

Radio Script for Triple J's talkback program "Hack". (Entered in the Walkley Student Journalist of the Year awards)

You like a drink right? Well, despite what K-Rudd thinks, it's not just us – the young boozed-up hooligans of Australia. It's our pets too.

Considerate Sydneysider, Elise Schumacher [Shoe-mack-a], attentive to her dogs' inner-most needs, created "DB" – Dog Beer – a VB substitute for her canine companions.

Think she's *barking* mad? Well, the University of Sydney's newly opened canine hospital has been bombarded, by people requesting liposuction, porcelain veneers, and *testicle* implants for their *prized pooches*.

18th-Century German philosopher Immanuel Kant [Like "Ant"] said: "We can judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals." – But is this cruelty of another kind?

Have we taken our love of household pets too far? How far have *you* gone for your pet? – Maybe you've risked your life to save your sausage dog or gold fish? Maybe you've ended a relationship over an ex's pet obsession? And what's the bizarrest thing you've done with, or for your pet, and why? Or, is there something about treating a pet as a semi-human fashion statement, that you find just a little bit sad? We want your thoughts – give us a call on 1 300 0555 36.

AUDIO – grab from POWDER FINGER'S "LIKE A DOG" –

"If you treat me like a dog,

Yeah if you treat me like a dog;

Then it's a fine, fine time for the people in the lucky land".

It seems like a 'dog's life' ain't that bad in the "lucky land". - The RSPCA says Australia has a good track record when it comes to animal cruelty. - But they probably didn't take into account, those who make their *beloved bitches* prance the pavement, in a beret, and matching faux [Foe] leather jacket. But more on that later.

To help us understand this obsession with pets is our first guest, academic and Associate Professor at Melbourne University, Bruce Headey. He's an expert in "social indicators research", publishing a joint 2007 study on "Pets and human health in Germany and Australia".

Bruce joins us on the line now. Welcome Bruce.

- Australia has one of the highest incidence of pet ownership in the world. A 2005 survey, found that pets were a normal part of childhood for 83 per-cent of Australians. What's the attraction?
[Pet companionship ingrained in society since pre-historic hunter/gatherer. Companionship. 63% Australian homes own pets.]
- I understand there's significant health benefits associated with owning a pet. What are they?
[Lower stress, encourage exercise. - Visit the doctor less; use less medication; have lower cholesterol and blood pressure; recover more quickly from illness/surgery.]
- What are some other benefits of pet ownership?
[Economic benefits - good for health - saved \$4 billion national health expenditure 2006-2007.
Contributes \$4.7 billion to economy annually, employing 45,000 people.]
- How have people's attitudes towards pet ownership changed in recent times?
[Linked to growth in pet industry – increase in specialty veterinary medicine and luxury pet care – represents the elevation of pet status in family.]
- What motivates us, to go to such extreme lengths for our pets?
[Australian Companion Animal Council (ACAC) 2005 study - 91% of pet owners regarded them as members of the family.]
- Can it be dangerous to elevate your pet to this sort of semi-human status?
[Yes. – pets should be cared for as animals – don't have same wants as humans, cannot respond to complex human gestures/desires – pets cannot fully substitute human relationship.]
- Is it possible to have an unhealthy reliance on pet relationships, to the detriment of human ones?

[Can become anti-social – create human partner jealousy – might feel neglected/second best.]

- Is this new “pet care” industry taking unreasonable advantage of the growing trend to humanise our pets?

[Unnecessary treatments (cosmetic surgery, clothing, etc) no benefit for animal – only satisfies owner desires - is wrong.]

That was Professor Bruce Headey, speaking about some of the pros, cons, and trends of pet-owner relations in Australia.

AUDIO –grab from PATTI PAGE’S version of “THAT DOGGY IN THE WINDOW” –

“How much is that doggy in the window?

The one with the waggle tail,

How much is that doggy in the window?

I do hope that doggy’s for sale”.

It seems it’s not simply the dog that’s for sale, but all the accessories imaginable, even your pet’s dignity perhaps? A new pugnacious pet industry is flourishing, and with it, the idea that your pet pup can be ‘man’s *best-looking* friend’.

