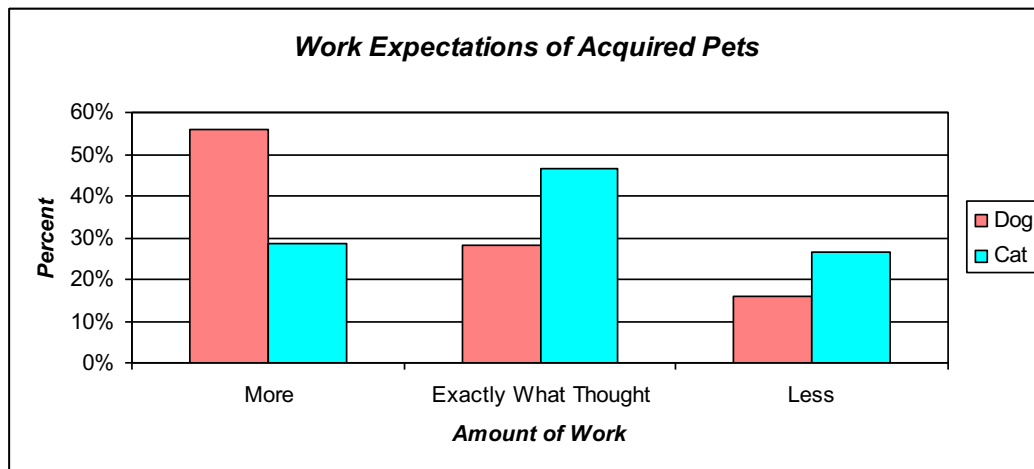
Post Adoption Outcomes

Adopters were contacted four to five weeks post adoption in order to see how things were going with their new family members. Only two of the forty-one adopters could not be reached. Five out of the twenty-five participants who adopted a dog experienced behavior problems. The problems centered mostly on housebreaking and other forms of training. Two of the participants who were experiencing behavior issues were undergoing obedience training to work on the problems. None of the reported problems were severe enough to make any of the participants question returning the pet. No cat adopters experienced behavior issues.

Eight dog adopters and two cat adopters experienced health problems with their pets. Eight out of the ten participants who experienced health problems spoke with their

veterinarians about the issues. One kitten died from severe sickness after spending several weeks at the vet.

Adopters were also asked if their pets were more or less work than they expected. Fifty-six percent of dog adopters and 28.6 % of cat adopters found their pets to be more work than they expected. Participants who adopted dogs found their pets to be significantly more work than they expected compared to participants who adopted cats, ($p=.042$, $\chi^2=4.137$). Twenty-eight percent of dog owners and 46.7% of cat adopters found the amount of work to be exactly what they expected, while 16% of dog adopters and 26.7% of cat adopters found their pets to be less work than they expected. Please refer to Chart 32.



Adopters also rated their level of satisfaction with their pets. On a scale from 1 to 10, adopted pets received an average score of 9.48. This was higher than non-adopted pets' satisfaction level, which was 8.56; however this difference was not significant.

Discussion

Malleability of Demand

The results supported the demonstrated human preferences of earlier studies towards small, young animals. Participants had age specifications more than any other physical characteristic and age was rated the most important physical characteristic in participants' selection of a pet. The majority of age demands, 75.9%, were for animals under a year old, indicating that the majority of participants hoped to adopt a puppy or kitten. This supports other studies, which have found age to be the most significant factor in the likelihood of adoption. (Posage, Bartlett, & Thomas 1998) (Patronek, Glickman & Moyer, 1995) (Lepper, Kass & Hart, 2002)

An examination of the age of pets participants actually adopted also demonstrates a preference for young animals with 90.2% of participants adopting an animal under one year of age. The agreement level between desired age and the actual age of the animal acquired was very high and indicates that participants were not very flexible on their age requirements. This findings point to just how difficult it is for shelters to adopt out adult animals.

Interestingly, however, age requirements were found to not affect the likelihood of adoption. This result is based on the fact that most people were able to adopt the young animal they wanted from shelters involved in relocation. The shelter housing mainly puppies and a larger percent of kittens had a significantly higher adoption rate in general than the other shelters, ($p=.001$). And significantly more people who visited the shelter involved in relocation had age requirements, ($p=.024$).

Size was also important for a large majority of the participants and was rated the second most important physical characteristic in participants' selection of a pet. A breakdown of size specifications demonstrates a preference for smaller animals,

specifically, smaller dogs, with 62.1% wanting small to medium sized dog. This finding agrees with past studies which have found that heavier dogs were more likely to be euthanized and that smaller dogs took a shorter amount of time to adopt. (Marston, Bennett, and Coleman, 2004) (Lepper, Kass and Hart, 2002) (Posage, Bartlett & Thomas, 1998) (Patronek, Glickman, and Moyer, 1995)

Size specifications, unlike age, were found to affect the likelihood of adoption, ($p=.004$). Participants with size specifications were less likely to adopt. When broken down, the effect of size specifications on adoption only held true for dogs, ($p=.009$). Specifically, participants looking for small dogs were significantly less likely to adopt a dog, ($p=.043$). The **importance** of size characteristics was also found to be significantly related to the likelihood of adoption. Participants who adopted rated size as significantly less important than participants who did not adopt, ($p=.002$).

This finding indicates that if people were not able to find the small dog they wanted, they left empty handed. Interestingly, the effect of size specifications on adoption did not hold true for participants who visited the two shelters involved in relocation. This again indicates that if there was a selection of the desired sized animals, participants with size specifications were more likely to adopt.

Breed, on the other hand, seemed to be less important in the selection of pets than earlier studies have shown. (Patronek, Glickman & Moyer, 1995) (Posage, Bartlett, & Thomas, 1998) A much smaller percentage of participants, 20.6%, had breed specifications. Also, most participants rated breed as not at all important in their selection of a pet. The ranking scores also showed participants' rated breed as lowest in importance, with personality, size and age all being more important factors in their

selection of a pet. Participants also seemed more flexible in their breed requirements with an 80% (8/10) agreement rate; a lower agreement rate than size and age.

These findings contradict the results on the importance of breed in other studies, where purebreds were found to have higher adoption rates. (Posage, Bartlett, & Thomas, 1998) (Patronek, Glickman & Moyer, 1995) One possible explanation may be that people who want purebreds aren't including shelters in their search for a pet. The poll conducted in Massachusetts found that 47% of people surveyed thought the selection of purebreds in shelters was poor. (Patronek, 2004) This finding may indicate that people who want purebreds don't include shelters in their search for a pet because they assume the shelters will not have them available. Also, many participants used the internet in their search for a pet. Perhaps people who want a purebred do not come in to shelters unless they know the specific breed they want is available.

Gender also seemed to play a minor role in participants' selection of a pet, with only 28.9% of participants having gender specifications. The importance of gender in participants' selection of a pet received low ratings and gender also seemed to be more flexible, with an agreement level of 75%. However, gender specifications were found to affect the likelihood of adoption for both dogs and cats but with opposite affects. Participants with gender specifications for dogs were more likely to adopt, while participants with gender specifications for cats were less likely to adopt, ($p = .019$, $p = .014$).

