

User Research Write-Up

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Project Description

We are planning to design a product, tool, or application for dog owners. We met with four different dog owners to discuss their experiences with their dogs and how their experience could be improved. Many dog owners indicated in their responses that they would like more time to walk or play with their dogs. One owner also expressed interest in a toy that was more portable and less distracting than traditional dog toys. These are issues we could attempt to tackle in our project.

While researching which questions to ask and how to approach our interview, we learned that dogs often require more time, attention, and money than many dog owners are prepared for. (Eley, 2017) We also learned that finding the time to walk dogs is a common area explored through user research. (PenzeyMoog, 2016)

Interview Questions

Preface: This is an interview for research purposes on the qualities and similarities between a user group (Dog Owners). This is not a critique or opinion on your aspects of an owner and companion, this is only for observational purposes. (If being recorded) This will be recorded for transcription and record keeping.

1. How many dogs do you currently have, and how long have you had them?
2. How do you define a good dog owner?
3. What adjectives would you use to describe yourself as a dog owner?
4. How would you describe your dog?
5. Is your dog social with humans and/or with other dogs?
6. Is your dog well trained?
7. What is the biggest thing you wish you could do as a dog owner?
8. What is one thing you think you do as a dog owner that has the biggest impact on your dog and/or yourself, in terms of health? In terms of social activity?
9. What is your dog like when you aren't around?
10. When do you think your dog is happiest? When do you think your dog is least happy?
11. What toys or tools do you use with your dog?
12. What toys or tools do you wish you had for your dog?
13. How has your life changed (positively or negatively) since having a dog?
14. What is the thing that you regret about the dogs as a dog owner?

Note: I asked many follow-up questions that were not a part of the initial question set. These were intended to allow the participant to expand upon her answers and build a more detailed understanding of her experiences as a dog owner.

User Responses

I interviewed a 20-year-old female undergraduate student at the University of Washington. She has been the owner of a service dog for a year and a half and has grown up with many dogs in her family.

DOG OWNER: My dog is an asshole and you can quote that. I love him with all my heart but he is an asshole.

RUBY: How many dogs do you currently have and how long have you had them?

DOG OWNER: 7 dogs, unless you want to count just Cajun. I've had him for about a year and a half.

R: How would you define a good dog owner?

DOG OWNER: Someone who loves their pet unconditionally. And cares for them, feeds them, spoils them, puts the dog above themselves sometimes.

R: So when you say feeds them and spoils them, how do you determine you're doing that well?

DOG OWNER: If the dog is generally happy to see you. So like, the dog owner is someone who loves their dog, doesn't forget to feed them, makes sure there's always care for the dog, that the dog goes to bed on time, is well nourished, is happy, gets excited easily. If you come home, they're happy to see you.

R: What adjectives would you use to describe yourself as a dog owner?

DOG OWNER: I don't want to use asshole, but asshole? He's an asshole to me, I'm an asshole to him, it's great. Um, loving? I'm very very loving, I spoil him... so freaking much. He's the most spoiled dog I've ever met. Um. Describing myself... Excitable? I like to get him excited. And if he's doing something really cute it excites me.

R: He's really cute when he's excited.

DOG OWNER: He is! He *springs*! He's like a cute little bunny! I love him so much.

R: How would you describe your dog?

DOG OWNER: He's an asshole. But he's extremely calm and quiet and loving and excitable and playful and—he's such a big personality. He has the biggest personality of any dog I've ever met in my life.

R: Big personality as in like, he's—

DOG OWNER: As in if he's grumpy, he's gonna let you know he's grumpy. Or if he's tired, he's gonna let you know he's tired. Or if he's happy he's gonna let you know he's happy. And he'll make expressions at you, his face will change, he'll perk his ears and perk his head, like, "whatcha doin', mama?". His various expressions—I can almost hear him talking to me, like, "whatcha doin'?" or "I'm tired", or "can we go out?"

R: So, he's kinda smart

DOG OWNER: He's very smart

R: Is your dog social, with humans or with other dogs?

DOG OWNER: He's very social with humans, not super social with other dogs, partially because of his training. 'Cause he is a service dog, he was trained *not* to interact with other dogs. So he's not super social with other dogs unless they're like, my family dogs, like my parent's dogs or my sister's dogs. He'll be social with them. Humans? Loves 'em. I think he thinks he's a human sometimes. He'll just sit on the couch.

R: When he does interact with other dogs in a social way, does he play?

DOG OWNER: If he's off-duty, he'll play if there's a toy involved. So if there's a ball being thrown he'll chase it, he'll do the whole like... stalking thing with other dogs that dogs do, where they kinda like... hold *really really* still, and then they jump! And he'll do that with other dogs. But he does get really tired after about five minutes he's like "Oh okay I'm done."

R: So he's not, like, an endurance dog.

DOG OWNER: No

R: Okay. Um. When he's social with people, does he especially like kids, or is it everyone...?

DOG OWNER: He likes... adult males.

R: (laughs) Okay. That's good.

DOG OWNER: I don't—can't explain it. He doesn't particularly like children, because they tend to poke him and prod him and he doesn't like that. He's used to like my friends, so he's used to females and female-aligned people, he really really likes older men.

R: (laughs)

DOG OWNER: Like, father-aged men.

R: (laughs) Okay, okay.

DOG OWNER: He's like, "Hey I'm here for you, let's play."

R: He craves male attention.

DOG OWNER: He does. He really does.

R: Okay. Um.... The question is, "Is your dog well trained?" but I know he is—

DOG OWNER: Yes he is.

R: So could you talk about his training a little bit?

DOG OWNER: So he knows 46 different commands. He's a very smart boy. He was trained for two solid years. So from eight weeks old until two years old he was trained every single day of his life to know all 46 commands, to be a very smart boy who can do many things.

