

THESIS

FUNCTIONS OF PETS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Submitted by

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED
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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

FUNCTIONS OF PETS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

The role or function that dogs and cats fulfill as pets in families with preschool-age children was examined in terms of pet prevalence, their relationship to animal fears, and their association with imaginary companions. The sample consisted of 37 children, three years nine months to five years nine months of age, in the Colorado State University Preschool Laboratory and their mothers. Mothers' data was collected by means of a questionnaire and an interview was conducted with the children. Measures used to determine the level of significance were the single-variable chi-square test, and the chi-square contingency table.

The first hypothesis, that there would be no difference between the prevalence of dogs and cats and any other pet in the preschooler's family, was rejected on the basis of the single variable application of the chi-square test. Dogs were revealed to be the preferred pet. Hypothesis two, relating mothers' fear and children's fear of dogs and cats, showed no statistical significance, therefore the null hypothesis was not rejected. However, statistically significant findings indicated that children who had an experience with a pet were less fearful of dogs

and cats. The third hypothesis, which examined selection of pets and non-pets as imaginary companions was rejected. Statistical analysis revealed that children chose non-pets as imaginary companions more often than they did pets.

Conclusions based on the study may be applicable to similar samples. There is a high incidence of pet possession among pre-school children. Children can and do assimilate realistic aspects of their pets, and relate positively to types of pets that are similar to the ones they have presently or previously owned. Those children who have an experience with a pet are less likely to be fearful of dogs and cats, though the effects of their mothers' fear of dogs and cats were negligible. Data on the role of the pet as an imaginary companion suggested that the pet experience needs to be of a concrete tangible nature to be meaningful to young children, rather than an imaginary one. Pets in families are more likely to play the role of family pets rather than the role of pets to any single family member.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Man's emotional relationship to pets was present before industry, advertising, and publishing discovered them. Pets, in return for love, loyalty, and companionship, shared in their masters' comforts.

Since the beginning of his existence, man has kept pets, but the quality of the interaction between man and his pet is changing (Szasz, 1968). Indications are that today man can express his affection for, communicate with, and understand his pets more easily than he is able to with his own species. Perhaps the pattern of modern society is such that man turns to animals for the simple pleasures of life that he once knew and to compensate for feelings of alienation (Bossard, 1944). Szasz (1968) suggested that it is 'frightening' and 'threatening' to watch the speed with which animals have gained focus in the lives of individuals in the Western world during the last ten years. She concluded that man's preoccupation with animals, his need for them, and his preference for certain breeds of animals is an indication that man is feeling inadequate and set apart from a rapidly changing impersonal world.

With the impending growth of the pet population and with the emotional involvement of today's family, it would seem advantageous

to investigate the family pet's role as perceived by mothers and their preschool children. Through such research, insight might be gained to more effectively evaluate the function or role a pet plays in the modern American family.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the present investigation was to determine the role and function that dogs and cats fulfill as pets in families with preschool-age children.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses have been examined:

1. There will be no significant statistical difference between the prevalence of dogs and cats and any other pet in the preschooler's family.
2. There will be no significant statistical difference between the mother's fear and her pre-school child's fear of dogs and cats.
3. There will be no significant statistical difference between the selection of pets or non-pets as children's imaginary companions.

Definition of Terms

Function-Role: A pattern of behavior characteristic of an individual occupying a given position in society or fulfilling a specified function. The same individual may display many roles.

Nursery School Children: Preschool-age children, three to five years old.

Pet: A tame, fondled animal.

Imaginary Companion: Someone or something, living or unreal, with whom the child is personally involved in his fantasies. It includes imaginary playmates, pets or non-pets, or real playthings which are treated as though they have an autonomous psychological experience.

Fear: An anticipatory internal response, basically an anticipation of danger or of an unpleasant event, feeling or reaction. Fear is generally considered a more specific emotion than is anxiety, and is a response to particular, specifiable objects and stimuli such as fast-moving vehicles or wild animals.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Historical Background

How animals were first domesticated by primitive man remains a mystery. However, it is known that this domestication was not accidental; rather, it was utilitarian. The animals were utilized by primitive man as pets, as hunting decoys, and for religious sacrifices. Levinson (1970) stated primitive man also domesticated animals for reasons of mental hygiene. The animals which were finally domesticated by primitive man and which are today's pets were animals that were social (Scott, 1962). Primitive man, thinking that a particular kind of animal (depending upon the tribe in question) was his ancestor, revealed his close identification with the animal world. All animals were sacred, but not all animals were used for lowly work. The Pharoahs chose as their own pets animals that were decorative, most costly, and the most difficult to tame. Perfumed and bejeweled cats and live monkeys were their pets. Often the ladies of the royal court had live snakes as arm bands and as neck decorations. In early civilization people had great affection for pets. In Thrace and in Macedonia snakes were allowed to feed from women's breasts and sleep with

children (Gates, 1931). Even today, some women of primitive societies breast feed puppies and pigs (Menninger, 1951).

Mary, Queen of Scots, was one of the nobility who displayed her admiration for her pet dog by attiring him in lovely velvets. Henry II so adored his small dog that in order not to be parted from the animal while in church or in conference, he had a basket devised in which he carried his pet (Szasz, 1968).

In 17th Century New England each pet became identified with a specific owner. For example, at the most famous witch trial held in Salem twenty people were hanged, and two dogs were killed for witchcraft. After the social revolution of the 19th century, domesticated animals invaded every stratum of Western society for reasons known or unknown (Szasz, 1968).

The dog and the cat assumed important roles in the history of the human race. Definite evidence exists that the dog was already domesticated by the "seventh millennium B.C." (Reed, 1959). The Magdalenian period artist drew dogs in the caves of Spain. In Britain during the Neolithic period dogs were found, and early tablets from the Ur of the Chaldees show the dog participating in a hunt (Levinson, 1968). Findings disclose that when writing was invented by the Sumerians some 5,000 years ago, the dog was worthy of inclusion. Records indicate that though the dog's position was not that of a respected member of the community, the domestication of the animal continued.

Such great admiration existed in Ancient Egypt for the dog's loyalty that Anubis, the dog- or jackal-headed god, was depicted as it led humans to paradise (Griffith, 1952). At this time the Greek historian, Herodotus (1960), recorded the admiration held by the Egyptian people for the cat, whom they thought of as the earthly incarnation of their goddess, Bastet. According to Herdodus, if an Egyptian home caught fire an all out effort was put forth to save the cats, in lieu of extinguishing the flames. The custom followed by the residents of a house in which a cat died of natural death, was to shave their eyebrows. Cats which expired in Egypt were embalmed and buried in sacred burial places within their home towns. Lewis (1963) noted that mummified cats were buried in Egypt, and dogs were usually substituted for a human offering (Levinson, 1968).

The Romans thought less of dogs as pets than the Greeks did but were highly attached to possessions; therefore, every wealthy Roman had a dog posted at the entrance of his house as a status symbol. The ancient Persians also valued the dog highly; an entire book of Zend-Avesta relates the various laws about the treatment of the dogs (Sloan & Farquhar, 1925).

Levinson (1968, p. 505) cited the significant value of the dog to children throughout recorded history. "Innumerable accounts are found in the literature of almost every nation describing the beneficial relations between dogs and adults and between dogs and children." The relationship of dogs to mankind are contained in numerous novels,

stories, and poems (Aldin, 1930; Dyer, 1918; Griffith, 1952; Lorenz, 1965; National Geographic Book of Dogs, 1966; Richardson, 1895; Sloan & Farquhar, 1925; Steinbeck, 1962).

