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## Rising Expenditures on Pets

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## Rising Expenditures on Pets

### **Introduction**

Anthropological work has found evidence that the dogs of antiquity were domesticated so as to help with the herding of other animals and guarding precious resources such as food stores and houses. Egyptians worshipped cats. Wild dolphins have been known to help humans in distress. These historical and contemporary symbiotic links between humans and other animals have been used, some would say exploited, for storylines that echo human families by institutions and organizations such as Disney in movies and books such as *The Fox and the Hound*, *Lady and the Tramp*, and *101 Dalmatians*. In these and other similar stories, animals have gone beyond a form of needed utility to being portrayed as loving and knowing family members.

My focus in this paper stems from this interest in the role animals have come to play in family structures through a sociological lens. The conceptual framework is based on Merton's (2018) notion of manifest and latent functions, specifically the roles children play in families, and how and when these are being replaced by pets. Manifest functions are those outputs that are intentional consequences of social systems. Latent functions, on the other hand, entail outcomes or expectations that are often unintentional reflexes of manifest functions. Data will be drawn from popular culture movies and books and statistics on how much we as a society have come to spend to maintain the health and well-being of these animals that continue to make inroads into our notions of what constitutes a family. I begin with a discussion of the family as an institution.

## **Family as Institution**

One of the first institutions we are exposed to is the family (Ten Eyck 2014). Within this institution we learn gender roles, acquire tastes for food, art, and other forms of entertainment, and are socialized into notions of morality. The traditional perspective on the family used these socialization patterns to differentiate between generations (e.g., children, parents, grandparents) and genders (mother and father, son and daughter). Each division had functional imperatives and was imbued with symbolic significance. Fathers were expected to be engaged in bringing home game to eat or money to be used to buy food, while mothers nurtured children and cooked what was brought home to eat. Children were expected to be socialized into these gender roles so as to continue both the function and structure of the family. Young boys were taught to hunt and young girls were taught to turn what was hunted into a family dinner.

The broad social institution of the family is complex, and continues to differentiate in many ways, while each family organization is, in a simplified sense, a support system for all its members. One family member cannot do something significant, whether it be positive or negative, without affecting other family members. This is as true of aboriginal groups, colonials in the New World, and a same-sex couple living in an expensive penthouse in downtown Los Angeles. According to Cohen (2015), these support systems include the personal family – those to whom we feel a sense of kinship – the legal family in which members are related either through blood, marriage, or other lawful means, and the family as an institutional arena where “actors” play their expected roles such as mother, father, brother, and sister. It is within the institutional arena that actors learn the norms and expectations of familial roles. Within these definitions and descriptions there are both manifest and latent functions at play. For example, within the support system aspect of the family, a manifest function is emotional support. If

another person is kin and experiencing trauma, other family members are expected to provide comfort. A latent function stemming from such emotional support is the creation of bonds that may be difficult to break if the relationship becomes unequal and dependency is forced upon one or more of the members, forming unhealthy, even toxic, relationships. Among legally bound family members, it is expected that behaviors will fall within legal limits, such as parents preventing their children from being harmed and sustaining their psychological and physical well-being. A latent function arising from these expectations is overly dependent children who expect parents to solve their problems (as well as parents who seem more than willing to follow that script).

Given my interest in pets being used as substitutions for children, it is imperative to delve more deeply into the roles of the younger generation to understanding both manifest and latent functions within families. Children fill many roles. One that immediately comes to mind is that of donors and acceptors of affection. Younger family members give affection as well as offer an outlet for their family members' affections. Children also function as pawns in conspicuous consumption patterns and as a source of pride as parents purchase expensive clothes, food, and cars for their children in an effort to define themselves as 'good' and caring parents (Bagwell and Bernheim 1996). This need to show one's parenting abilities has turned into a societal expectation for romantically bonded adults to have children. In addition to being the outlet for parental efforts, children can act as the "glue" within an unstable family. Children can take on the role of mentee, bestowing knowledge and wisdom on others. This in turn can encourage the mentors to behave as better people and improve their habits because they are acting as a role model for the mentee.