This finding contradicts most previous studies findings which did not find gender to affect adoption. (Patronek, Glickman & Moyer, 1995) (Posage, Bartlett, & Thomas, 1998) The one study that did find gender played a role, found significant differences for

intact versus altered animals. (Lepper, Kass and Hart, 2002) All the shelters involved in the current study required the animal be spayed and neutered before adoption and so the affects of intact versus altered animals was not possible.

Coat color was also found to be of little importance in the selection of a pet; participants had this physical specification less than any other specification. Coat color also had the lowest level of agreement at 60% (6/10), which suggests people are more flexible in their demands for coat color. The findings did not support the past study which found that dogs with gold, white and grey coat colors and cats with white, grey and color print coat colors were more likely to be adopted. (Posage, Bartlett & Thomas, 1998) (Lepper, Kass and Hart, 2002)

A surprisingly high percentage, 41.4%, of participants had specifications on the coat length of the pet they hoped to adopt. The vast majority, 95.5% wanted a pet with either a short or medium length coat, while only 4.5% wanted a pet with a long haired coat. Coat length also had a high level of agreement, with 81.8% of participants getting the coat length they wanted.

The desire for short haired pets may be based around allergy concerns. There is a common misconception that shorter hair causes less of an allergic reaction. Dander or skin shedding is what actually causes allergies, not the length or amount of hair. The desire for short haired pets may have also been based on grooming concerns, as generally animals with long hair require more grooming than animals with short hair. It would be interesting to look at the reasons behind the preference for short hair in more detail, especially if the preferences for short haired coats make it harder to place long hair cats or dogs. However, the importance of coat length on participants' selection of pets

generally received a rating of not at all important, which may indicate that the preference for short hair does not decrease the likelihood of adoption of medium to long haired pets.

The findings show that in general a large majority of people coming into shelters had physical specifications; only 8.4% of participants had no physical specifications. Also the majority of participants had more than just one physical specification; only 11.2% had one physical specification, while 28% had two specifications, 31.8% had three specifications, and 20.6% had four or more physical specifications. Interestingly, the number of specifications a participant had did not significantly affect the likelihood of adoption or the likelihood that a participant would end up getting a pet from a shelter at the end of their search.

This long list of physical requirements and the high agreement levels suggests that the majority of people coming into shelters fall under the Planners category. Meaning they come into the shelter with a formed and concrete idea of what they are looking for in their future pet. In contrast, it seems a small minority would fit in the Smittens category; only 5.4% of participants described an emotional connection as their reason for picking a particular pet.

The hypothesis that people come in with an established set of criteria on the type of pet they are looking for is further supported by the low average number of pets participants interacted with, 1.74, and were interested in, 1.27. This low number agrees with the past studies mentioned earlier, which also found that visitors expressed an interest in only a small portion of the animals available for adoption. (Wells and Hepper, 2001) (Irvine, 2004) Also a large percentage of participants, 38%, did not interact with any animals and 25% of participants were also not interested in any animals. These

participants represent the portion of visitors that could not find an animal at the shelter that met their physical specifications.

In this study, only 38.3% of those visiting a shelter adopted. The majority of people, 62.7%, who did not adopt stated they did not adopt because they did not find the type of pet they were looking for in the selection of shelter animals available. This makes an interesting comparison to the study conducted in New York which found that 68% of random households polled who stated the reason they would not come to a shelter during their search for a pet was because they were concerned about the selection of pets at shelters. (Frank & Carlisle Frank, 2001)

The findings of the current study may be initially discouraging to shelters. The study found that most of the people coming in to shelters have a number of physical requirements and that these requirements are not very flexible. This reaffirms past studies which have found that people have established preferences for young, small animals. There are several ways in which shelters may still be able to shift consumer demand for companion animals in their direction.

One way that has proven effective in shifting demand is the devising of creative ways to challenge the public's apparent preferences towards puppies and purebreds. One program created by Union County Animal Care in Control in Georgia put an interesting spin on purebred favoritism. To try to change society's bias towards purebred pets, they created the APPC, in mocking jest of the AKC. The APPC stands for The American Pre-Owned Pet Club. The APPC featured new dog breeds such as the Catdal, a Cattle Dog/Dalmatian mix. Imitation AKC papers were placed in front of the kennels of dogs in hopes of gaining potential adopters curiosity and attention. The promotional items helped

increase the shelter's presence in the community and also helped increase adoption rates. (Allan, 2005)

Larger animal welfare organizations, such as the ASPCA and HSUS have also started actively promoting the benefits of adopting a mature animal. A printed public service announcement which read "they may be second hand but they are not irregulars" was made available in a recent HSUS' Animal Sheltering Magazine for shelters across the nation to duplicate and reuse in their own advertising campaigns. (San Francisco Ad Club, 1997) The creative marketing techniques are designed to help advertise and place harder to adopt animals. Understanding consumer behavior and preferences towards pet adoption can help in the development of messages and communications that can enhance adoption rates for these harder to place animals.

Adopters can also make great advertisers. With each adoption, shelters could offer free bandanas for the pets which advertise that the pet was adopted from a shelter. People are influenced by the behavior of others around them and seeing the success a friend or stranger has had in adopting an animal from a shelter may drive them to check out a shelter for themselves.

Shelters may also want to stress the benefits of shelter animals instead of fighting against established human preferences. Most shelter animals are already vaccinated and spayed or neutered. Shelters could promote these medical services more, especially now with some shelters offering two free weeks of follow up care if needed. This is a great way to counteract peoples' suspicions about the health of shelter animals and also show how much shelters are invested in the care and well being of the animals coming through their doors. Further research into whether shelter dogs have more health or behavior

problems than dogs acquired from pet stores or breeder may also be a good way to counteract any negative perceptions about the health and behavior of shelter animals.

Shelters may also want to promote more research into the underlying reasons consumers prefer purebreds and puppies. There seems to be a general belief that mixed breed animals are lower in quality. Purebred dogs are inbred by definition and several studies have been shown purebred animals tend to have more health related issues than mixed breed animals. Shelters may want to promote these findings.

A study conducted by Hart in 1983 found people tend to prefer purebreds as they feel an animals' breed reduces uncertainty in animal traits and can more easily predict what the dog/cat will be like as an adult. Armed with this information shelters can counteract this argument with the already established personalities of shelter animals.

The study showed that personality played an important role in the selection of a pet. Participants listed personality traits as the reason they picked out a particular animal just as often as they cited a physical trait. The ranking scores show that personality was actually more important than size, age and breed in participants' selection of a pet. Also participants who adopted from a shelter gave personality as their basis for attraction more often than those that got their pets from other sources, ($p=.005$).

Unfortunately, when writing the surveys, the researcher failed to give an option of not important next to each personality characteristic as she had with the physical traits, so every participant circled the personality they wanted. This makes comparisons between the number of physical and personality demands impossible.

The importance of personality traits in the selection of pets, however, can be compared to the importance of physical traits. Many of the personality characteristics

were more important than the physical characteristics in participants' selection of a pet. The compatibility of a pet with kids was overall the most important characteristic in the selection of a pet, with 67.6% of participants rating compatibility with kids as very important in their selection of pet. Also, compatibility with strangers and other pets, affection level, housebreaking and training levels were all rated as higher in importance in participants' selection of a pet than any physical characteristic.