Animal Symbolism

Animal symbolism evidences itself in man's speech and literature in which animals often assume important roles (A. Freud, 1937). The primitive mind perceived in the shapes and appearances of various animals symbols of flight and speed (S. Freud, 1960). In every day life animals may symbolize both positive and negative human drives as is illustrated in early German mythology: here, wolves for example, were regarded as devils (Lewis, 1963). "Birds were seen as phallic symbols (Levinson, 1968, p. 506)." Levinson (1968) recalled that the mere sensation caused by petting a cat may bring about a sexual tinge. It is known that cats are able to arouse sexual sensations (Stekel, 1959). Furthermore, the cat is often a formalized, safe expression in some narcissistic women of the phallic wish (Schwartz & Rosenberg, 1955). The dog, however, represents faithfulness and good companionship (Hunt, 1970).

Levinson (1968, p. 506) reported the existence of a "plethora of studies of animal symbolism in anthropology, art, mythology, religion, and psycho-analysis (Aymar, 1956; Dale-Green, 1963; Leach, 1961)." Unfortunately, however, relatively few controlled psychological studies have been done that relate the animal and his symbolic significance to

the individual and his daily life. Levinson (1968) attributed some of the children and adults to a study of projective protocols on tests, such as drawings (Hammer, 1958), the Children's Apperception Test (CAT) (Haworth, 1966), and the Rorschach (Ledwith, 1959).

Hartley and Shames (1959) studies a small sampling of great dane and chihuahua owners. Results indicated that traits like masculinity, power, strength, dominance, and virility were symbolized by the great dane while the chihuahua symbolized feminine qualities and attributes. Children on the Animal Association Test, tend to associate adults with large animals (Goldfarb, 1945). The children frequently made aggressive animal-cruel adult and domestic animal-kind adult associations. Results from other controlled tests indicate that a cow and a deer are associated with kind loving mother, that small animals were associated with children (Buss & Durkee, 1957). The projection of a particular animal figure in the Rorschach Test--in it animals are usually seen as males rather than as females--reflects certain other underlying personality traits (Gill, 1957; Phillips & Smith, 1953). Goldfried and Kissel (1963), in confirming some of Phillips and Smith's findings, indicated that "some allowance had to be made for the individual's age and cultural background (Levinson, 1968, p. 507)."

Projective questions relating to what animals a person would most like and least like to be if he were not a human being tend to be revealing of the personality. The subject's unconscious choice

discloses some of his psychological strengths and weaknesses (David, 1955; David & Leach, 1957; Kaplan & Calden, 1967).

The Role of Pets

The literature concerning man and his interpersonal relationships with pets tends to divide into four general categories: people, adults, families, and children. [These are rather arbitrary categories, but they consist of a common denominator: all are composed of humans, each possess innate and acquired fears, needs, emotions.] Man's reliance on, love for, and fear of animals in general, and pets in particular, varies according to his needs, age, status, and mental and physical health. It is evident from a study of literature that this reliance, love, and fear interrelate and interact between humans of the different categories. The human-animal relationships, however, are differentiated in their intensity, significance, and their endurance among the various categories.

In all the categories the "human-animal" relationships vary from an occasional 'cuff' to the most tender solicitude, depending on the needs of the person involved. Usually none of the customary inhibitions to limit or restrain the affections extends to this relationship as it does between humans in our society (Bossard, 1944).

Many human interest stories, some illustrating usual animal-owner relationships, exist about people and their pets. One story involves Adolf Hitler's relationship with his dog, Blondie. Hitler, a

man who had millions of humans murdered and countless of his followers assassinated would risk his life leaving his bunker during the last weeks of World War II to air his beloved pet (Szasz, 1968). Another example concerns Plato, a pet dog, who continually embarrassed its owners by being a kleptomaniac (Mendelsohn, 1968). Margaret Truman (1969) told that after the death of Willie Lincoln it took the interaction of Abe's son's two pet goats to finally turn the White House into a "happy bedlam."

The adult, as he enters old age, is confronted by "new developmental problems and at the same time . . . problems which date from infancy and childhood (Levinson, 1968, p. 514)." He experiences, among other things, loss of status, death of friends and relative, previously repressed asocial behavior, depression, and somatic complaints. These reactionary experiences may be alleviated by " . . . the necessity of caring for a pet. There is an urgent need in the aged individual for someone to love, for someone who may be waiting for one's homecoming, and for someone to feel responsible for (Levinson, 1968, p. 514)." Often one of the rewards of having loved dogs all one's life is that a person can be spared of lonely old age as a result of his continuing affection for a dog (Joseph, 1956). In addition, a pet may prevent an aged person from developing a serious personality disorder. The oldster, like the child, may consider an animal such an integral part of his world that he indulges in anthropomorphism. A pet that was an unconscious 'totem' in childhood may serve the same

purpose in the old age (Levinson, 1969). "This is something of a reversal of what may happen in childhood, in which the trend is from being interested in pets to enlarging one's interest and becoming more interested in people (Levinson, 1968, p. 514)."

The pet's role in the family depends upon familial structure, its members, their physical strengths and weaknesses, the emotional undercurrents, and the social climate (Levinson, 1968). Often in a family crisis, the pets, by offering love, affection, and unconditional acceptance, act as a stabilizer.

A family's dynamics and ~~sub-culture~~ change when a pet is adopted. The interaction within the family weakens while the psychological potential is being reconstructed. Pets appear to bring about certain attention to the symbiotic relationships between the child and his mother, their emotion is then redirected toward the pet (Levinson, 1968). The family may participate in discussions of the dog. Today, as families become more and more mobile, as their mores change, as the family members lead increasingly more disparate lives, often the only uniting agent is the family pet. "This may be the only activity in which they are equals and about which they see eye to eye (Levinson, 1970, p. 1760)." The child may relate better to his family and the pet by learning the necessities of enduring inconveniences for one who he loves (Bossard & Boll, 1966).

Pets seem to support the emotional climate and mental hygiene of a family. Bossard (1944) studied 37 families which kept dogs as

pets. Through observations, case studies, and interviews, it was found that the dog was valuable to the family members by meeting each one's needs for security and companionship.

Interestingly enough, the pet becomes more a member of the family as the family's socio-economic level rises. In the middle and upper levels the pet is allowed to eat in the dining room and sleep in the bedroom, while in lower-class families the pet becomes a "working" animal--"the guardian of the home and the protector of the family (Levinson, 1968, p. 512)." A cat, dog, or other large animal is usually thought of as family property, while a turtle, fish, or other small animal is considered the child's property.

Sometimes a pet becomes more important than individual family members. Occasionally, a pet, acquired by an adult before marriage, plays the symbolic role of an in-law. If the married couple does not adapt to the idiosyncracies of the pet, the marriage might not survive (Disney, 1967). One mother admitted she was less upset by her father's death than she was by her dog's death (Jungreis & Speck, 1965). Often, a parent compensates for a child's death by treating a pet as if it were a child (Friedman, 1965). In some cases where a man dies after a lengthy illness, leaving his pet dog, the widow, attempting to compensate for guilt associated with the illness, becomes attached to the dog. However, if the husband is the survivor, he frequently finds memories associated with the pet so painful that he has the dog killed (Levinson, 1968).