While aspects of this type of family structure can be found throughout history and across cultures, these have become more noticeable in contemporary times. The modern family has evolved from what Reisman (2018) referred to as a traditional-directed society in which the family acted as an economic unit within an agricultural culture. Children acted as economic players in helping with household chores and farming. As humans became more efficient and effective in growing food and fighting disease, family members became inner-directed in the sense that they began thinking of their own psychological and physiological well-being at the expense of others. Families continued to have many children, but they were no longer needed to play an economic role. This afforded more opportunities to move away from the family, altering the roles children were expected to play, especially as they reached young adulthood. As the demographics of a society move from high birth rates and low death rates to low birth and death rates, the self becomes other-directed in the sense that one's basic needs are met so efforts to please others, especially bureaucracies, becomes the major focus of one's actions. The family, again, is seen as a system that supports a narrow range of individual needs, as one finds love, entertainment, knowledge, and so forth in other institutional spheres.

As people seek to fulfill roles and satisfy needs within bureaucratic structures, the manifest functions of these structures are made apparent:

Before the development of a social safety net for old people – pensions, Social Security, and government-subsidized health care for the elderly – having children was an important part of most people's long-term survival plan. Even after children's labor stopped being a prime motivation for fertility, which was mostly the case in agricultural settings, parents hoped that their adult children would care for them in their retiring years. Now, however, raising children is a major

expense, an investment that is expected to pay off not so much economically as emotionally and symbolically (Cohen 2015:312).

Children are supposed to be seen (and not necessarily heard), and to be extensions of the family's financials and customs, though these can be, and are often expected, to be practiced outside the familial sphere. Children are expected to be well-behaved, as they are the reflections of adult supervision and suitability to raise the next generation and instill qualities of family and society. However, these expectations often stop when one enters other spheres, such as business and school, where competition and a narrower range of emotions are viewed as necessary for success (Zafirau 2008).

While the manifest function of being seen and not heard serves one societal purpose of maintaining a sense of order, there is a latent function at play in that children are learning that there is a hierarchical ordering within social systems. In addition, parents are learning they must prove their capability to produce well-behaved subordinates. If children are not present, for whatever reason, a potential substitute is something else that can be trained and flaunted in public. One potential substitute, and one that is part of the lives of nearly 78 million Americans, is the dog.

Much like children, the market for pet supplies and products continues to grow as books portraying pets (and their accompanying movies) are consumed by millions. The companionship we have come to expect from pets has come to encompass human characteristics, as we use words such as 'love' and 'joy' to define the links between humans and the animals they own. According to Ericksen et al. (1979), both men and women are expected to play parental roles as socializing the next generation is one of the main manifest functions of the family. While some changes in power dynamics and parental expectations are being found in current research on the

family (Cohen 2015), there is still evidence that these expectations pressure those without children to engage in activities that mimic parenthood, such as taking a pet to a playground where others can see them acting as parents. McLanahan and Percheski (2008) argued much the same thing in the sense that one of the main roles of the family is the nurturing of children, so couples, as well as single individuals of childbearing and childrearing ages, without children may feel they are not meeting the societal expectations of being considered part of the family or thoroughly engaged in adulthood. One is obligated to satisfy the expectations of these manifest functions in other ways, such as caring for and nurturing a pet. This is an indication of how a manifest function – nurturing the next generation – leads into a latent one – spending money and time on something that is in need of care that will not be passing on family traditions.

### **The Pet Within the Family**

Still, for all his juvenile acts, Marley was serving an important role in our home and our relationship. Through his very helplessness, he was showing Jenny she could handle this maternal nurturing thing. . . . In many ways, he was like a child, requiring the time and attention a child requires, and we were getting a taste of the responsibility that lay ahead of us if we ever did have a family. But only to a degree. Even as clueless as we were about parenting, we were pretty sure we couldn't lock the kids in the garage with a bowl of water when we went out for the day (Grogan 2005:27-28, 81).

These excerpts from John Grogan's book *Marley and Me* touches on the role dogs (and pets in general) play in our everyday lives that parallel those of children, as even the use of such terms as 'juvenile' point to the desire to compare pets to people. Pets not only give us a sense of importance and meaning as they depend on our care, they also provide us comfort, love, joy,

humor, and so forth, much like the role children play in the support framework of families. Pets, however, play a part in families no human could play in the same way, and many homes feel incomplete without one. For many, there is nothing like coming home to four feet pitter-pattering with excitement and a wagging tail.

Of course, in a country where more households have a dog (46 percent) than have children (32 percent), animals are an important part of family life, and they are often treated as family members. On the Internet, for example, Americans have posted thousands of photographs showing off their ‘grandpuppies,’ referring not to the offspring of their dogs but to the dogs of their human children (Cohen 2015:4).