The importance of personality is encouraging for shelters as the personality of the animals can be great selling points since most shelter animals have known personalities. It is important for shelters to gather as much information from past owners as possible in order to be able to provide this information to prospective owners. For example, if you have an older cat that is very affectionate, or a dog that is known to be good with other dogs, visitors may be swayed to adopt based on these established personality characteristic.

Also, many shelters place restrictions on pets such as large breed dogs can only go home with kids 10 years of age or older, such a restriction is the equivalent of a death sentence because so many people come in needing a dog/cat that is good with kids. Shelters may want to be more careful about placing age restrictions on a pet. Or if an animal is known to have a bad behavioral history with children, shelters may want to work on advertising the animal to certain demographics, such as senior citizens or a younger age group, since they are less likely to have young kids at home.

Personality, however, may be part of the reason that people tend to prefer younger animals, because they feel they can shape the pets' personality. To counteract this benefit, shelters could promote the wonderful already developed personalities of the animals in

the shelters. Knowing the personality of pets in the shelter can be essential to the adoption of an animal and stresses how important it is for staff to get to know the individual personalities of the animals in their shelter. Temperament tests are a great way to learn more about an animals as well as making sure to collect a thorough behavioral history from the past owner. This information should be promoted and made available to potential adopters.

Staff may also be able to encourage the adoption of older, larger harder to adopt animals. Staff satisfaction and perceived intelligence levels were very high. The findings replicate the high marks staff received in past studies. (Patronek, 2004) (Neidhart & Boyd, 2002) However, though happiness with the shelter staff was high, the level of influence the staff had on adoption behavior was low. Staff received an average of only 2.91 out of 10 on the level of influence they had on participants' decisions to adopt or not to adopt a particular animal. Knowledge and staff satisfaction scores also did not have a significant affect on the likelihood of adoption.

The low influence of staff on respondent's selection of a pet may indicate that adoption is an extremely personal decision. Also, in some cases, it was evident that the staff did not know much about a particular animal. This lack of familiarity with the animals prevented the staff from being able to assess whether the animal would be a good fit. One way to counteract this again would be the use of temperament tests. Also adoption managers may want to hold daily meetings that include basic personality profiles of the dogs and cats in their care. If shelters house too many animals for this to be possible, each staff member could be assigned several animals and are in charge of getting to know these animals well enough to talk about them with potential adopters.

Another possible way staff might be able to have a greater impact on the adoption behavior of participants is by directing the participants to the animals they think might be a good fit instead of having the participants find the animals they are interested in on their own. In the study, only 18.5% of participants were directed by the staff. Directing adopters to the animals that would fit well with their lifestyle may increase the influence of the staff, lead to better matches and increase the adoption rates of harder to place animals. Shelters can explain to visitors the differences in breeds and evaluate with them the type of dog or cat they may suit them best.

Making the appropriate match between owner and pet is an important process that can often be neglected in other sources. One study found that 13% of relinquishers mentioned incompatible matches as the reason they were surrendering the animal. (DiGiacomo, 1998) The relinquishers encountered problems with the kind or personality of the animal. For example an older couple that purchased a puppy realized the dog had too much energy for them to handle. Pre-adoption counseling on size, activity level, and genetic predisposition can help ensure that a good match is made with the potential owner's lifestyle.

For example, Meet Your Match, an adoption process actively promoted by the ASPCA, was designed to create a match between a prospective adopter's lifestyle, expectations and home environment and the personality of the dog. One of the key elements of the program is that visitors are approached before they are able to view the animals available for adoption. Visitors fill out a survey that evaluates their lifestyle and helps visitors see which kind of animals would fit best with their current situations. The visitors are then given cards which match the types of animals available for adoption that

would work well with them. The program has been shown to increase adoption rates and decrease return rates.

Differences between Dog and Cats

There were many interesting differences between participants looking for dogs and participants looking for cats. First, participants looking to adopt a dog traveled significantly longer to shelters than participants looking for cats, ($p=.036$). Also more participants looking for a cat ended up adopting than participants looking for a dog. While this difference was not significant it seems to indicate that finding the dog participants want at a shelter is more difficult than finding the cat they wanted. This is further evidenced by the finding that before coming to the shelter, participants who were looking to adopt a dog spent a significantly longer amount of time searching for a pet than participants looking to adopt a cat, ($p=.013$).

The follow up portion of the study also indicated finding a dog is more difficult than finding a cat. Many of the participants, 71.4%, looking for dogs still hadn't found a dog a month later versus only 37.5% of participants looking for cats still hadn't found a cat. These findings indicate that it is harder for people to find a dog than a cat, especially considering the data which showed that a majority of participants, 45.3%, wanted to take an animal home right away.

Participants looking for cats also seemed to be looser in their requirements as they looked at a significantly greater number of cats than participants looking for dogs, ($p=.031$). Participants looking for a dog also had significantly more physical specifications for their potential pet than participants looking for cats, ($p=.02$). Also,

participants looking for dogs had a generally higher agreement percentage levels than participants looking for cats for all physical traits except for age and coat color.

Participants seemed to also take their search for a cat a little less seriously than when searching for a dog. A higher percent of participants picked out their own dog, while cat selection decisions were more often allotted to children or partners, ($p=.012$). Also, a significantly greater amount of participants talked to their friends about getting a dog versus getting a cat, ($p=.03$).

Loyalty to Shelters

The study also measured the loyalty visitors had to a shelter. First, the study found that about a third of respondents had already been to a pet store or breeder before they came into the shelter. The follow up portion also showed that 11.8% of participants planned to go to a pet store or breeder upon departure from the shelter. A month later, 14.3% had been to a pet store, 9.5% had been to a breeder, 7.1 % had looked at friend's places and 4.8 % had looked in the newspaper. Also, 2 dogs were acquired from a pet store and one from a breeder. Out of the participants who still had not found a pet, 30.4% planned to go to a pet store and 13% to a breeder.

These percentages are smaller than predicted and suggest that many people are loyal to shelters and include only shelters and rescues in their search for a pet. Also, a surprisingly high percentage of participants, 59.8%, had previously visited the shelter. The percentage of participants who had stuck with shelters and rescues was much higher; 35.7% had gone back to the shelter, 28.6% had been to other shelters, 18.6% had looked on petfinder.com, and 11.9% had been to a rescue organization. Also six dogs and two cats were adopted from shelters or rescue organizations. The percentage of participants

who planned to stick with shelters after a month was still very high 79.2% planned to return to the original shelter, 69.5% planned to visit a different shelter and 30.4% planned to visit a rescue organization. The findings indicate that most participants were willing to people stick with shelters, even if it took awhile to find the right pet for them. This is especially evident when considering that a high proportion of participants, 49.5%, had already spent over a month in their search for a pet before they came into the shelter.

Interestingly, no significant trends were found between the persistence to adopt a pet from a shelter and the physical demands participants had for the type of pet they wanted. There was a trend, however, which showed that participants with demands for any certain physical characteristic more often ended up getting a pet from a source other than a shelter than those who did not have demands on that physical characteristic.