Pets play a significant role in the mental and physical development of a child, especially during the child's first seven years. "A child must identify himself with a living creature before he may begin to wish to live in this world. The child learns how to relate through body activities (Levinson, 1970, p. 1761). "In infants this relating usually comes about through body contacts with mothers. However, specially trained pets--"soft, cuddly, succorant, yielding, and always present"--can also serve this need for body contact (Levinson, 1970, p. 1761). In the second six months of life, infants become aware of those around them. They need what scientists call a "transitional object" to serve as a bridge between themselves and the outside world. Soft, cuddly pets will help children resolve their security problems (Levinson, 1970, p. 1761). These pets may, as they become the children's constant companion, serve to lessen their anxieties by providing the continuity needed to develop trust in their world and in themselves. In one to two-year-old children "the pet may begin to play the role of a nonjudgmental acceptant friend that will tend to lessen the child's anxiety and thus avoid any incipient emotional difficulty (Levinson, 1970, p. 1762)." Children from two to seven years old live in an egocentric world in which only love or hate exist. To these children pets are trusted friends.

Children often fantasize about animals and endow them with human characteristics (Levinson, 1968). In a child's fantasy, the animals assume various roles in the family life and activity; thus, to

a child, a disliked and restrictive parent might seem similar to an aggressive animal and the tolerant parent similar to a kind animal (Bender, 1952). Children, it is well known, often state they have become animals in their make-believe play with pets (Stekel, 1959). This is one of the child's outlets for childhood problems. Children feel anger, sorrow, and remorse, and many think their pets do, also. Other children, when their pets do wrong, think they too can differentiate between right and wrong, and believe their pets should be punished. Sometimes pets have accidents but are not punished by the children's parents. Thus, children learn to "accept ambivalence as being part of any human relationship (Levinson, 1970, p. 1762)."

Since a child may be afraid of his pet at the beginning of their relationship, adjustments must occur. The child, if he can identify with the pet, may begin to love it (A. Freud, 1937). By identifying with this living animal the child may feasibly incorporate the pet's strength. He can be the master and issue orders to his pet (Bolton, 1948). No longer will the parents size and strength be overpowering (Levinson, 1968). Caplan (1951) thought children readily identify with pets as companions because they satisfy the children's needs to control and direct parent substitutes to which they can also be close.

Through love of his pet, the child forgets himself, becomes cognizant of reality and nature, and learns mutual trust and confidence, thus creating for his future and self-awareness. In other words, he learns the ability to master his world (Levinson, 1970). Szasz (1968)

concluded that want and loving kindness may coexist if a child can use his pet as just one more outlet for his spontaneous and uninhibited expression of emotions. Such co-existence will not be possible if the child is compelled to love an animal in lieu of having a human relationship.

A child can develop a positive self-concept through his successful, rewarding handling of a pet. "The child's self, i. e., the child's inner world, will then become a comfortable, pleasant one. This self will then be able to accept new learning in a positive fashion, reject undesirable experiences, and incorporate desirable ones (Levinson, 1970, p. 1763)." Peer-group recognition and acceptance of the child may occur because of his pet: it might be unusual or able to perform tricks and the child, through play with his pet, may solve some of the problem involved in relating to his peers (Levinson, 1970). A child gains many things from a pet besides companionship. "It serves as a source of ego-satisfaction and ego-gratification: it satisfies the child's desire for power and most important of all, it serves as an effective social aid (Hurlock, 1964, p. 398)."

Through identification with his pet, a child is able to learn about his own responsibilities in life. The child perceives how the pet becomes acceptable or desirable through training (Bolton, 1948). He understands that the pet is trying to be good because it wants to be loved. Thus, through identification, the child realizes that to be loved, he must love (Lorenz, 1965).

By caring for his pet, the child learns desirable aggressiveness, self-denial, and responsibility. He learns, also, what Erickson (1963) termed the principle of "mutuality". "The child and the dog learn they are mutually dependent on each other. From this dependence later develops the strength to take, to give, and to share. The child learns to accept his animal's self, one of the causes of his unconscious fears (Levinson, 1968, p. 508)."

In America, children depend on pet animals for a sense of permanance and security which their over-permissive parents cannot give them. An adult may have betrayed a child's trust and love. When a child acquires a pet, he readily realizes, however, that a dog can be trusted not to betray its master. Through the pet, the child may again transfer feelings of trust to the adult and create a significant human relationship (Szasz, 1968).

Other processes of learning transpire because of the child's pet relationship. When the animal is sick, it is taken to the veterinarian, given medicine, and restricted in its activities. A child, when he is ill, is better able to follow the doctor's orders and to do what he must to get well because of his identification with his pet.

Animals are often altered. The significance of these alterations and the reason a male dog runs after a female dog in heat are easily explainable to a child (Bossard, 1944). He is able to understand sex differences and the normality of elimination.

Bereavement and its resulting insecurity, anxiety, fear, distrust, and physical discomfort is frequently one of the most traumatic experiences in a child's life (Arthur & Kemme, 1964). Through association with his pet the child can often undergo a wholesome mourning experience. The child is frequently able to understand and accept the inevitability and the finality of death through the loss of pets who usually have short life spans. By replacing a deceased pet with a new pet, the child perceives that life must go on as it does following a human death (Levinson, 1968).

Child-pet relationships have undesirable aspects; also pet-child sibling rivalry may manifest itself (Chapman, 1946; Moskin, 1965). Anger might be redirected from his parents, siblings or peers toward the pet (Levinson, 1968). Menninger (1951) reported that the child may act out on the pet undesirable passions for his mother or sister. Sometimes "a zoanthropic fixation" develops as a result of childhood experiences with animals becoming fixated (Stekel, 1959).

Available statistics, based on studies of the different interests of boys and girls, reveal significant preferences, trends, declines, and aversion. The Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association (1967) sighted the presence of 24.7 million dogs and 20 million cats as pets in American homes. A study by Amatora (1960) of 629 pre-adolescent boys and girls and their interests found that for 17.6 per cent of fifth grade boys, animals were the first, second, or third choice of interest, but that for only 12.2 per cent of sixth grade

boys, did animals hold the same corresponding interest. Of the fifth grade girls, 15.7 per cent indicated animals as first, second, or third choice of interest; the choice declines to 13 per cent for sixth grade girls. The overall pet sequence of preference for boys was dogs, horses, birds, and cats; while the order changed to horses, dogs, cats, and then birds for girls. Levinson (1968) found active interest in pets declined in adolescent boys and surmised an increasing importance in heterosexual interests. He found also that the dog is preferred more often than any other animal by most groups.

Pet and Mental Hygiene

Pets--used as therapeutic agents--" . . . can play an important role in mental hygiene today . . . " (Levinson, 1970, p. 1760). Children and adults, through viable relationships with pets, may establish and perpetuate healthy peer rapport and identification. In instances where incipient mental disorders, maladjustments, or sexual perversions exist or where professional thereapeutic help is required, pets again assume significant positions.