To dive deeper into the connections between family and animals, I turn to work put together by various scholars who are expanding our notions of human-pet/animal relationships (e.g., Kalof 2000, Kellert 1984, Lerner and Kalof 1999, Levinson 1978). Drawing on Kellert’s work, Kalof (2000) argues for ten value categories: naturalistic (love of wildlife and nature), ecologicistic (concern for the environment), humanistic (affection for pets), moralistic (animal rights and the proper treatment of animals), scientific (biological and physical function of animals), aesthetic (symbolic and artistic value of animals), utilitarian (practicality and function of animals) dominionistic (exerting dominance over animals), negativistic (fear or dislike of animals) and neutralistic (indifference towards animals). The three of interest for me in this paper are humanistic, moralistic, and utilitarian.

According to Kalof, people are becoming more concerned with the role of animals in various cultural and natural spheres. The utilitarian is concerned with the role animals play in reaching desired ends. This is as true for the adventurer seeking a close encounter with a bear to



prove her daring spirit as it is for the dog owner who needs to show others his devotion to another creature through material intentions, with the dog functioning as a trophy to be displayed in public. The moralist is concerned with the welfare of animals, which could include the carnivore who turns to veganism to show an empathy towards animals and animal products marketed for consumption or the concerned citizen who notifies the police that a neighbor is hoarding cats. The humanist ranges from the individual who is concerned with the treatment of his “grand puppy” by his son-in-law to the owner of a hedgehog who invites her hedgehog to enjoy dinner at the table each evening.

Each of the above scenarios can be tied to various aspects of the modern family. According to Levinson (1978:1031), who extends the field of pet-human interactions even further, “[t]he development of empathy, self-esteem, self-control, and autonomy can be promoted in children through raising pets, while the loneliness of old age can be eased and deterioration warded off by nurturing an animal.” Children learn to be humanists by developing relationships with pets that foster their development and teach them about how to behave, responsibility, and emotions much like relationships with humans in their families. For the elderly, pets play a more utilitarian role as they offer comfort by becoming substitute children and grandchildren who have grown up.

Levinson (ibid. 1032) also notes that, “[a]nimal companions may have a more important role than they did when the extended family provided more companionship and learning experiences, and life, particularly in rural areas, provided more opportunities for daily contact with animals which were crucial to the economic existence of the family.” This can be seen in the utility of pets for the film industry. “The popularity of a film such as *For the Love of Benji* [sic] or of Sandy the orphan dog in the very successful Broadway musical *Annie*, reflects the

hunger which urban populations feel for meaningful contact with animal companions” (ibid. 1032).

The portrayal of dogs in these cultural products, much like the ones we will be discussing, offers glimpses into how a pet engages both manifest and latent functions of a member of a family.

When a pet is introduced into a family, the entire climate of family interaction changes and becomes more complex. Not only does each member of the family interact with the animal in his own characteristic way, but family members interact with each other over the pet. Feelings of rivalry, possessiveness, jealousy can emerge just as with the advent of a new child or sibling (ibid. 1033).

The manifest aspect is that the family members are expanding their own socialization experiences and skills, while few purchase pets in hopes of creating strife within the household.

As we turn to excerpts from popular cultural products involving pets, it is important to keep in mind that, “[c]hildren who become the ‘parents’ of a pet may develop a more realistic view of their own parents and parenting functions, not only nurturant but disciplinary in nature” (ibid. 1033). Caring for pets teaches children about responsibility and furthers their understanding of roles within families. We now turn to our data and methods before investigating these types of relationships within different cultural spheres.

## **Data and Methods**

My data are drawn from four sources of information – three products of popular culture and statistics concerning the amount of money pet owners spend on their pets for different reasons. The popular culture products include *Where the Red Fern Grows* (estimated book sales of \$6,754,308), *Marley and Me* (over 5,000,000 copies sold, 76 weeks on the *New York Times*

bestseller list), and Disney's animated movie *The Fox and the Hound* (released in 1981, and drew \$63,456,988 at the box office). My analytical goal is to find instances of pets being treated as children, both in terms of direct interactions between pets and owners and between owners and other humans regarding the role of the pet as a family member. This will involve a value judgment on my part aimed at the pet-human connection, such as a pet being essential or appropriate as a family member parallel to a human child.