Also, a month later, only 34.9% had acquired a pet. One factor that may have encouraged this low acquisition rate was the time of year. Many of the participants had children who were about to go back to school and weren't able to dedicate a lot of time to their search for a pet. This finding may also suggest, however, that people consider getting a pet a serious decision and are willing to spend a large amount of time searching for the right pet. It is also a reassuring as many shelter workers worry that visitors are adopting a pet on impulse.

The finding shows either way that there is a large window of time where shelter staff may be able to influence a visitors' search for a pet. If shelter personnel could guide people coming in their doors in their search for a pet they may be able to increase the number of people who adopt.

The study found that there is definitely room for growth in this area. The study found that while staff satisfaction and knowledge ratings were high, staff did not have an influence on the persistence or loyalty of participants to ultimately get their pet from a shelter. This may have been due to the finding that 28% of shelter visitors had no interaction with the staff. Also, only a small percentage of participants, 26%, received advice on where to go next in their search for a pet and only four participants were offered advice without having to ask. Interestingly, 50% of the participants who received advice on where to go next ended up getting a pet in four to five weeks time, whereas only 33.3% of participants who did not receive advice found a pet in the same time length. Though this difference was not significant it demonstrates the opportunity shelters may have to impact the contents and outcome of shelter visitors search for a pet.

One way shelters could help visitors in their search for a pet is by looking at their physical demands and exploring whether there is a way for the shelter to meet them. For example, a past study found that 18% of participants said they might adopt if the breed they wanted was available. (Frank & Carlisle-Frank, 2001) Some shelters have created waiting lists for specific breeds. Once that breed comes in, the shelter will call the people on the waiting list to let them know they have the breed they are looking for available for adoption. Shelters can also point visitors to local breed rescue organizations which concentrate on a certain breed.

Educating visitors on other respectable sources in the area can also play an integral role in pet population problems. A recent gathering of experts in the animal sheltering industry recognized guiding visitors as one of the important factors in the

adoption process, shelters should be “ready to redirect adopters to other options as needed” (Adoption Forum II, 2003).

One interesting idea may be to create kiosks in shelters similar to those that have been set up in some PetSmart stores. The PetSmart Charities’ Pet Adoption Kiosk Program sets up computers in PetSmart stores where people can go and search the animals available for adoption in their areas. Shelters could model a similar program by setting up computers in their lobby areas where people can search on petfinder.com to look at animals available at other shelters. This would also help cut down on the amount of time staff would need to spend with individual visitors.

Also, knowing and researching the sources in the surrounding area can help shelters educate concerned consumers who come to their shelter and can’t be flexible in the type of animal they desire. Shelters may also want to explore whether they feel comfortable sending a visitor to reputable breeders in the area. The procedures used in raising puppies and kittens at some sources can be disturbing. For instance, the conditions at puppy mills are deplorable.

Shelters can help identify and eliminate disreputable breeders and inadequate pet store facilities by educating consumers about how their choices in pet acquisition can help support or end disreputable facilities and cruelty towards animals. Making people aware of the relevant market forces and the implications of their pet acquisition decisions can foster positive behavior. Choosing an animal can “become an act of conscience rather than merely the optimizing act of a consumer” (Fennell, 1999)

Many people do not realize where the animals are coming from. A focus group was gathered by the HSUS and most of the participants who bought their pets from a pet

store did not realize they were in turn supporting the puppy mill where the animals originated. Internet purchases of animals can also be a dangerous practice, as little can be derived on the humaneness of the source simply by visiting a website. Visitors could also be educated on how to choose responsible breeder. Show and backyard breeders are decreasing and underground sales to an ignorant public are increasing. One researcher believes that the percentage of puppies originating from disreputable breeders now accounts for many of the AKC registered puppies sold.

Educating the public on the types of breeders and the positive and negative aspects that can accompany each can help to make the choice of the consumer an educated one. Visitors can for instance be educated at the shelter to ask to see the sire or dam to ensure puppies aren't being imported from puppy mills. Shelters, rescues and animal control offices should decide what they want their individual policies to be and create a list of places they feel comfortable referring visitors to. If a shelter does not feel comfortable sending people to breeders, they could still create a list of breed rescues in the area or other shelters that may have more of a selection of pets due to their involvement in relocation. This exercise may also help local animal welfare organizations get to know each other better and promote more collaboration.

Currently, few people rely on shelters for information on pet care and their pet search, "Pet owners turn to almost any other source including vets, pet store personnel, magazines, breeders, friends and relatives before they knock on the doors of their local humane society" (Lawson, 2000). Our study found that the decision to acquire a pet is not discussed much outside the family and is not viewed as a decision that needs expert opinion. Only a very small minority, 4%, discussed the decision to acquire a pet with

their veterinarians, and only one participant spoke with a trainer. No participants reported speaking with a groomer or any other person in regards to their decision to adopt a pet.

Shelter interaction provides a window of educational opportunity. If shelters can provide professional advice and support to animal caregivers in their community during their search for a pet they can increase the communities' perception of the shelter and boost the reputation of the shelter. If shelters can earn a reputation as the place to go for help in the search for a pet, they may also be able to more easily convince people to think about adoption as the first step in the process of pet acquisition. Turning adoption centers into resource centers can also help ensure retention. Shelters can use the opportunity to promote the resources the shelter provides for these soon to be owners such as behavior classes and behavior helplines. Adoption programs are the most visible interaction shelters have with their community, and are prime locations for shelters to provide education and gain public and community approval.

In sum, if visiting a shelter doesn't convince a person to adopt an animal there are still a myriad of functions shelters can take on. For example, shelters can play a role in guiding people to the best sources for companion animals, instilling realistic expectations, and promoting their resources (obedience training, behavior helpline). "This migration to new programs and priorities will require a radical rethinking of a shelters' role in the community" (Wenstrup & Dowidchuck, 1999).

The study's account of consumer demand also shows how shelters may want to rethink how they address the issues of pet overpopulation. Focusing solely on sterilization doesn't make sense if shelters only have a small percentage of puppies and kittens coming through their doors and those kittens and puppies are quickly and easily

adopted out. Shelters instead may want to target the sources of the harder to adopt animals that are coming through their doors. In New England, the highest number and the hardest to adopt out animals are pit bulls and pit bull mixes. Collecting data on where these hard to adopt animals are coming in from and why they are coming in may help shelter develop intervention and prevention programs to keep these animals out of shelters and in their homes.

The low flexibility participants had on their physical demands also has implications for the practice of dog relocation. The effect relocation has on local, harder to adopt dogs is hotly debated. Proponents believe that relocated dogs increase the chances of a harder to adopt dog finding a home by attracting more traffic and potential adopters to the shelter. Opponents disagree and feel that harder to adopt local dogs are staying longer at shelters because it is difficult for them to compete with the cute puppy in the adjacent cage or in the adjacent shelter. Opponents of relocation seem to have won this part of argument, as the study shows that peoples' demands are not flexible and people coming in for a puppy or kitten are most likely not going to change their minds.

