



WOMAN'S BEST FRIEND

There's a new breed of dog ownership being shaped by millions of millennial females. Meet four of them here and discover how their bonds with their canines go far beyond matching outfits.

Every morning, Max and Melissa awake from their temperature-regulated beds, nosh on a breakfast of organic, non-GMO, sustainably sourced food, slip into their designer sweaters, and—okay, so this is clearly a setup. Max is a dog. And Melissa is a human. (Or a “hooman,” as dogs

would say, if they could speak.) But this made-up pair is part of a very real trend—the humanization of our four-legged friends, and the transformation of pet “owners” to pet “parents.”

Consider this: Pet spending for 2017 is estimated to top \$69 billion in the

U.S., up 25 percent from just five years ago. There are doggie massages, paw-ticures, and fitness classes where canines can work on their “core.” Bella can even dine out with Mom and Dad, as restaurants have added play spaces and special menus. And this cash output

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extends beyond the superficial: More pet owners now carry insurance for their pals to help extend their pets' lives.

Experts say that while humans have always had powerful feelings for their animals, we now have ever more ways to express it. Indeed, canine owners post a picture or talk about their pooch on social media six times per week. And one in 10 have created social accounts for their dogs. "We're no longer ashamed to show our affection and spend money on our pets," says Deb Havill, M.S.W., a clinical social worker and therapist in Indianapolis. Havill's dogs sometimes play a part in sessions with clients ("pet therapy" is another field that's growing). "People dealing with trauma really respond well to a dog nuzzling them when they're troubled," she explains. "A lot of my female clients in particular say it's so much easier to talk when a dog is present." Research backs this up, showing that our brain chemistry changes when we interact with animals, making us calmer and more relaxed.

There's also a more recent, less primitive reason we're so willing to lavish goodies on our "fur babies": For many, they have *become* our babies. Nearly two-thirds of women ages 18 to 34 own a dog—many of them small dogs under 20 pounds, which have overtaken big and medium pups as the most popular choice in the country. All the while, childbearing is rapidly declining among this same age group. Census data from 2015, the latest numbers available, shows that nearly half of adult women do not have kids. And that demographic change will even contribute to a reshaped economy. According to a new report by The Conference Board, by 2025, Americans will likely spend more on their pets than on education.

For women who do have kids, the human-canine connection remains deep. Researchers at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston conducted MRIs of mothers of kids ages 2 to 10 who also owned dogs; they found that the mothers' brains responded just as strongly when they looked at photos of their pets as when they gazed at their kids. "Dogs evolved alongside humans long ago, and they're part of our pack, our clan," explains Havill. "We are taken to our most fundamental, exposed emotional self when with 'our' animals—we're more playful, we make goofy little noises and silly faces." And, as you can see here, we have even been known to dress them just like us.



KATIA + ROXY

Roxy's got moves and energy for days—and she clearly got it from her mama, professional dancer Katia, founder of DanceBody, a dance-cardio studio in New York City, the Hamptons, and Miami. Like Katia, the silky terrier loves to perform. Katia puts it this way: "We are both athletic, competitive, treat-driven, assertive alphas who love to cuddle and wear cute outfits." (Yep, Baby Rox has a vast wardrobe of dresses, hats, and tutus to go along with her sporty style here.) The major difference? "She likes to cause mischief," Katia says. If only Roxy could talk... Follow Roxy at @babyrox819.

On Katia: A New Day tunic, \$25, [target.com](#); Kenneth Cole sneakers (shown on page 56), \$140, [kennethcole.com](#); Aerie hat, \$16, [aerie.com](#). On Roxy: Love Thy Beast hoodie, \$46, [lovethybeast.com](#); Aerie cap, \$16, [aerie.com](#)

PUPPY LOVE OF FITNESS

Why should humans be the only ones who can track every detail of their lives?

1/ This GPS collar recommends moderate or intense exercise based on breed and helps you create virtual scrapbooks of memorable walks and adventures. *Link AKC, \$199, [linkakc.com](#)*

2/ Not sure if your pooch is under the weather? This calculates her health index, determined by activity levels and sleep. *Fit Bark, \$70, [fitbark.com](#)*

3/ When you're outdoorsy, your pet probably is, too. This gadget displays a satellite image of your dog's tracks up to nine miles away should he go off trail. *Garmin, \$600, [garmin.com](#)*



COURTESY OF VENDOR (STILLS)



ROBIN + KIWI

After being told she couldn't adopt a rescue puppy because of her long work hours at a job she didn't even love, Robin left the gig. "The experience highlighted just how wrong the job was for me," she says. She ultimately landed a more flexible role (she's *WH's* site director!), giving her more time to become a mom to this three-legged mixed breed. "Adopting Kiwi really felt like I was taking a step toward writing my own narrative. I am so much better for it," she says. Kiwi, for example, has encouraged Robin to get out and be more social in her Brooklyn community—and yes, add some hipster plaid to her wardrobe. Follow Kiwi at @therealkiwikusel.

On Robin: Eddie Bauer Limited Edition by Ilaria Urbinati jacket, \$199, eddiebauer.com; MPG Sport pants, \$48, mpgsport.com; Rebecca Minkoff shoes, \$195, rebeccaminkoff.com. On Kiwi: Lands' End vest, \$44.50, landsend.com



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ALLYSON + FREDDIE BEAR

The jewelry designer and her Goldendoodle are dynamic in denim, but it's their golden locks that truly bond them. "We both have curls that need serious maintenance to avoid tangles!" The pup's skills include helping Allyson "drop preoccupations more quickly" and giving furry high-fives. Follow Freddie at @freddiedoodle.

On Allyson: Gap shirt, \$60, gap.com; McGuire jeans, \$238, anthropologie.com; Soludos shoes, \$149, soludos.com. On Freddie: The Worthy Dog chambray shirt, \$24, theworthydog.com



LIZ + BONNIE

Roles often get reversed with these preppy besties. (Look, they're wearing each other's initial!) "Bonnie thinks she's my owner. She's been very protective from the moment we met at the shelter." The writer says her Jack Russell terrier-chihuahua mix has "taught me quite a bit about being present. She gets so happy on her walks that I, too, become absorbed in our surroundings."

On Liz: Alma Mater cardigan, \$80, almamaterwear.com; Parker Smith jeans, \$198, parkersmith.com; Soludos shoes, \$129, soludos.com. On Bonnie: ED Ellen DeGeneres jacket, \$25, petsmart.com; Fabdogg collar, \$20, shop.fabdogg.com ■