I will also conduct an internet search of expenditures on veterinary visits and pet products. This will be used as a proxy for the larger role pets are playing within families, as increases in spending on pets may be evidence that they are becoming more important in our sense of what it means to be human. I turn now to pets in popular culture.

## **Findings**

*Where the Red Fern Grows*. I begin the discussion of how pets are referred to as family members with Rawls's (1961) *Where the Red Fern Grows*. In this fictional account of a young boy from a poor family who learns to hunt with two redbone coonhounds, we learn about how bonds between humans and dogs can become as strong as between human family members. The main character, Billy, raises Old Dan and Little Ann, engages in numerous adventures, and finally puts them to rest after the dogs protect Billy from a cougar attack. The following quotes provide insights into how Rawls created family linkages between humans and their pets. What the reader should keep in mind is whether these are too far-fetched to be considered typical, or if one finds oneself feeling the same emotional attachments as Rawls was trying to create.

"I figured the lion had scented my pups. The more I thought about anything harming them, the madder I got. I was ready to die for my dogs" (Rawls 1961: 48). This quote shows the lengths to which a human will go to protect their pets. While this is Billy speaking, and so not

one of the adults in the story, his protective instincts are much like that between siblings. According to Cohen (2015:170), “aside from parents, no one is closer to a young child than his or her siblings.” Billy is ready to take on a cougar to protect what some would consider to be his younger siblings.

Cohen (2015) points to the need for siblings to also teach one another about gender roles. Billy, as the oldest child and only boy in his rural family, engages the dogs in a way he might a younger brother. For example, “It was wonderful indeed how I could have heart-to-heart talks with my dogs and they always seemed to understand. Each question I asked was answered in their own doggish way” (Rawls 1961:66). While Billy does engage with his younger sisters by doing things such as buying them candy and comforts them during times of emotional distress, the dogs are the ones he takes hunting. This is where he can engage in male gender roles, an aspect of growing up that engages both the manifest function of being responsible and the latent function of differentiating between boys and their snips, snails and puppy dog tails while his sisters are all sugar and spice and everything nice.

As with all family relationships, Billy’s bonds with the dogs evolve, in this case from those of siblinghood to parenthood. This can be seen when Billy congratulates Little Ann on her early hunting prowess after training her to track game. “With a loud whoop, I told her how proud I was. My little girl had remembered her training” (ibid. 71). While siblings can be proud of each other, this is indicative of rewarding for engaging in activities instilled by a parent. Parents are proud of their offspring. Siblings typically show their pride for each other through less explicit ways.

This familial connection continues to grow between Billy and his dogs. As Billy begins making money from his dogs’ hunting exploits, he finds that he cares less about the financial

rewards relative to the social aspects to dogs provide. “My whole life was wrapped up in my dogs. Everywhere I went they went along” (ibid. 92). The only place where Billy did not want his dogs was at his grandpa’s store because there were other dogs that would fight with Old Dan. That an adolescent boy would think about the well-being of his dog in this way suggests the onset of a parental mindset.

The strength of this bond continues to grow when Billy enters his dogs into a raccoon hunting contest. Even after being told by a judge that not all dogs succeed, “‘Son,’ the judge said, ‘I wouldn’t feel too badly for you. I’ve seen some of the very best hounds fooled by a smart old coon,’” Billy does not lose faith in his hounds. “Regardless of all the discouraging talk, the love and belief I had in my little red hounds never faltered. I could see them now and then, leaping over old logs, tearing through the underbrush, sniffing and searching for the lost trail. My heart swelled with pride. I whooped, urging them on” (ibid. 163). Ideally, parents believe in their children, as the manifest function of socialization is to offer unwavering support. A latent function, however, might be for children to be unable to face adversity on their own.

All family relations end. Old Dan dies after suffering injuries while protecting Billy from a cougar, and Little Ann passes shortly thereafter. Billy engages traditional family practices by burying his dogs in a purposeful spot where the dogs could continue enjoying the country where they had roamed. “In my heart I knew that there in the grave lay a man’s best friend” (ibid. 201). When Billy’s mom makes him his favorite dinner in an effort to comfort him, “[h]is heart wasn’t in it” (ibid. 204). Later that night, Billy finds himself alone. “I didn’t feel like saying any prayers that night. I was hurting too much” (ibid. 206). This is not simply the loss of man’s best friend, but of a family member one cares deeply about.