The pet's role is more specifically defined with children who have special problems. The "playing out" of attitudes toward a pet animal will give the therapist in psychotherapy many clues to the child's conflict and, thus will facilitate treatment. Hopefully, research in understanding animals and their significance to human beings will become so advanced that one day doctors will be able to prescribe pets

of a certain kind for different emotional disturbances (Szasz, 1968). Helping to further knowledge of pet-human relationships and emotional disturbances was Skeezer, the "resident canine" at the University of Michigan's Children's Hospital. She was the companion to some 50 children, age six to fourteen years undergoing inpatient treatment at Children's Psychiatric Hospital in Ann Arbor. Authorities at the hospital claim that Skeezer tried not to show favorites among the children; however, she instinctively knew which children were extremely depressed or sick and spent her time next to their bedsides. Dr. Steward M. Finch, director of the children's psychiatric service, recalled "many of our youngsters enter the hospital suffering from disturbed relationships with both people and animals. In some instances, the first sign of progress has been noted in their relationships with Skeezer (Dishon, 1970, p. 16)." As a child relates to pets such as Skeezer he can be caught off guard, and the psychodiagnostician can observe the child in action (Levinson, 1966). It is through such productive play that communication with the child is established (A. Freud, 1951). "In summary, this working through with the therapist and the pet becomes a crucial experience that helps the child change his personality so that it becomes more open (Levinson, 1970, p. 1764)."

Levinson (1970) stated that a decided effort should be made to introduce pets into such places as hospitals, nursing homes, homes for the elderly, even prisons. Brill and Thomas (1965) commented

that the directors of children's homes have recognized the importance of their children keeping pets. They felt it compensated for some of the deficits involved in being separated from their own families.

Pets utilized in residential treatment centers should "become part of the entire therapeutic milieu." This interaction was achieved by "allowing the child to select the pet by letting him consider it his own, and permitting it to eat, sleep, and attend school with him (Levinson, 1968, p. 517)." Children, particularly those who have been institutionalized a long time, need quite a bit of stimulation in sensory areas such as vision and hearing. Provision of an active pet stimulates the child and forces him to become active, and develop more interest in his surroundings (Levinson, 1970).

There are two interrelated aspects of pet therapy: one is the use of the pet by the clinician in his office and the other is the introduction of the pet into a child's home (Levinson, 1970). The child is more able to project unacceptable feelings upon a pet than upon a human (Levinson, 1962). The pet, to be a responsive, effective agent in this therapeutic relationship, must meet several criteria: it must be quickly responsive and enthusiastic to the child's timidity, or the disturbed child may feel rejected; it must be sensitive to and able to take abuse from the child. For this disturbed child-pet relationship, a dog is a highly satisfactory agent. By representing no threat of emotional entanglement and by satisfying the child's need for physical contact, the pet serves the child and the therapist.

When a pet is used for therapeutic purposes in the family, thoughtful preparation and consideration must be taken by the therapist and the family so that the proper pet is selected. With careful selection, a beneficial rapport between the pet and the emotionally disturbed child may be achieved. Thus, it is hoped that feelings of love, warmth, and protectiveness toward the pet may be aroused in the disturbed child (Levinson, 1968). Later, the child may again transfer feelings of love and trust to humans from whom he may have withdrawn.

An interesting aspect of the animal-human relationships is the increasingly important and significant role played by the veterinarian. No longer can he treat only the health of the family pet, he now becomes involved in the mental health of the family whose pet he treats (Levinson, 1968). Levinson observed that the emotional relationship between a pet and his master is deeply rooted, and it is the veterinarian who has the opportunity of observing this interplay best. The veterinarian ordinarily can: (a) advise the family on the pet best suited to their needs; (b) be available for treatment of the animal; (c) notice symptoms of emotional disturbance, when observing the behavior of people towards pets. If properly trained in the behavioral sciences, the veterinarian can also: (a) advise parents in situations involving children and their pets; (b) provide help to people in emotional situations resulting from the deaths of pets; (c) or enable parents to perceive that their children by correctly and lovingly caring for pets old and sick, will develop insight into and respect for old age, its infirmities and problems.

Pet Prevalence and Pet Criteria

The number of domestic animals, ranging from a lion cub to a copperhead snake, that might be included as household pets is tremendous (Bossard, 1944). Hurlock (1964, p. 398) stated "while young children like pets of all types--hamsters, mice, rabbits, turtles, chameleons, or birds--the older child gains little satisfaction from pets that do nothing to show their affection or hold the child's interest."

The number of pet dogs, cats, and caged birds in homes throughout America is close to one hundred million now and steadily increasing (Consumer Bulletin, 1969). The dog population is growing twice as fast as the human population in the United States (Szasz, 1968). Fifty-seven per cent of American dogs are owned by people with an annual income of \$7,000 and over, 34 per cent by people earning \$3,000-\$7,000, and nine per cent by people earning \$3,000 or less. Forty-five per cent of all single-dog homes and 41 per cent of all multi-dog homes have incomes of over \$7,000 (Szasz, 1968).

Research reveals that a variety of reasons or criteria affect selection of animals as pets. For example, a dog might be selected as a pet for small children, as a companion, and as a watch-dog (Changing Times, 1968). A dog is a silent, yet responsive, patient, uncritical, seemingly appreciative, and a faithful companion. Since he is unable to speak, he never argues nor says the wrong thing (Bossard, 1944).

Cats, on the other hand, are described as being single-minded-- the most highly individual of animals (Rosenberg, 1958). They are egocentric and show little affection, compared to the dog who is capable of showing great affection (Hurlock, 1964). Thus, animal personality is a pet criterion.

Animal intelligence is another interesting criterion. Hunt (1970) stated that dogs are not particularly brilliant, but seem to be more intelligent than many other pets. Dogs are smarter than cats, as are sheep, goats, rabbits, birds, and rats, while horses are among the least intelligent of all domestic animals.

Other important considerations in the choice of a family pet include the animal's temperament, sex, and size, the family mobility, the ages of the children as well as of the animal in the family, and the traits of specific breeds (Craster, 1968). The cost of feeding which will vary is also a criterion (Consumer Bulletin, 1969). Dogs and cats may be members of families 10-15 years so the pet choice by the family should include this consideration (Sullinger, 1960).

Exploitations and Need-Creators

The pet business has grown from a one billion dollar business in 1962 to a two billion dollar business in 1968. Dog food sales are growing twice as fast as the average grocery store product and cat food sales even faster. Clothing, as well as a multitude of accessories, health and accident insurance, funeral parlors, cemeteries, and

computer services are available to a pet owner or prospect (Forbes, 1968). Established companies such as Trans World Airlines cater to the sophisticated dog and cat. New businesses which offer such services as pet analysis, palmistry, and horoscopes especially for dogs and cats are developing (Szasz, 1968; Tresillians, 1967). Pet napping in New York alone amounted to a 20 to 50 million dollar business in 1968 (Szasz, 1968).

Summary

The domestication of animals by primitive man was for utilitarian purposes, while domestication later was allied with the more social, decorative, and costly animals used for personal recognition (Szasz, 1968). Dogs and cats were especially associated with religious beliefs and symbols of status (Levinson, 1968; Lewis, 1963; Sloan & Farquhar, 1925). Drawings and writings throughout history have revealed man's relationship with his animals (Levinson, 1968).

Mythology, anthropology, psychology, art, and religion yield evidence of the symbolic nature of animals (S. Freud, 1960; Levinson, 1968; Stekel, 1959). Specifically animals are associated with sexuality, dominance, cruelty and kindness, as well as other psychological strengths and weaknesses.

The roles that animals perform in their relationships with man vary (Bossard, 1944; Szasz, 1968; Truman, 1969). The needs of the of the specific human being and his interrelationship with domesticated

animals are dependent upon his own stage of development and his family structure (Amatora, 1960; Levinson, 1968). Pets play significant roles in the everyday involvement of children as well as during their periods of trauma (Disney, 1967; Jungreis & Speck, 1965; Levinson, 1970).