R: What is the biggest thing you wish you could do for your dog, like on a daily basis, or.... Generally.

DOG OWNER: Well in a blue sky: talk to him.

R: Aww.

DOG OWNER: It would be so nice to have conversations. Because I feel like we do. But non-blue sky.... Something I wish I could do with him on a daily basis.... Play with him more. Like, he gets more exercise than most dogs because we get up, we go to school, we do this, we do that, but sometimes he just gets so bored. So playing with him a lot more would be really nice. Or having something that could keep him entertained in class, which I know is specific to me.

R: Well, a lot of dogs might like that.

DOG OWNER: Well, having something small and non-distracting that's like, portable, to keep him entertained would be super cool. Something that's not like, a nylabone, but that he could like, hold, and be entertained by in class.

R: Mhm. That's not really disruptive.

DOG OWNER: That's not really disruptive.

R: Okay, cool. What's something you do as a dog owner that you think has a really big impact on your dog. In terms of health, or social activity....

DOG OWNER: When I'm stressed, he's stressed. So, I try to keep my stress low so he doesn't freak out, because like, the more stressed I am the more I notice his health go down. So I try to like, engage with him in positive ways like when I'm more stressed like, love on him more so he doesn't get as stressed? And I forgot the question, I hoped I answered it.

R: Yeah. Basically just like, we're just trying to figure out what dog owners think is really important to do with their dogs, and what has impact.

DOG OWNER: The dogs.... And I think cats too, but you're doing dogs. Dogs are affected by their owners' emotions. And they're affected by the emotions and tensions in the house. Like, I was taught that all your feelings will travel through the leash. So like, if I'm stressed, he's stressed. If I'm super happy, he's super happy. Mhm buddy?

R: What is your dog like when you're not around?

DOG OWNER: Mopey. And sad. I'll get snapchats of him lying in his crate with his eyes drooping all sad.

R: So he definitely misses you when you're not there.

DOG OWNER: He misses me a significant amount. He'll get separation anxiety. I'll get separation anxiety from him, he'll get separation anxiety from me.

R: Do you notice a difference in the amount of time that you're separated? If you have to be separated for longer.

DOG OWNER: No. If it's like, 5 minutes, he's kinda like "Mma where she'd go", if it's an hour or more, he gets mopey. And that's anywhere from like an hour to like five days. He gets mopey.

R: Do you notice he like, if he like responds to your voice if he hears your voice over like a video call?

DOG OWNER: He's terrified of phones.

R: He is?

DOG OWNER: If you hold a camera up to him, like a face time, he freaks out. So no. Because he does not like, like, facetimeing phones. Like if you're taking a picture of him he's fine, but if you're like, having him interact with a phone he freaks out. He'll like, look away, won't make eye contact.

R: That's funny, I used to have a dog obsessed with TVs and stuff.

DOG OWNER: I had a dog like that where we would put animal channel on for him and he would sit there and—"Ruff. Ruff. Ruff."

R: That's so cute. When do you think your dog is happiest, or least happy?

DOG OWNER: He is happiest when it's dinner time. Or when it's time to play. If there's a squeaky toy involved, he's like so excited! Or if you're playing with him and like, clapping at him—he gets *really* excited when you clap. So he's probably like most excited when you're clapping and playing or like feeding. So when there's toys or food involved he's happy. What's the other part of the question?

R: Least happy?

DOG OWNER: If I'm not there he gets super mopey. If I've been working on homework all day he'll get mopey and angry with me. If I am like late on my breakfast he'll get mad at me. It's more like he gets *mad*. He doesn't get sad, he gets *mad*. Or if he *really* has to potty. That's a big one. If he really has to potty he'll like look at you, look at the door, look at you, look at the door.

R: What toys or tools do you use with your dog?

DOG OWNER: He's a little special. So he has squeaky toys. All of his toys squeak. He has an abundance of squeaky toys—it's ridiculous. Tools—he has his vest. He's smart so he can pick things up and hand them to me. He has a crate, which actually a lot of dogs don't have, but I crate trained him so he's got his little den. Um... squeaky toys... He has a lot of outfits. Because he knows when he gets dressed up, that like he gets more attention. So he lets me dress him up so I continually dress him up and the cycle goes on. Oh my god, like, if I could have a dog closet... I so would.

R: That's so cute.

DOG OWNER: So he has outfits, he has crate... He has toys.... I use a dremel on his nails. It's like a power tool. Keep his nails short. He has a toothbrush. I don't know if that answers the question....

R: That answers the question. You have a lot of insight on tools for dogs.

DOG OWNER: He has toothbrush, dremel, crate, ear cleaning pads, outfits, vest, chains, toys, the list goes on.

R: What toys or tools do you wish you had for your dog?

DOG OWNER: I don't have an automatic feeder and I really really want an automatic feeder, but they're all really really expensive. So it's like—that's the one thing I like, top, cherry on top for him. Having an automatic feeder.

R: And the last question.... How has your life changed positively or negatively since having a dog?

DOG OWNER: *It's so much better!* My mental health would not have survived college without him. The sheer amount of stress I feel? Would not have survived without him. Because he calms me down, keeps me happy, takes my focus off like, internally myself. Because I have to like take care of this human being. I have to be well enough to take care of this... thing. I just called him a human being. Whoops. I have to be... well enough to take care of this other living object that's depending on me. So, he keeps me kind of in-check.

R: Thank you so much!

DOG OWNER: Of course!

References

- Eley, A., & Wickwire, E. (2017, March 21). 6 things I wish I knew before getting a dog. Retrieved January 17, 2018, from <https://www.today.com/series/things-i-wish-i-knew/adopting-dog-what-know-t109481>
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