*Marley and Me*. Published in 2005, *Marley and Me* became a *New York Times* bestseller and blockbuster movie in 2008. In the book and movie, we meet John Grogan and the relationship between a yellow lab and John's growing family. Marley, the lab, is introduced to the family prior to the first human child being born.

Somehow having Marley aboard with us, and seeing how strangers eyed him so warily, gave us a sense of peace we might not have had otherwise. He was a big, loving dope of a dog whose defense strategy against intruders would surely have been to lick them to death. But the prowlers and predators out there didn't need to know that. To them he was big, he was powerful, and he was unpredictably crazy. And that is how we liked it (ibid. 43).

At this point, John and Jenny expect Marley to do dog-like things such as protecting them, though later they begin to see him as a 'practice child.'

After Jenny experiences a miscarriage, Marley offers support to 'his mother-figure.' As John recounts,

When I turned the corner, I stopped short. I would have bet a week's pay that what I was looking at couldn't possibly happen. Our rambunctious, wired dog stood with his shoulders between Jenny's knees, his big, blocky head resting quietly in her lap. His tail hung flat between his legs, the first time I could remember it not wagging whenever he was touching one of us. His eyes were turned up at her, and he whimpered softly. She stroked his head a few times and then, with no warning, buried her face in the thick fur of his neck and began sobbing. Hard, unrestrained, from-the-gut sobbing. They stayed like that for a long time, Marley statue-still, Jenny clutching him to her like an oversized doll. I

stood off to the side feeling like a voyeur intruding on this private moment, not quite knowing what to do with myself. And then, without lifting her face, she raised one arm up toward me, and I joined her on the couch and wrapped my arms around her. There the three of us stayed, locked in our embrace of shared grief (ibid. 49).

This is a family moment in which Marley plays a significant role beyond protector. As Merton argued, family members are expected to support one another. When a member is missing, in this case a miscarried child, the dog takes its place. Marley could even be considered to be taking the place of the husband in this case, as John is not present when Marley begins comforting Jenny.

Comforting after such a loss often goes beyond the time spent on the couch. While some might argue that dogs need little more than food, water, and shelter, a comforting child is deserving of many more rewards. Shortly after Jenny's miscarriage, John and Marley are out to run errands. "As we passed the pet shop, I made the split-second decision that Marley deserved a pick-me-up, too. After all, he had done a better job than I at comforting the inconsolable woman in our lives" (ibid. 57). Much like buying a child an ice cream cone, and showing others your understanding of what good parents do in such situations (McIntosh 2013), Marley is rewarded as if he were a child who had done the right thing.

As with children, pets need to be trained in an effort to prove one's worth as a parent in which the performance demonstrates one's ability to fill the role of the parent effectively (Goffman 1959). Marley, like a child who has been given too much ice cream and believes all efforts are good efforts and so must be (re)socialized, is taken to obedience training. It does not go well. "'For God's sake, Marley,' I whispered. 'Our family pride is on the line'" (Grogan

2005:64). Much like a parent scolding a child who is acting out in a public place, Marley's behavior is calling into question John's ability to play the role of an effective parent.

While the effort to train Marley in an organizational setting fails, John takes Marley home to continue the training, much like we would expect a parent to engage a child who is being questioned in school. This strengthens the bond between them to the point that John begins comparing Marley to a child. "Our lives increasingly were being defined by work. Work at the newspapers. Work on the house. Work around the yard. Work trying to get pregnant. And, nearly a full-time vocation in itself, work raising Marley" (ibid. 81). While John does recognize differences between Marley and a child as mentioned in the aforementioned quote that one could not put a child in the garage with food and water, the reader gets the sense that John is playing the role of a father to Marley. Marley's actions have become a reflection of him.

When a human child is introduced into the Grogan family, Marley returns to the role of protector.

As the days turned into weeks and weeks turned into months, Marley came to accept Patrick as his new best friend. One night, early on, as I was turning off the lights to go to bed, I couldn't find Marley anywhere. Finally I thought to look in the nursery, and there he was, stretched out on the floor beside Patrick's crib, the two of them snoring away in stereophonic fraternal bliss. Marley, our wild crashing bronco, was different around Patrick. He seemed to understand that this was a fragile, defenseless little human, and he moved gingerly whenever he was near him, licking his face and ears delicately. As Patrick began crawling, Marley would lie quietly on the floor and let the baby scale him like a mountain, tugging on his ears, poking his eyes, and pulling out little fistfuls of fur. None of it fazed



him. Marley just sat like a statue. He was a gentle giant around Patrick, and he accepted his second-fiddle status with bonhomie and good-natured resignation (ibid. 109).