Process of Pet Acquisition

The results on the process people go through in their search for a pet demonstrates other ways shelters can exert their influence over the process. The study found a high percentage, 70.1% of people use the internet in their search for a pet. A high percentage of the participants who included the internet in their search used the internet to research husbandry and breed information. This finding agrees with a recent survey conducted by the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association which found that more pet owners are getting their information from the internet then ever before. (APPMA, 2003-2004)

Shelters may want to include information about pet care and breed characteristics on their website in order to educate people and create realistic expectations on the challenges the new addition to their family may bring. By placing accurate information on their websites, shelters can decrease the chances that people are getting false information from less reputable sites. The websites can also encourage adoption by stressing the health and behavior advantages of adopting a mix breed instead of a purebred animal.

The importance of internet is also seen in how the participants who came heard about the shelter; 34.9% of participants heard about the shelters they visited via the internet, with an additional 17% finding out about the shelter specifically through petfinder.com. Those participants who heard about shelters through the internet were also interestingly more likely to adopt than participants who heard about the shelters through other sources, ($p=.05$). The findings speak to the importance of creating a shelter website or joining petfinder.com.

The data on how participants heard about the shelters also demonstrated the low influence of veterinarians, with only 4% of participants hearing about shelters from vets. Shelters may want to further their outreach efforts and increase veterinary referrals by setting up meetings with their local veterinarians. Veterinarians may be willing to display advertising material or keep the lists shelters created of reputable sources in their area to acquire a pet. In order to reach a wider audience shelter personnel may also want to attend a state chapter meeting of the Veterinary Medical Associations which many veterinarians attend.

The data on how participants heard about the shelter also showed that a surprisingly high percentage, 24.5%, of participants heard about the shelter simply by driving by it. Participants who found out about shelters this way were not found to be less inclined to adopt, however anecdotal reports from shelter staff seem to indicate that those referred by veterinarians are much more likely to adopt than people who find out about a shelter by simply driving by it. This may be an interesting area to explore further as it would provide more clarity on the best advertising strategies.

It is also interesting to look at the reasons people included a shelter in their search for a pet. The findings were very similar to the results of the study conducted in Massachusetts by the Harvard Business School Volunteer Consulting Organization, which found that 62 % of people would include shelters in their search for emotionally based reasons. (Patronek, 2004) The current study found 60.5% included a shelter for emotionally based reasons. Another 23.3% gave a practical reason, such as low cost or the shelter was close by, while 12.8% gave both a practical and an emotional reason for visiting the shelter. Only 3.5% included a shelter because they thought highly of shelters as a source for a companion animal.

The reasons participants came to shelters are interesting to explore as they suggest ways to increase the number of people who include shelters in their search for a pet. Shelters could either try to build on the practical aspects of coming to a shelter to adopt or accentuate the emotional reasons to increase demand for shelter pets. In general shelter staff may be frustrated by the fact that many people come to shelters because they know they can get a pet for less than if they were to buy the pet at a pet store or a breeder. In a past study, when asked if anything could be done to change their minds about adopting

from a shelter, 38% of respondents stated they would switch if the price of dogs at other sources went up (median price increase that switch would occur was \$500). (Frank & Carlisle-Frank, 2001)

But is money necessarily a bad reason for people to visit shelters? The study found no relation between the reasons people came to a shelter and the likelihood they would adopt. Also the findings of the study show that people coming to shelters are generally middle to upper class families, who can afford to provide the animals with their basic needs but do not want to pay an extreme price for the animal up front.

Shelters may also want to promote the reasons why they are a good source of companion animals in order to increase the number of people who come in to shelters purely because they think highly of them. Animal welfare organizations are not concerned with turning a profit, but taking care of the animals they house and placing them in good homes. Shelters thus take very good care of the animals within their doors and this may be one way of promoting themselves as a good source of pet acquisition.

Shelters may also want to work on increasing the emotional reasons for coming into shelters. Shelters have created national promotions designed to increase public empathy for shelter animals such as Adopt a Cat Month, Adopt a Dog Month, and Shelter Appreciation Week. The promotions have been created in order to steer more people to shelters for adoption. (Sawicki, 1998) Humane education programs for years have also tried to educate children on the plight of homeless animals and may also be a great way to promote adoption and drive more visitors through shelters' doors.

A look at the demographics of people coming into shelters also suggests areas where shelters may be able to increase their traffic. One study conducted in 1992

explored gender differences and found that 35% of adopters were men and 65% were women. Men were more likely to adopt dogs and women were more likely to adopt cats. (Kidd, 1992b) The current study also found a higher percentage of women, 73.8%, coming into shelters. However, the current study found that men and women were equally likely to be looking for a dog or cat and equally likely to adopt. Targeting a specific gender, therefore, does not seem to be a smart strategy.

The past study also found that the mean age of adopters was 34.1. (Kidd, 1992b) The current study found that the highest percentage, 43%, of participants were between the ages of 40-49, with only 19.6% of participants between the ages of 30-39. Senior citizens comprised a very small minority of the respondents, with only 2.8% of participants over the age of 60 and 9.8% between the ages of 50-59. Shelters may want to work on bringing in more senior citizens to their shelters. Senior adopters may be more willing to adopt harder to place senior pets, as they may not be up for the hassle of houstraining and the energy of young animals.

The current study also supported a past study that found shelter visitors came from mostly middle to upper lower socioeconomic classes. (Kidd 1992b) The current study found that 42.9% of participants earned a yearly household income of over \$80,000, while 41.8% made between \$40,000-\$79,999 a year, and only 15.3% made below \$40,000 a year. This finding is important as it again emphasizes that people coming into shelters can afford to provide pets with their basic needs and care, even if they may be motivated to come to shelters for a more reasonably priced pet. It also counteracts the general bias shelter workers oftentimes feel that most adopters are from low income families and are just looking for a cheap pet.

Past studies have also found that the majority of adopters were families; only 15.6% of adopters were single. (Kidd, 1992b) The current study also supports this finding, only 15.9% of participants were single and 2.8% were divorced. Also, 58% of participants had children and the average number of people residing in the households of participants was 3.2. This demographic is interesting as it indicates that most animals will be coming home to a busy household where they will need to get a long with a lot of people.

Also, participants who came in with children were significantly more likely to adopt, ($p=.008$). This finding contradicts a previous study which found that people who come in alone are more likely to interact with more animals and adopt than people who come to shelters with company. (Wells & Hepper, 2001) This contradiction may be more of a reflection of shelter policies, as shelters oftentimes require the entire family to meet the pet before they are allowed to adopt.

Regardless, the findings do highlight the important role children play in adoption. Especially when considering the finding that participants' children selected the animal to adopt just as often as participants themselves picked out their pet. Shelter workers may be discouraged at this finding, especially considering the return rates of shelter animals. However, children's influence on the adoption process may not be such a negative phenomenon. Many children have a good understanding of the issues surrounding pet overpopulation and are the reason the parents included a shelter in their search for a pet in the first place. Humane education classes have anecdotally been shown to bring in children from the schools into shelters, and these kids bring their parents along. Targeting the younger generation may be a good way to increase traffic.