Within mental hygiene there is a newly recognized area for human-pet involvement. Pets in psychiatric hospitals, nursing homes, residential centers and prisons are becoming more common (Dishon, 1970; Brill & Thomas, 1965; Levinson, 1966). The therapeutic value of animal-human relationships perhaps is not new per se, but only recently has it been recognized as significant.

The type and number of pets in American homes has reached tremendous numbers, and evidence shows it is gaining (Szasz, 1968). The criteria for choosing pets includes such areas as intelligence, temperment, sex, and size (Changing Times, 1968; Consumer Bulletin, 1969; Szasz, 1968).

To accommodate man's continuing association with his pets, the business community has developed both merchandise and merchandising to meet the demand. Companies catering to human status symbols and animal "needs" are increasingly common (Szasz, 1968).

There appears to be a significant gap in child research surrounding the area of mother-child perceptions of the specific role performed by the most common of household pets, the dog and cat.

Therefore, it would seem extremely important to examine the function that these predominant pets perform in the contemporary household.

The results of such a study may help delineate the reasons for the numerous animals in modern American households.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURE

Selection of Subjects

The subjects consisted of 37 children attending the Colorado State University Laboratory preschool and their mothers. The children ranged in age from 3 years 9 months to 5 years 9 months. The subjects included 18 girls and 19 boys.

Description of the Instruments

Two instruments were used: a questionnaire for the mother, and an interview with her child.

The questionnaire. The questionnaire was handed by the researcher directly to the mothers as they arrived at the preschool with their children. The questions pertained to: (a) background information (age and number of siblings, information concerning past or present pet ownership within the family), (b) the determination of attitudes of the mothers toward pets in general and dogs and cats specifically, (c) the role of the mothers and the child as they perceive the pet, (d) the significance of the sex of the child in the mothers' selection of a specific pet, (e) fears associated with pets held by the

child, and those evidenced by the mother, and (f) the presence of imaginary companions.

The interview. The interview schedule was in the form of simple and direct questions during a relatively unstructured play period (see Appendix B), and held in the private office within the preschool. The administrator, as a graduate assistant in the preschool, attempted to establish adequate rapport with each subject before individual questioning. The interview form was followed and allowed for flexibility through neutral responses from the interviewer such as: "Tell me more about it", "Why do you think that's true?", "Why do you feel that way?" Comments were recorded by the tester on forms in the presence of the children and also on a small tape recorder. Questions asked the child related to: (a) their comprehension of the terms pet, dog, cat, in order to establish a base line for comprehension; (b) the attitudes they maintained concerning the animal's role; and (c) the degree of experience the child has had with pets. The interview took place prior to the administration of the questionnaire in order to control for parental bias of the child's responses.

Due to time limitations no attempt was made to conduct a pilot study whereby validity and reliability co-efficients could be established. However, a small sample (5) of neighborhood children were interviewed previous to final revision of the interview.

Analysis of Data

The data from the children's interviews and from the mothers' questionnaires were analyzed to examine each of the following hypotheses:

1. There will be significant statistical difference between the prevalence of dogs and cats and any other pet in the preschooler's family.
2. There will be no significant statistical difference between the mother's fear and her pre-school child's fear of dogs and cats.
3. There will be no significant statistical difference between the selection of pets or of non-pets as children's imaginary companions.

The single-variable application of the chi-square was used to test the significance of null hypothesis number one. This statistical technique was utilized to determine the difference between the observed number of cases falling into each category, and the expected number of cases, based on the null hypothesis. The formula for this test is:

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^k \frac{(f_o - f_e)^2}{f_e}$$

f_o = the observed number in a given category

f_e = the expected number in that category

$\sum_{i=1}^k$ = directs the tester to sum this ratio over all k categories

Hypotheses two and three were tested by chi-square analysis.

This statistical test was employed because these hypotheses dealt with two or more nominal categories in which data consisted of a tabulated frequency count which was placed in appropriate cells. The following formula (herewith shown with 1 degree of freedom) was used to calculate the chi square of the discrete data. Findings were all tested at the .05 level of significance.

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{j=1}^a \sum_{i=1}^b \left[\frac{(\phi_{ij} - E_{ij})^2}{E_{ij}} \right]$$

d.f. = (a-1) (b-1)

N = grand total of table (i.e., number of observations)

ri = total of the ith row

cj = total of the jth column

$E_{ij} = \frac{(ri)(cj)}{N}$

a = number of columns

b = number of rows

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The Subjects

The subjects for this investigation consisted of 37 mother-child pairs, with the child ranging in age from three years nine months to five years nine months. Of these children tested, 18 were girls and 19 were boys.

The Findings

The findings of the study are discussed in relation to each of the hypotheses investigated to ascertain the role and function that dogs and cats fulfill as pets in families with preschool-age children.

The Analysis

The analysis for hypothesis one was the single-variable application of the chi-square contingency table. Findings were tested at the .05 level of significance.

Hypothesis one: There will be no significant statistical difference between the prevalence of dogs and cats and any other pet in the pre-schooler's family.

$$H_0 = P_1 = P_2 = P_3 = P_4$$

$$(P_1=\text{dog}) (P_2=\text{cat}) (P_3=\text{other}) (P_4=\text{none})$$

$$H_A: P_1 \neq P_2 \neq P_3 \neq P_4$$

TABLE I

GOODNESS OF FIT TEST FOR PET TYPES**

Frequencies	Dogs	Cats	Other	None
Observed	18	8	2	9
Expected	9.25	9.25	9.25	9.25

** .01

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^k \frac{(f_o - f_e)^2}{f_e}$$

$$\chi^2 = 14.13514$$

$$\Pr \left[\chi^2_{(3)} \geq 14.13514 \right] = .00273$$

$$\text{d.f.} = 3$$

This hypothesis then is rejected on the statistical results of the single-variable application of the chi-square test. The results of this analysis showed dogs to be the preferred pet at the .01 level of

significance. Dogs exceeded the expected number, the prevalence of cats was slightly below the expected. Other pets were significantly below the predicted amount and the condition of no pets approximated the probability level.

Hypothesis two: There will be no significant statistical difference between the mother's fear and her pre-school child's fear of dogs and cats.

Contingency table 2 illustrates the cross tabulation of the two variables (mother's fear of dogs and cats, and children's fear of dogs and cats) based on the mothers' data. The calculated chi-square value testing mother's and child's fear of dogs and cats was .71215 with 1 degree of freedom, not statistically significant at the .05 level. The null hypothesis therefore was not rejected.

TABLE 2

CONTINGENCY TABLE OF MOTHER'S FEAR OF
DOGS AND CATS VS. CHILDREN'S FEAR OF DOGS AND CATS*

Category	Fearful Children	Non-fearful Children	Total
Fearful Mothers	3	4	7
Non-fearful Mothers	18	22	30
Total	11	26	37

* .05

Hypothesis three: There will be no significant statistical difference between the selection of pets or non-pets as children's imaginary companions.

The total sample of 37 subjects revealed 17 children had imaginary companions. According to the mothers' reports, three of these children had pets as imaginary companions, and 14 children had non-pets as imaginary companions.

Statistical analysis on this information revealed the chi-square value to be 7.11 with 1 degree of freedom. These findings indicated that children more often chose non-pets as imaginary companions. The null hypothesis therefore, was rejected at the .01 level of significance. Table 3 presents the observed and expected frequencies relative to the selection of pets and non-pets as imaginary companions.