While the main role is that of sentry, Grogan refers to the “fraternal bliss” shared by his son and his dog. It is brothers who share a fraternal bond.

While it is expected that John and Jenny would focus their socialization efforts on their newborn children (a second child has been born) Marley continues to be seen as a valued member of the family. Even after Marley becomes a point of frustration for Jenny who suffers from post-partum depression, he ultimately receives parental praise. “We had brought into our home a living, breathing being, not a fashion accessory to prop in the corner. For better or worse, he was our dog. He was a part of our family, and, for all his flaws, he had returned our affection one hundred fold. Devotion such as his could not be bought for any price” (ibid. 142). This price, which is steeped in morality, included a ruined sofa, gouged doors, and chewed books, all of which might have a parent telling a child they are headed for boarding school. However, when such threats are carried out, individuals are often questioned as to their capabilities as parents.

Marley continues to engage in human-like behavior as the family grows and evolves.

At one point, she said, Marley grabbed the checkbook out of a crew member’s hand and raced away, running a series of tight figure-eights to nowhere, apparently determined this was one way to guarantee a paycheck. “We call him our Labrador evader,” Jenny apologized with the kind of smile only a proud mother can give (ibid. 152).

While recognizing Marley's behavior is not entirely acceptable with her apology, Jenny implies her adoration for Marley with her smile, referencing a nickname bestowed upon Marley for his regular slightly mischievous behavior. The dog's actions caused no real harm so Jenny found some humor in it, much like a mother would find humor in her young child getting into makeup and practicing application on their younger sibling's face (and hair and arms and hands). Marley's interactions evolve with the changing and growing family in ways that are framed as just another member of the family.

*The Fox and the Hound.* In Disney's animated *The Fox and the Hound*, released in 1981, an elderly woman (Widow Tweed) finds a fox kit whose mother has been recently shot and killed, takes him in, cares for him, and soon Tod (the fox) is a member of the family. Tod develops a friendship with Copper (a young hound from next door), which complicates interactions between Widow Tweed and Amos Slade who lives next door and is steeped in a hunting culture.

At the beginning of the movie, when Tweed finds Tod, she wraps him in her apron and says, "There, there now. Calm down. No, I can't just leave you out here all alone." Tweed is projecting motherly instincts onto the small, helpless animal. One major role of pets is as something that needs to be nurtured and cared for, fulfilling humans' desire to do so and providing moral self-worth.

Shortly thereafter, Tweed feeds Tod and looks at him adoringly while doing so, just as a mother might feed her baby. "Oh, my. You're such a little toddler. Say, that's what I'm going to call you, Tod. You know, Tod, I'm not going to be so lonesome anymore." Tweed's comment to Tod solidifies a statement made by Levinson: "A lonely person who has a pet is no longer so lonely" (Levinson 1978:1037). Pets fill a void that can be left by the absence of loved ones who used to fill its place. Given that Tweed is a widow with no children, Tod, while a fox

and not a typical domestic animal, is filling the utilitarian role of being an outlet for her affections.

Tod is not the only animal in Tweed's care. She has a few farm animals that Tod must interact with. While milking Abigail, her cow, who seems concerned with the new addition to the family, Tweed says, "Abigail, you're going to have to be patient with Tod. He's one of the family now." Abigail, a member of Tweed's family, is asked to be patient with Tod, which implies the desire for a functional family comprised of members who coexist peacefully. Tod later disrupts and chases a hen, causing a ruckus that upsets Abigail leading to the pail of freshly collected milk being kicked over. While Tweed did not cry over the spilled milk, she did scold Tod like a mother would a child, saying, "just look what you've done." Tod snuggles up to her, eliciting a "now don't try to butter me up" from Tweed. Tod's antics do not take long to have the desired effect, and the Tweed states, "Oh, Tod. I just can't stay angry with you, you little imp. Now, run along and play. Go on! And try to stay out of mischief!" This interaction mirrors one of that between a grandparent and grandchild or a parent and child and the manifest function of socializing proper behavior while also creating a level of dependency that may be difficult to break. The (grand)child causes a problem or mess unintentionally through exploration of its world and is initially reprimanded for it (manifest socialization). However, with the batting of eyelashes, or in Tod's case showing affection, all wrongdoings are forgiven and the (grand)child is dismissed to play and enjoy themselves (latent dependency).