Our next guest is Jodie Hartz, self-described pet fashion expert, and manager of “Waggin’ Tails Dog Daycare” in Brisbane’s CBD. Jodie, welcome to Hack.

- Well known pet fashion supplier – “Doggie FooFoo” - boasts the slogan, “Because There’s No Such Thing As Too Much Cute!” Surely there is?
[Asked with humour but seriously too – in context of growing industry and consumer trend.]
- At \$33 per day, the price of “Waggin’ Tails Dog Daycare” is comparable to the cost of *childcare*. What do get for your money?
[Peace of mind. Dog gets attention, socialization with other dogs and participates in specialised dog activities (wading pools, etc).]
- Doggy daycare is just one facet of the booming pet industry. How big is it?

[Australia. – \$4.62 billion in 2005, up 15% on 2002 - according to ACAC.]

- So, why would my dog *need* clothes?

[Some might be self-indulgence of owner, but can improve quality of life for your pet.]

- The pet accessories and clothing market is on the rise. Ok, take me shopping, what's out there? – Should I mortgage my house in advance?

[Doggles (sunglasses), shoes, diamond jewellery; custom-made furniture (Savannah Wardrobe - \$139), etc!

Clothing – anything: from Doggy Swimwear to Wedding Attire (Venus Wedding Dress - \$99).]

- I've been looking to pamper my Pit-bull. And he *needs* an extreme makeover. What products and services are available to him?

[Liposuction, life coaching, luxury resorts, spa treatments, dog blogs, yoga, aromatherapy, cologne, fresh breath spray, acupuncture, therapists, etc!]

- But do most animals actually *like* the Paris Hilton treatment? – Prominent animal behaviour expert, Dr Judith Blackshaw, says it satisfies the human rather than the animal, and can even be harmful.

[Being treated unnaturally – wearing clothes, unnecessary medial treatments, etc – can distress animals greatly.]

- Why do you think this market has developed? – What do you, the pet owner, get out of it?

Thanks to pet fashion guru and dog daycare manager, Jodie Hartz. Well, what's your view on the developing pet care industry? Would you send *your* hound on a doggy vacation? Or, is a trip to the kennels when *you* go on holidays, as far as it goes? And if you saw a pink doggy tutu, would you reach for your wallet, or a bucket?

What do you reckon? We want to know, so give us a call on 1 300 0555 36.

Does your family pet enjoy some aromatherapy during its yoga class? Maybe your hairy-backed orangutan has its own Jacuzzi? Or, do you feel neglected, because the dog gets more attention than you?

How far would *you* go for your pet? What lengths *have* you gone to? – Maybe you’ve been scuba-diving with your miniature pony? And do you consider your ape, or armadillo, a member of the family?

Where’s that line between practical care, and ridiculous self-indulgence? Would it be ok to neuter your dog, but not to get it that hip-slimming liposuction it’s always wanted?

Does the luxury pet industry simply prey on people’s insecurities, fetishes or vanity? Or, is there something more logical behind the trend? Do we over-humanise our pets? - Is a dog, just a dog?

[Ideal callers: Those candid about reasons for use of luxury pet services or pet clothes; negative/positive pet reactions to treatments/services; anyone whose pet has undergone cosmetic surgery; anecdotes about bizarre lengths people go to for their pets (serious and comical); Sellers of luxury pet services; those who feel superseded by their dog/pet.

Likely caller responses: Those against the industry (negative); people who use it/know those who use it (positive and negative); those who praise the practical (life saving treatments, etc), but degrade the “luxury” side of industry; those who have/would do anything for pet (serious and comical); those who think a pet is just an animal.

Reasons for selecting key talent in the story: Bruce Heady was generally negative on luxury pet services; Jodie Hartz positive. The key talent provided a balance in tone and opinion – The Bruce Headey interview was more factual and serious; whereas the Jodie Hartz interview was more satirical. Both interviews provided valuable listener information to stimulate wide ranging talkback possibilities by offering different perspectives.]

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