TABLE 3

GOODNESS OF FIT TEST FOR CHILDREN'S SELECTION
OF PETS AND NON PETS AS IMAGINARY COMPANIONS**

Frequencies	Pet as imaginary companions	Non pets as imaginary companions
Observed	3	14
Expected	8.5	8.5

** .01

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^k \frac{(f_o - f_e)^2}{f_e}$$

$$\chi^2 = 7.11$$

$$\Pr \left[\chi^2_{(1)} \geq 7.11 \right] \leq .01$$

Related Findings from the Children's Interview
and the Mothers' Questionnaire

The interview. A frequency count revealed 84 per cent of the children tested were able to verbalize what a pet was. When questioned by the interviewer if a dog or a cat was a pet, 94.6 per cent of the subjects responded positively that both dogs and cats were pets.

The following areas were cross tabulated with the mothers' questionnaires to determine if there was agreement between the children's and mothers' responses.

1. A chi-square analysis revealed children are knowledgeable about their own pet possession. Cross tabulation of the mother-child responses concerning pets presently a part of the family structure were significant at a level of $< .005$.
2. Mothers and children were in agreement as to types of animals which presently are the child's pet, and what kinds of animals have previously been pets of the child. Employing the chi-square test to their responses the .001 level of significance was obtained.
3. Testing the relationship between mothers' and children's responses concerning specific types of pets and mothers' concept of 'favorite' pets

and children's concept of 'favorite' pets were related, the level of significance was .001.

The children were categorized by sex and by possession. The responses were classified by specific pet types. Sex of the child was significantly related to pet type at the .05 level of statistical significance. Table 4 reports that pets (dogs specifically) were most popular among girls. Pets other than dogs and cats were more prevalent among the animals possessed by the male subjects, i.e., gerbals, fish.

TABLE 4

PET POSSESSION BY PRE-SCHOOL
BOYS AND GIRLS*

Pets	Boys	Girls
Dogs	3	8
Cats	2	4
Other	8	6
None	6	0
Total	19	18

* .05

Children were asked, "Do you like your pet?", "Is your pet good or bad?", "Do you miss your pet when you're at school?" The responses to these items were employed to determine the relationship between the child and his or her pet. The results of the statistical

analysis revealed that children did like the pet they had, they felt the pet was "good" as opposed to "bad", and they did miss the pet when they were away. Statistically, the chi-square analysis revealed the statistical significance of these findings at the .02, .01, and .02 levels respectively.

Dogs were not only the most prevalent pet possessed by the pre-school subjects, but were considered the avored pet as indicated by the children's responses, significant at the .01 level. Of the nine subjects not possessing a pet, four responded positively when asked by the interviewer if they would like a pet, five had no response or a negative reply. All four subjects having positive replies rated dogs as their first preference, if they would or could have a pet.

The questionnaire. In accordance with the mothers' questionnaire, pets were found to be related to family rather than child ownership. Three mothers indicated that the pet was the possession of the individual child; two considered possession to be shared between the child and the family; and 23 mothers considered pet possession to be solely the family's. The level of significance attained was .02.

Related, but not statistically significant, were mothers' replies to the questions concerning the ideal pets for three to five year-old

girls and boys. Responses were divided between cats and dogs. There did not appear to be a trend in selecting one animal over and above another. Table 5 yields the response frequencies.

TABLE 5

IDEAL PETS FOR THREE- TO FIVE- YEAR-OLD BOYS AND GIRLS

Mothers' responses	Ideal pets for boys		Ideal pets for girls	
	Cats	Dogs	Cats	Dogs
Yes	12	27	18	22
No	16	2	11	5
No Response	9	8	8	10

Ninety per cent of the mothers reportedly had pets as a child, by actual count 33 of the 37. Of the 33 mothers indicating pet possession as a child, only three, or nine per cent designated by their replies that they did not have a dog, or cat, or both a dog and cat at some time.

Mothers were asked if their child had any fears of dogs and cats. Their responses to this question were used to determine if there was any relationship between the fear a child displays for cats and dogs and his possession of a pet. The results of the chi-square analysis were statistically significant at the .01 level indicating a definite relationship. Children, having pets of their own, evidenced less

fear of dogs and cats than did those children with no pets. The contingency table 6 indicates the tabulated numbers involved in relating children's fears of dogs and cats with their pet possession.

TABLE 6

CHILD'S FEAR OF DOGS AND CATS VS. CHILD'S
POSSESSION OF PETS**

	Children with pets	Children without pets	Total
Children fearing dogs and cats	5	6	11
Children not fearing dogs and cats	23	3	26
Total	28	9	37

** .01

Two questions on the mothers' questionnaires were concerned with their children's attitudes relating to pet manipulation and understanding. The response to the first question concerning whether the child was loving or rough with pet resulted in the responses presented in table 7. None of the statistical analysis associated with pet manipulation yielded significant results, however.

TABLE 7

FREQUENCY OF CHILD'S MANIPULATION AND
UNDERSTANDING AS REPORTED BY MOTHERS

30 Children considered loving of pets
3 Children considered rough with pets
3 Children considered both loving and rough with pets
1 Mother failed to respond

The responses to the second question concerned with mothers' evaluation of children's attitudes relating to understanding did yield significant results. When understanding or unconcern for their pets was investigated and statistically varied with children's fear of dogs and cats, it was found that children so categorized by their mothers as 'understanding' of their pets had less fear of dogs and cats. The level of significance for this analysis was .01. Table 8 presents the data related to these variables.

TABLE 8

CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR PETS VS. THEIR
FEAR OF DOGS AND CATS**

	Children with an understanding of their pets	Children without an understanding of their pets	No Response	Total
Children fearing dogs and cats	5	1	5	11
Children not fearing dogs and cats	24	1	1	26
Total	29	2	6	37

** .01

The investigator anticipated examining more closely the differences between mothers' and pre-school children's perception of the role of the family pet. However due to the instruments used, the data relating to this issue was of a descriptive nature which prevented a statistical analysis. Table 9 presents the frequency response based on the replies of the children when asked what they do or would do with a dog or cat.

TABLE 9

CHILDREN'S FREQUENCY RESPONSE ON THE
ROLE OF THE FAMILY PET

Children's comment	Frequency
To play with	18
To love and care for	14
To feed	10
Varied other responses (i. e., "take to vet's" "to build a dog house for")	13

Table 10 presents the mothers' comments relating to the function of the child's first pet and his favorite pet.

TABLE 10

MOTHERS' SCALE OF CONTRASTS ON
THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY PET

Mothers' Comment	First Pet	Favorite Pet
Unnoticed by the child	9	0
A companion for him	11	17
A playmate	16	23
A nuisance	3	2
Temperamental	6	2
Even tempered	17	20
Affectionate	17	22
Unaffectionate	5	1
Beneficial in initiating the child's responsibility	11	10
Not effective in developing his responsibility	15	10
Relatively expensive to maintain	2	3
Relatively inexpensive to maintain	24	21
Convenient for the family to have	18	18
A brother for the family to have	6	4

Some of the prominently stated desirable qualities of pets, as reported by the mothers, were: gentleness, patience, and tolerability of small children; companionship, and mutually affectionate; even tempered, and lovable. From the mothers' aspect too, there was the desirable quality of ease in caring for the pet. Other than the opposites to these specifics as undesirable qualities, size (either too large, or too fragile), expense of maintenance, and conditions associated with allergies were the main responses of the mothers. A pet that does not scratch, and is "good", were the most popular criteria of quality given for a pet by the children. Children reported biting, as the most undesirable characteristic of a pet.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The first hypothesis, that there would be no difference between the prevalence of dogs and cats and any other pet in the preschooler's family, was rejected on the statistical results of the single variable application of the chi-square test. Dogs were definitely the preferred pet, as indicated by their prevalence in homes of the preschool children. Cats by number, were the second choice pet.