The story is complicated by the culture of hunting in which Amos Slade is embedded. Slade also has chickens, and when he sees Tod around the chickens, he grabs his gun and begins shooting at Tod before being confronted by Tweed. When Slade argues that Tod is a nuisance, and therefore displaying a dominionistic understanding of animals, Tweed replies, "I don't

believe it. He wouldn't hurt a thing!" Tweed is offended by Slade's accusation against her sweet, innocent young fox. Much like parents who wish to protect their children and their children's reputation (both for their own sake and for the sake of their child), the woman is quick to jump to Tod's defense, refusing to believe or acknowledge that he caused her neighbor any trouble, again possibly leading to problems when the child, or in this case the fox, needs to act independently. It also points to how one's approach to animals can come into conflict with other approaches.

Tweed's concern for her fox leads to even further protection by keeping him inside. "Poor little tyke. It's a shame I have to keep him cooped up." Tweed desires for Tod to be happy and frolicking outside, a feeling that parallels that of a parent with a sick child, the latter of whom wants desperately to be able to play but is not well enough to do so and must be left "cooped up." This can lead to feelings of guilt for both the child – feeling bad that the child cannot go out and play – and for oneself – not being able to protect one's child from sickness.

Tweed's understanding of the forced socialization begins to grow and she realizes the bond must be broken. This could benefit Slade whose relationship with his dogs are more utilitarian as they help with financial gains. Upon returning from hunting with a truck full of animal skins, Slade reflects, "Now I got me the best two dogs there is." This statement demonstrates the pride he feels in that moment. This pride in his dogs' abilities represent the proud parent looking upon her child's high school diploma (the furs) and title of Valedictorian (number of and quality of the furs that represent the goodness of the child that is a reflection of the parent).

As Tweed is preparing to take Tod to the game reservation and break the parental link, she looks in a mirror and tucked into its frame is a picture of Tod with a cake that says, "Happy

Birthday Tod.” My own grandmother’s home is full of pictures of her children and grandchildren throughout various stages in our lives (sitting on her shoulders in a diaper, helping her paint her porch, high school graduation). With these pictures are also pictures of her pets, both past and present. There is a sense of equality between (grand)children and pets both in real life and in animated movies. These portrayals, as well as those in *Where the Red Fern Grows* and *Marley and Me*, highlight the humanistic (affection for pets), utilitarian (pets are viewed as providing services), and moralistic (as humans we are supposed to care about our animals). Tweed and Tod do separate in the end, but one gets the feeling that neither will ever forget the other.

*Veterinary Visits and Other Expenditures*. There is a plethora of the types of popular cultural products as those analyzed above, as well as many that portray animals in a different light (no human bonds or feelings). However, as I turn my discussion from pets in the cultural products to how much we spend on them, one sees how society is willing to spend on keeping pets healthy and in the family.

According to the Journal of American Veterinary Medical Association, US consumers spending on pets “increased 4.1 percent between 2016 and 2017, from \$66.75 billion to \$69.51 billion. The APPA estimates a 3.7 percent overall increase in 2018”

(<https://www.avma.org/News/JAVMANews/Pages/1805011.aspx> accessed November 4, 2018).

This is evidence of how humanistic ties to our pets become a material cost that must be carried by the owners, and by doing so highlights one’s willingness to pay for a family member’s health and well-being. One is not a good parent if one decides that a \$100 euthanasia is more financially responsible than a \$1500 surgery to save an animal that cost \$125 at the time of adoption.

Pet owners are showing their moral tendencies by purchasing products that they believe meet their pets' satisfaction and life enjoyment. For example, it is estimated that there are over 78 million dogs in the US. The average dog owner in 2016 spent on average \$307 for food and treats per dog. It is estimated that each dog owner is spending \$1284 annually on veterinary services ([https://americanpetproducts.org/Uploads/MemServices/GPE2017\\_NPOS\\_Seminar.pdf](https://americanpetproducts.org/Uploads/MemServices/GPE2017_NPOS_Seminar.pdf), accessed November 4, 2018). Manifestly, owners are showing others they are able to take care of their beloved pets and proving they are good parents. The latent function of such spending involves the growth of pet products that call into question the safety of pets (e.g., <https://www.dogfoodadvisor.com/dog-food-recalls/>, accessed December 19, 2018) as individuals, groups, and organizations try to profit from changing patterns in spending.