The study also found that a vast majority of participants had extensive previous experience with pets. The study found that 88.8% of participants grew up with dogs, which supports a previous study's finding that 90% of dog adopters owned a dog during their childhood. (Kidd, 1992b) Also, in the current study, 72% of potential adopters had been the main caretaker of a dog and 67.3% had been the main caretaker of a cat. This compares well with a past study conducted in Italy which found that 59.6% of dog adopters had previously owned a dog. (Monedelli, 2004)

It is important for shelters to recognize the extensive background shelter visitors seem to have in animal care. The findings suggest that shelters may want to tailor their educational efforts based on the participants animal care background. Shelter visitors have an established bank of knowledge when it comes to animal care, however some of this knowledge may be outdated. For example, people coming into shelters may have misconceptions on effective training techniques, such as believing that rubbing a dog's nose in its mess is an effective way to housetrain a dog or that declawing a cat is the only way to get it to stop scratching the furniture. Focusing on past experience and misconceptions instead of general animal care information may help ensure retention.

Adoption Follow Up

The response rate of the follow up portion of the study was pretty high, with an overall response rate of 95.1%. This is much higher than a past study conducted on adoption which had a response rate of only 37%. (Neidhart & Boyd, 2002) This study was a national survey conducted for PetSmart charities that looked at the success of adoptions through their stores. The lower response rate was most likely due to the larger sample size and older phone lists. The personal contact the researcher had with all the

participants and the knowledge that the researcher would be following up with them also most likely increased the response rate. The high response rate bodes well for further adoption follow up research; as the earlier studies left concern on the validity of conducting such research. The high response rate is also encouraging for shelters who are thinking of creating an adoption follow up program.

The researcher was able to follow up with all 25 of the dog adopters, and 5 of these participants, or 20%, experienced behavior problems. No cat adopters experienced behavior issues. This finding was similar to a past study which found that 23% of dogs and 10% of cats adopted from shelters had behavior problems. (Neidhart & Boyd, 2002) Past studies have also shown that animals adopted from shelters are at an increased risk of relinquishments with an average return rate of twenty percent. (Patronek, Glickman, and Moyer, 1995) However, in this study, none of the reported problems were severe enough to make any of the participants question returning the pet. Follow up phone calls after adoption may help address the behavior issues the adopters have before they become more of a headache. Since most of the problems were minor, basic training would help with a majority of the behavior issues.

Also eight dog adopters, or 32%, of dogs adopted and two cat adopters, or 12.5%, experienced health problems with their pets. One kitten died from severe sickness after spending several weeks at the vet. The health results of the current study were lower than a past study which found that almost half of animals adopted from shelters suffered from health problems. (Neidhart and Boyd, 2002) Again follow up phone calls post adoption would help ensure all the medical issues that need veterinary care would be addressed.

The follow ups also examined how well the participants' expectations matched up with the actual work of caring for their pet. Fifty-six percent of dog adopters and 28.6 % of cat adopters found their pets to be more work than they expected. This finding speaks to importance of instilling realistic expectations on the responsibilities of pet ownership. This was a higher percentage of participants than past studies have found. One study found that 31% of shelter dog owners felt the dog was more work than expected. (Patronek et al.,1996a) Another more recent study assessed whether dog owners found their dogs to be more or less work than they expected on various tasks of ownership. The results again showed a lower percentage of participants found the work to be more than they expected for each category than the current study. (Frank & Carlisle-Frank, 2001) Please refer to the table below.

Table 6.

Activity	More Work
Housebreaking	15.1%
Discipline	17.8%
Feeding	6.4%
Behavior with Family	10.6%
Grooming	18.1%
Cleaning	16.7%

Inappropriate expectations have been shown to be the third most important variable in relinquishment. Reasons given for relinquishment such as moving, barking, lack of room/money, hyperactivity and chewing suggest that the expectations for becoming a pet owner may have been less than adequate. The amount of effort exceeded expectations two times more in shelter dog owners than other sources pet shop and breeder dog owners. (Patronek et al., 1996a) These findings stress the importance of educating visitors and adopters on the work and effort animal ownership entails.

Though many participants rated their animals to be more work than they expected, adopted pets still received an extremely high average satisfaction score of 9.48. This score was lower for people who got their pet from elsewhere; these pets were given a satisfaction rating of 8.56. This finding indicates that though pets may be a lot of work, adopters were, overall, very happy with their pets.

Limitations and Recommendations for Research

The current research into the pet acquisition process and consumer demand as it relates to companion animals is preliminary. Participants in this study were not randomly selected, and the shelters where the research was conducted were also not randomly selected. All four shelters were located in the suburbs of Massachusetts, rural or more urban shelters may have had far different findings. The sample size was also quite small so extrapolating the findings of the current research to the general population of shelter visitors must be done with these concerns in mind. Also since the sample size was small it was harder to make comparisons across shelters and relocation policies. It may have been smarter to concentrate on shelters not at all involved in relocation to see the full effect of physical demands on adoption rates.

The researcher also tried to record the demographics of the animals at the shelters; however the collection of this data was sometimes impossible due to time constraints. Information on the selection of pets available at the shelters would have been helpful in making further trajectories on consumer demand.

Future research may want to investigate the process of pet acquisition in a broader sense by including participants who don't necessarily include shelters in their search for a pet. Such research would provide a clearer picture of the amount of effort and thought

people put into the acquisition process.

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Appendix A. Initial Interview Question.

1) Why did you include shelters in your search for a pet? _____

Appendix B. Two and a Half Page Survey.

Please complete. All answers are confidential.

- 1) Do you currently have any animals in your home? YES NO

If yes, please list the number and species/types of animals. (**ex. 2 dogs 1 gerbil**)_____

- 2) Have you ever been the main caretaker of a dog? YES NO

- 3) Have you ever been the main caretaker of a cat? YES NO

- 4) Did you grow up with a dog/dogs in your household? YES NO

- 5) Did you grow up with a cat/cats in your household? YES NO

- 6) Who did you come to the shelter with today? (Please circle all that apply)

ALONE FRIEND SPOUSE/DOMESTIC PARTNER CHILD/CHILDREN
OTHER FAMILY MEMBER OTHER_____

- 7) How soon are you thinking of bringing a pet home with you?

TODAY TOMORROW THIS WEEK TWO WEEKS WITHIN THE MONTH
OVER A MONTH FROM NOW HAVEN'T DECIDED OTHER_____

- 8) Have you been to this shelter before? YES NO

If yes, how many times you have been to this shelter in the past year (not including today)?__

If yes, approximately how long ago was your most recent visit to this shelter? _____

- 9) How long did it take you to get to the shelter? _____

- 10) How did you hear about the shelter? (Please circle all the choices that apply)

INTERNET PETFINDER.COM RADIO NEWSPAPER FRIEND/FAMILY
TV VETERINARIAN ADOPTION EVENT DROVE/WALKED BY OTHER_____

- 11) Where else have you gone in your search for a pet? (Please circle all that apply)

PET STORE BREEDER PUREBRED RESCUE GROUP RESCUE GROUP
NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENTS DIFFERENT SHELTER OTHER_____

- 12) If you have been to different shelters during your search for a pet, how many other shelters have you been to? _____

- 13) Approximately how long would you say you have been actively searching for a pet?