The prevalence of dogs among the preschool children was expected by the writer. This substantiates the findings of Consumer Bulletin (1969), Szasz (1968), and The Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association (1967) in their reports of dog population and popularity. Cats are described as individual, independent, less affectionate and single-minded (Rosenberg, 1958). Findings from the present study provided definite support for the variety of previous studies that indicated dogs as the most prevalent of pets, and cats the second most prevalent. Other pets within the sample examined were: ants, birds, butterflies, fish, gerbils, goats, guinea pigs, hamsters, horses, snakes, and turtles.

Interestingly, pets (dogs specifically) were most popular among girls, while pets other than dogs and cats were more prevalent among the animals possessed by the boys. Boys may be encouraged to be

more adventuresome and exploratory of the out-of-doors. Such freedoms may offer them a greater opportunity for a broader selection of pets, i. e., discovering snakes, ants, butterflies, etc.

Hurlock (1964) stated that children gain more satisfaction from pets that show affection than those that do little to hold the child's interest. It would seem that this might account for the increasing popularity of dogs and cats as a whole over such pets as turtles, birds, and fish.

Preschool children are cognizant of pets and have had some experience and association with dogs and cats in particular. These findings indicated that children even in their very early period of life, can and do assimilate realistic aspects of animals. They are aware of the pets which are currently in the home and many were capable not only of recalling animal names, but specific attributes of animals which were previously a part of the home.

Positive attitudes were maintained by the children for their past or present pet. Regardless of the choice of pets, children appeared to relate positively to the types similar to the pets they had. Children indicated their pets were "liked" and "good", and that they did miss the animal while away at school. To these children, pets were trusted friends. Perhaps their limited experiences within a short time span influenced their feelings of comparison. Levinson (1970) states that for the young child a pet plays the role of a nonjudging friend, and the children's responses in this study lend support to this explanation.

This writer found it interesting when children chose to comment further on their separation from the pet. Some told of kissing the animal goodbye, of its crying, and also of the loneliness encountered by the pet on their departure. Additionally, some were concerned that the pet might "run away." These overall descriptive comments of the children suggested a possible projection of their own separation anxieties on to the pet. This is consistent with Piaget's notion of the pre-school child's ego centric, centered thinking that does not allow him to take the role of the other, but directs him to impart to individuals and objects his interpretation of the world (1926).

Findings seemed to indicate that activities associated with pet possession included a variety of areas. Among the children's responses, the most popular was that a pet is a playmate. Table 9 contains the frequency count on the children's perception of the role of the family pet. Table 10 indicates that mothers also tend to view the pet in the playmate role.

The findings concerning stated desirable qualities of pets reported by mothers and children, were consistent with the data on this perceived role of the pet (pages 42-43). Children indicated animals were "to play with", "love and care for", and "to feed". Mothers viewed the pet as the child's playmate. Therefore, findings describing desired characteristics of pets as gentle, patient, tolerant of small children, and even-tempered are consistent with the perceived role of the pet in the family.

Hypothesis two, relating mothers' fear and children's fear of dogs and cats, showed no statistical significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. Mothers' fear of dogs and cats was not found to be a statistically significant variable in relation to children's fear of dogs and cats according to the mothers' questionnaire response.

Fears were not significantly related in this study to breeds, sex of animals, pets presently in the home, or to pets the child wants. Children's fear of dogs and cats were not found by statistical analysis to be significantly associated to mothers' fear of dogs and cats, even though it is generally assumed that the mother is the major socializing influence during early childhood.

Fear behavior, however, was significantly related to the pet experience the child had. Table 6 illustrates a definite relationship between children's fear and pet possession. Children possessing pets had less fear of dogs and cats than did the children that did not possess dogs and cats of their own. Indications are that children, as Levinson (1968) suggested in his study, endowed their pets with human characteristics. Their pets were no longer merely moving creatures, but through identity, the child associated the animal with one of the loving and understanding members of the family. The pet may be a companion, or perhaps a subservient object to the child. Assuming that much fear behavior is elicited through conditions of the unknown (Jersild, 1968), the direct experience the child has with his pet provides him with information (knowledge) that may allay fears of the unknown qualities

of dogs and cats. Further support for this explanation is in the significant data related to the child's understanding of his pet. Fear behavior diminished with the child's understanding of the pet.

The third hypothesis, which examined pets and non pets as imaginary companions, was rejected. Analysis of the data indicated that children show a significant difference in their selection of pets and non-pets as imaginary companions. The findings indicated that children more often chose non-pets as imaginary companions. Children imagine or fantasize about what they are desirous of being or of having (Hurlock, 1964). Children assume roles during dramatic play to play out or pretend they are something or someone that they are not presently. They technically are "trying on" patterns or styles of life that they have encountered, or believe to be accurate. An imaginary companion is a part of this vision or image. When a child assumes the possession of an imaginary companion, regardless of the form, he may be filling some sort of void. In the case of a child selecting a pet in the form of an imaginary companion, there would be little need for pretence if he could experience the fulfillment of having a real animal. However, this study presents data contrary to the expectation that there

would be a greater selection of pets as imaginary companions. Table 11 illustrates imaginary companion type versus pet possession.

TABLE 11

IMAGINARY COMPANION TYPE VS. PET POSSESSION

	Imaginary Companion as a pet	Imaginary Companion as a non-pet	No Imaginary Companion
Pet Possession	2	9	7
No Pet Possession	1	5	0

One interpretation of this might be that there is no relationship between the condition of pet experience and the selection of an imaginary companion. Though it was impossible to analyze the data to support an alternative interpretation, the following explanation appears plausible. Pet ownership would provide the child with a concrete experience so that selection of an imaginary companion would not include a pet. The kinds of needs the pet fulfills are satisfied in the concrete pet experience rather than in an abstract pet experience, i. e., imaginary companion.

Conclusions

The following are conclusions based on this study that may be applicable to other similar samples.

1. There is a high incidence of pet possession in this sample and dogs are preferred pets.
2. Children can and do assimilate realistic aspects of their pets, and relate positively to types of pets that are similar to the ones they have presently or previously owned.
3. Those children who have an experience with a pet are less likely to be fearful of dogs and cats, though the effects of their mothers' fear of dogs and cats were negligible.
4. Data on the role of the pet as an imaginary companion suggested that the pet experience needs to be of a concrete tangible nature to be meaningful to young children, rather than an imaginary one.
5. Data on the role of the pet suggests a function of friendship and affection that has been evidenced in previous research.
6. Pets in families are more likely to play the role of family pets rather than the role of pets to any single family member.