Between 2017 and 2018 there was a 2.9% growth in how much money pet owners spent on food for their pets, rising from \$28.23 billion to \$29.07 billion. Food was not the only product to increase, as supplies and over-the-counter medication, veterinary care and “other services,” such as dog grooming and dog daycare also increased. The largest increase was shown for “other services,” with a growth of 6.9% (<https://www.vmdtoday.com/news/american-pet-spending-reaches-new-high>, accessed November 4, 2018).

This increase is not just a matter of buying more. It is also fueled by a need to provide higher quality products, or at least higher priced ones for family members. According to *Veterinarian's Money Digest* (<https://www.vmdtoday.com/news/american-pet-spending-reaches-new-high>, accessed November 4, 2018), “[t]he industry is moving beyond simply the humanization of pets to where they are now widely accepted as part of the pet owner’s lifestyle.” Another *Veterinarian's Money Digest* article pointed to this same phenomenon. “Spending has continued to increase as more and more pet owners consider their cats and dogs as valuable as

any other member of the family” (<https://www.vmdtoday.com/news/pampered-pet-trends-for-2018>, accessed December 19, 2018).

Beyond over-the-counter purchases, pet owners are starting to pay to protect their pets’ futures as they would a child with health insurance. “The share of dogs and cats covered by insurance is rising. This suggests both that pet owners increasingly see their pets as valuable and hard to replace, suggesting they make substantial monetary investments in them, but also *is itself* a rising cost factor: insurance money is ‘new spending’ (<https://ifstudies.org/blog/fewer-babies-more-pets-parenthood-marriage-and-pet-ownership-in-america>, accessed December 19, 2018, emphasis in the original).

Finally, it should be noted that there are differences in generations when it comes to spending on pets. “A majority of millennials — 76 percent — said they are more likely to “splurge” on their pets than for themselves, including for expensive treats (44 percent) or a custom bed (38 percent), according to a 2014 study by Wakefield Research. By comparison, 50 percent of Baby Boomers — those born between 1946 and 1964 — said they would do so” ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/business/wp/2016/09/13/millennials-are-picking-pets-over-people/?utm\\_term=.932ec9d40178](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/business/wp/2016/09/13/millennials-are-picking-pets-over-people/?utm_term=.932ec9d40178), accessed December 19, 2018). This echoes work as reported by the Institute for Family Studies (<https://ifstudies.org/blog/fewer-babies-more-pets-parenthood-marriage-and-pet-ownership-in-america>, accessed November 4, 2018) that found pet ownership is reportedly rising particularly fast among single women, even as fertility has fallen for this group.

## **Conclusion**

The stories and statistics noted above can be found in every city across the US, including Sedro-Woolley, WA. In a text sent to me in July 2018, a friend, Jennifer, wrote that “Nemo [her

dog] had at least 10 bladder stones. Best case scenario: \$1,500. Worst case scenario: \$5,000. Scenario I'm not even considering: we put him down." These dollar figures are the prices of the two surgeries Nemo may have needed. Fortunately for both Jennifer and Nemo, the cheaper of those two options solved the bladder stone issue. Jennifer did not specifically state the price of euthanasia, but it would have been the cheapest option. As she and Nemo share such a strong familial bond, the cheapest option was simply *not* an option for Jennifer because that would mean losing a family member. Nemo is now on a more expensive special kind of dog food, which along with his surgery is true to the findings that we are spending more on pets, much like we would expect for children (<https://www.healthpopuli.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Health-Costs-for-Family-of-Four-Hit-22030.jpg>, accessed December 19, 2018).

Jennifer and Nemo are part of the changing family structures in the US. These bonds have manifested in much the same way found in more traditional family studies. Animals are providing a sense of kinship at the personal level, society has expectations that have been formalized into laws about how animals are to be treated, and they are taking on the function of the pet that has come to mean more than just a companion to include that of a child, parent, and spouse. These manifest functions that are growing and changing should not be overlooked when understanding the new family. In addition, we are spending more time and money on cultivating an image that we are good pet owners, and therefore caring and morally centered individuals. These bonds have become instrumental to the point that if we were to lose our pets, we would lose a portion of our humanity.



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