TODAY THIS WEEK TWO WEEKS A MONTH OVER A MONTH

- 14) Did you discuss your decision to get a pet with any of the following people? (Please circle all that apply)

FRIENDS FAMILY GROOMER TRAINER VETERINARIAN

NONE OF THE ABOVE OTHER _____

15) Did you use the internet in your search for a pet? YES NO
If yes, please indicate what types of research you conducted on the internet. (Please check all that apply)

- Researched basic dog or cat information on the Internet
- Researched breed types on the Internet
- Looked at the animals available for adoption on the Internet
- Other _____

16) Please describe the type of pet you are hoping to adopt. (Please circle all the choices that apply)

Type: DOG CAT NOT IMPORTANT
Gender: MALE FEMALE NOT IMPORTANT
Breed Type: _____ NOT IMPORTANT
Size: SMALL MEDIUM LARGE NOT IMPORTANT
Age: 0-6 MONTHS OLD 7 MONTHS -1 YEAR OLD 2-4 YEARS OLD
 5 YEARS OR OLDER NOT IMPORTANT
Coat Color: WHITE ORANGE YELLOW BLACK BROWN TORTIE TIGER
 BLACK AND WHITE GREY AND WHITE CALICO TABBY BRINDLE
 OTHER _____ NOT IMPORTANT
Coat Length: SHORT MEDIUM LONG NOT IMPORTANT

17) Please describe the type of personality you are looking for in your future pet. (Please circle **only one** choice)

Active.....	VERY	SOMEWHAT	NOT AT ALL
Playful.....	VERY	SOMEWHAT	NOT AT ALL
Protective.....	VERY	SOMEWHAT	NOT AT ALL
Housebroken.....	VERY	SOMEWHAT	NOT AT ALL
Well trained.....	VERY	SOMEWHAT	NOT AT ALL
Affectionate.....	VERY	SOMEWHAT	NOT AT ALL
Dominant.....	VERY	SOMEWHAT	NOT AT ALL
Good with kids.....	VERY	SOMEWHAT	NOT AT ALL
Good with Strangers....	VERY	SOMEWHAT	NOT AT ALL
Good with dogs.....	VERY	SOMEWHAT	NOT AT ALL
Good with cats.....	VERY	SOMEWHAT	NOT AT ALL

18) On a scale from 1-5, please rate how important each of the following **physical** characteristics are in your selection of a new pet. (Please circle **only one** choice)

	not at all important		somewhat important		very important
Gender.....	1	2	3	4	5
Breed.....	1	2	3	4	5
Size.....	1	2	3	4	5
Age.....	1	2	3	4	5
Coat Color.....	1	2	3	4	5

IN-PERSON EXIT INTERVIEW IF ADOPT

- 1) Did you end up adopting an animal? 1.YES 2.NO
- 2) What is your new pet's name? _____
- 3) Are you bringing (**adopted animals name**) home with you today? 1.YES 2.NO
If no, why not? 1.FINAL DECISION WAIT 2.MEET FAMILY/RM 3.MASS ID
4.SURGERY/VACCINATION 5.LANDLORD PERMISSION 6. PROOF OF HOME
OWNERSHIP 7.MEET OTHER DOG 8.BEHAVIOR TEAM APPROVAL OTHER _____
- 4) What attracted you to (**adopted animals name**)? How did you pick him/her out?

- 5) **If they came in with someone**, who picked the animal
out? _____
- 6) How many animals did you take out of their cages? _____
- 7) How many animals were you interested in possibly adopting? _____

Staff Assessment:

- 8) Did the staff help direct you to the animals or did you look at the animals on your own and then approach the staff once you found an animal you were interested in?
1.DIRECTED BY STAFF 2.FOUND OWN ANIMAL
- 9) On a scale from 1-10 (with 10 being the best score), how knowledgeable did the staff seem about the individual animals you were interested in? _____
Comments: _____
- 10) On a scale from 1-10, how much do you think the staff's information and opinions affect your decision to adopt this particular animal? _____
Comments: _____
- 11) On a scale from 1-10, how satisfied were you overall with the staff? _____
Comments: _____

SCRIPT: Thank you so much for taking the time to answer all of my questions. I will be contacting you in two weeks to check up with you and ask you a few more questions, ok? Is there a time of the day or evening that works best for you? THANKS AGAIN!

At end of day, assess how well animal matches up with criteria by looking at shelter information.

12) Physical: Kennel Card

- Type: 1.DOG 2.CAT
Gender: 1.MALE 2.FEMALE
Breed: _____
Size: 1.SMALL 2.MEDUIM 3.LARGE
Age: 1.0-6 months old 2.7 months to 1 year old 3.2-4 years old 4.5 years or older
Coat Color: 1.WHITE 2.ORANGE 3.YELLOW 4.BLACK 5.BROWN

6.BLACK AND WHITE 7.GREY AND WHITE 8.CALICO
 9.TABBY 10.BRINDLE 11.TIGER 12.TORTIE
 13.OTHER_____

Coat Length: 1.SHORT 2.MEDIUM 3.LONG

13) Personality: Staff and Temperament Test

Active:	1.VERY	2.SOMEWHAT	3.NOT AT ALL
Playful:	1.VERY	2.SOMEWHAT	3.NOT AT ALL
Protective:	1.VERY	2.SOMEWHAT	3.NOT AT ALL
Housebroken:	1.VERY	2.SOMEWHAT	3.NOT AT ALL
Well trained:	1.VERY	2.SOMEWHAT	3.NOT AT ALL
Affectionate:	1.VERY	2.SOMEWHAT	3.NOT AT ALL
Dominant:	1.VERY	2.SOMEWHAT	3.NOT AT ALL
Good with kids:	1.VERY	2.SOMEWHAT	3.NOT AT ALL 4.DON'T KNOW
Good with strangers:	1.VERY	2.SOMEWHAT	3.NOT AT ALL 4.DON'T KNOW
Good with dogs:	1.VERY	2.SOMEWHAT	3.NOT AT ALL 4.DON'T KNOW
Good with cats:	1.VERY	2.SOMEWHAT	3.NOT AT ALL 4.DON'T KNOW

IN-PERSON EXIT INTERVIEW IF DO NOT ADOPT

Shelter ____ Participant ____

1) Did you end up adopting an animal? 1.YES (2.NO)

2) Why did you decide not to adopt today? _____

Analysis: **1.SHELTER RELATED** **2.SELECTION RELATED**

3) How many animals did you take out of their cages? _____

4) How many animals were you interested in possibly adopting? _____

5) Do you plan to continue to search for a pet? 1.YES 2.NO

If yes, what will your next steps be? _____

(PROMPT: Where do you plan on looking for an animal?)

Staff Assessment:

6) Did you have any interaction with the staff? 1.YES 2.NO **If no end survey**

7) Did the staff help direct you to the animals or did you look at the animals on your own and then approach the staff once you found an animal you were interested in?

1.DIRECTED BY STAFF 2.FOUND OWN ANIMAL

8) On a scale from 1-10 (with 10 being the best score), how knowledgeable did the staff seem about the individual animals you were interested in? _____

Comments: _____

9) On a scale from 1-10, how much do you think the staff's information and opinions affected your decision not to adopt? _____

Comments: _____

10) On a scale from 1-10, how satisfied were you overall with the staff? _____

Comments: _____

11) Did the staff give you any advice on where else you could look for a new pet?

1.YES 2.NO

If yes, can you please describe the advice your received _____

If yes, did you ask the staff for advice or did they offer you this information?

1. OFFERED

2. ASKED

Comments: _____

***SCRIPT: Thank you so much for taking the time to answer all of my questions, I will be contacting you in two weeks to check up with you and ask you a few more questions, ok? Is there a time during the day or evening that works best for you?
THANKS AGAIN!***

TWO WEEK FOLLOW UP PHONE CALL IF ADOPT

Hello, my name is Bryn we met at the _____ shelter where you adopted _____. I was hoping I could ask you a few questions about how things are going with him/her? It will only take 5 minutes to answer these very important questions

Pet Satisfaction

1) How is (**fill in pet's name**) working out?

Any Behavior Problems? 1.YES 2.NO

Any Health Problems? 1.YES 2.NO

2) **If problems**, have you sought help? 1.YES 2.NO

If yes, from whom? _____

Are you thinking of returning (**fill in the pet's name**)? 1.YES 2.NO

Comments: _____

3) Has (**pet's name**) been more or less work than you expected?

How so? 1.MORE 2.LESS 3.EXACTLY WHAT I THOUGHT

4) On a scale from 1-10, with 10 being the best score, how satisfied are you overall with (**your new pet**)? ____

Comments: _____

5) I am going to ask you to describe some of (**your new pet's**) personality characteristics.

- | | | | | |
|----------------------------|--------|------------|--------------|--------------|
| Is it active: | 1.VERY | 2.SOMEWHAT | 3.NOT AT ALL | |
| Is it playful: | 1.VERY | 2.SOMEWHAT | 3.NOT AT ALL | |
| Is it protective: | 1.VERY | 2.SOMEWHAT | 3.NOT AT ALL | |
| Is it housebroken: | 1.VERY | 2.SOMEWHAT | 3.NOT AT ALL | |
| Is it well trained: | 1.VERY | 2.SOMEWHAT | 3.NOT AT ALL | |
| Is it affectionate: | 1.VERY | 2.SOMEWHAT | 3.NOT AT ALL | |
| Is it dominant: | 1.VERY | 2.SOMEWHAT | 3.NOT AT ALL | |
| Is it good with kids: | 1.VERY | 2.SOMEWHAT | 3.NOT AT ALL | 4.DON'T KNOW |
| Is it good with strangers: | 1.VERY | 2.SOMEWHAT | 3.NOT AT ALL | 4.DON'T KNOW |
| Is it good with dogs: | 1.VERY | 2.SOMEWHAT | 3.NOT AT ALL | 4.DON'T KNOW |
| Is it good with cats: | 1.VERY | 2.SOMEWHAT | 3.NOT AT ALL | 4.DON'T KNOW |

SCRIPT: Thank you so much for your participation in my study, I truly appreciate it and I hope things continue to go well for you and _____ OR I hope you can work things out with _____

If participants ask for behavioral/personal advice refer them to the Animal Rescue League's behavior helpline at (617) 426-9170 ext. 4

TWO WEEK FOLLOW UP PHONE CALL IF DO NOT ADOPT

Hello, my name is Bryn we met at the _____ shelter. I was hoping I could ask you a few questions about how things have been going with your search for a pet? It will only take about five minutes to answer these very important questions.

- 1) Have you found a pet? 1.YES 2.NO **If yes skip to Q4**
- 2) Have you had a chance to look anywhere else? 1.YES 2. NO
1.SAME 2.DIFFERENT 3.PET
SHELTER SHELTER STORE 4.INERNET 5.PETFINDER.COM
6.PUREBRED RESCUE 7.RESCUE 8.BREEDER 9.NEWSPAPER 10. FRIEND
66. OTHER _____
- 3) Are you planning on continuing your search for a pet? 1.YES 2.NO
If no, may I ask why not? _____

If yes, where are you planning to look next for a pet?

- 1.SAME 2.DIFFERENT 3.PET
SHELTER SHELTER STORE 4.INERNET 5.PETFINDER.COM
6.PUREBRED RESCUE 7.RESCUE 8.BREEDER 9.NEWSPAPER 10. FRIEND
66. OTHER _____
- 4) Where did you get your pet?
1.SAME 2.DIFFERENT 3.PET
SHELTER SHELTER STORE 4.INERNET 5.PETFINDER.COM
6.PUREBRED RESCUE 7.RESCUE 8.BREEDER 9.NEWSPAPER 10. FRIEND
11. STRAY 66. OTHER _____
- 5) Did you look anywhere else for a pet? 1.YES 2.NO **If yes where?**
1.SAME 2.DIFFERENT 3.PET
SHELTER SHELTER STORE 4.INERNET 5.PETFINDER.COM
6.PUREBRED RESCUE 7.RESCUE 8.BREEDER 9.NEWSPAPER 10. FRIEND
66. OTHER _____
- 6) What attracted you to your new pet? How did you pick him/her out? _____

7) I am going to ask you some questions about your new pet.

Is it a: 1.DOG 2.CAT

What type of Breed is it? : _____

Is it a male or a female? 1.MALE 2.FEMALE

What size is it? : 1.SMALL 2.MEDUIM 3.LARGE (*analysis classification: S: 0-25lbs, M 25.1-50lbs, L 51+lbs*)

How old is it? : 1.0-6 months old 2.7 months – 1 year old 3.2-4 years old 4.5 years or older

What color is its coat? : 1.WHITE 2.ORANGE 3.YELLOW 4.BLACK 5.BROWN 6.TORTIE

7.BLACK AND WHITE 8.GREY AND WHITE 9.CALICO 10.TABBY 11.BRINDLE
12.TIGER 13.OTHER_____

What is the length of its coat? : 1.SHORT 2.MEDIUM 3.LONG

8) I am going to ask you to describe some of your new pet's personality characteristics.

Is it active:	1.VERY	2.SOMEWHAT	3.NOT AT ALL	
Is it playful:	1.VERY	2.SOMEWHAT	3.NOT AT ALL	
Is it protective:	1.VERY	2.SOMEWHAT	3.NOT AT ALL	
Is it housebroken:	1.VERY	2.SOMEWHAT	3.NOT AT ALL	
Is it well trained:	1.VERY	2.SOMEWHAT	3.NOT AT ALL	
Is it affectionate:	1.VERY	2.SOMEWHAT	3.NOT AT ALL	
Is it dominant:	1.VERY	2.SOMEWHAT	3.NOT AT ALL	
Is it good with kids:	1.VERY	2.SOMEWHAT	3.NOT AT ALL	4.DON'T KNOW
Is it good with strangers:	1.VERY	2.SOMEWHAT	3.NOT AT ALL	4.DON'T KNOW
Is it good with dogs:	1.VERY	2.SOMEWHAT	3.NOT AT ALL	4.DON'T KNOW
Is it good with cats:	1.VERY	2.SOMEWHAT	3.NOT AT ALL	4.DON'T KNOW

9) Has your new pet been more or less work than you expected?

1.MORE 2.LESS 3.EXACTLY WHAT I THOUGHT

How so? _____

10) On a scale from 1-10, with 10 being the best score, how satisfied are you overall with your new pet? _____

SCRIPT: Thank you so much for your participation in my study, I truly appreciate it and good luck with your new pet OR good luck in your search for a pet!