Limitations of This Study

This study was limited in sample size and broad representation. It would have been more meaningful to have investigated a greater number of mother-child pairs. No attempt was made during this investigation to ascertain the cultural and socioeconomic effects of pets in relation to their role in the family; nor was there any means with this

research to determine the impact on the role of the dog or cat in the pre-schooler's family. Studies from the standpoint of a variety of human relationships need to be emphasized, i.e., self concept, reference groups. Other limitations are inherent in the procedural use of the child interview, and the questionnaires. These instruments are subject to known weaknesses, including interpretation discrepancy in recall and self report and children's lack of a sophisticated verbal ability (Cronbach, 1969). No attempt was made either to establish the reliability or validity of the instruments.

Implications for Further Research

Today's children live in an age quite different from that of parents or grandparents. This study indicates pets may play an important role in the middle-class-family structure. The time has come to recognize and define some of the main implications of research in this area. Recognizing the limitations, certain implications follow.

A larger sample of mother-child pairs need to be studied to include broad representation of social class groupings and culturally different backgrounds.

Research might explore change in the family interrelationship patterns upon the adoption of a pet. Is the pet a member of the family itself? Could this animal be a substitute guardian and/or protector of the child? Further research might explore the feasibility of pets

substituting specifically as playmates and conceivable even, substituting for children in the smaller family.

Data were incomplete in terms of analyzing pet possession in relation to the occurrence of an imaginary companion. Do children who do not possess a pet show a greater incidence of imaginary companionships?

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY

The purpose of this investigation was to determine the role and function that dogs and cats fulfill as pets in families with preschool-age children. Although much interaction within the family includes the pet, little research seemed to have dealt specifically with the roles and functions of these familiar animals. Thirty-seven children were interviewed individually to ascertain their comprehension of terminology as well as to determine their attitudes toward and experiences with pets. The criteria for the selection of these subjects were (a) children's attendance in the Colorado State University Preschool Laboratory, and (b) age between three years nine months and five years nine months.

Data were collected from the mothers through use of a questionnaire. Findings from the two were statistically analyzed to determine if there were significant relationships. The single-variable application of the chi-square was used to test the significance of null hypothesis number one. Hypotheses two and three were tested by the chi-square contingency table.

The specific hypotheses examined were:

1. There will be no significant statistical difference between the prevalence of dogs and cats and any other pet in the preschooler's family.
2. There will be no significant statistical difference between the mother's fear and her pre-school child's fear of dogs and cats.
3. There will be no significant statistical difference between the selection of pets or of non-pets as children's imaginary companions.

The first hypothesis, that there would be no difference between the prevalence of dogs and cats and any other pet in the preschooler's family, was rejected on the basis of the single variable application of the chi-square test. Dogs were revealed to be the preferred pet. Hypothesis two, relating mothers' fear and children's fear of dogs and cats, showed no statistical significance, therefore the null hypothesis was not rejected. However, statistically significant findings indicated that children who had an experience with a pet were less fearful of dogs and cats. The third hypothesis, which examined selection of pets and non-pets as imaginary companions was rejected. Statistical analysis revealed that children chose non-pets as imaginary companions more often than they did pets.

The following are conclusions based on this study that may be applicable to a similar sample.

1. There is a high incidence of pet possession in this sample and dogs are preferred pets.

2. Children can and do assimilate realistic aspects of their pets, and relate positively to types of pets that are similar to the ones they have presently or previously owned.
3. Those children who have an experience with a pet are less likely to be fearful of dogs and cats, though the effects of their mothers' fear of dogs and cats were negligible.
4. Data on the role of the pet as an imaginary companion suggested that the pet experience needs to be of a concrete tangible nature to be meaningful to young children, rather than an imaginary one.
5. Data on the role of the pet suggests a function of friendship and affection that has been evidenced in previous research.
6. Pets in families are more likely to play the role of family pets rather than the role of pets to any single family member.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER

May 1971

Dear

Under the guidance of Dr. Judith Kuipers, as part of the requirements for a Master of Home Economics Degree, I am attempting to gain insight into the role or function of the dog and/or cat in the contemporary family structure.

This letter is a request for your participation in the study. All that is asked is that you fill out the attached questionnaire and return it to me at the preschool as soon as possible.

I will also be talking to your child about pets. This interview will consist of a brief conversation at which time I will ask your child some simple questions about dogs and cats.

My research should be completed this summer and hopefully I will have an opportunity to share the results of my work at that time.

Sincerely,

Mrs. George R. Mock, Jr.

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

QUESTIONNAIRE

(To be completed by the mother)

Directions: Please fill in the blanks or check the appropriate box.

1. Child's name _____
2. Number of children in the family:
_____ Boys, their ages _____
_____ Girls, their ages _____
3. Has your child ever had a pet? Yes _____ No _____
(If No, proceed to #4)
What was his first pet? type _____, breed _____
sex _____
What other pet (pets) has he had? _____
What is his pet now? _____
Is his last or current pet: the family's _____ the child's _____?
What is (was) his favorite pet? _____

Please put a check on the appropriate lines to answer the following questions about his first and his favorite pet.

First pet was:

Favorite pet was:

_____	Unnoticed by the child	_____
_____	A companion for him	_____
_____	A playmate	_____
_____	A nuisance	_____
_____	Temperamental	_____
_____	Even tempered	_____
_____	Affectionate	_____
_____	Unaffectionate	_____

First pet was:

Favorite pet was:

Beneficial in initiating the child's responsibility

Not effective in developing his responsibility

Relatively expensive to maintain

Relatively inexpensive to maintain

Convenient for the family to have

A bother for the family to have

If per chance the first and favorite pet are the same, check here _____

Was a specific pet chosen because of the sex of your child?

Yes _____ No _____ Why? _____

Of what sex was this pet? Male _____ Female _____

4. Has your child ever wanted a pet? Yes _____ No _____

Would you consider getting him a pet? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, would you choose a: dog _____ cat _____ other _____

What are some of the characteristics of a pet that would make it desirable for your child?

.....

Would the sex of the pet be a determining factor in the choice?

Yes _____ No _____

5. Do you consider your child to be

Loving of pets

Rough with pets

Understanding of pets

Unconcerned with pets

6. I consider dogs an ideal pet for 3-5 year old boys. Yes___ No___
I consider dogs an ideal pet for 3-5 year old girls. Yes___ No___

I consider cats an ideal pet for 3-5 year old boys. Yes___ No___
I consider cats an ideal pet for 3-5 year old girls. Yes___ No___
7. Did you have a pet as a child? Yes___ No___
The pet was: dog___ cat___ other___
8. Does your child have any fears of dogs or cats? Yes___ No___
What are these? _____

9. Do you have any fears of dogs or cats? Yes___ No___
What are these? _____

10. Has your child had any imaginary companions? Yes___ No___
If yes, did the imaginary companion ever take the form of a pet
for your child? Yes___ No___

CHILD'S INTERVIEW

Child's Name _____ Age _____ Sex _____

1. What is a pet?
2. What is this? (Show pictures of dogs, then cats)
3. Is a (dog - cat) a pet?
4. What pets have you had?
5. What was your favorite pet?
6. Do you have a (dog - cat) as a pet?
(If positive proceed through f, if negative proceed to #7)
 - a. What is it's (their) name (names)?
 - b. Do you (like - not like) your (dog - cat)? Why?
 - c. What do you do with your (dog - cat)?
 - d. Is your (dog - cat) (good - bad) to you? Why?
 - e. Do you miss your (dog - cat) when you're not home? Why?
 - f. Tell me something about your (dog - cat).
7. Have you ever had a (dog - cat)?
(If negative proceed to #8)
 - g. What was it's (their) name (names)?
 - h. Did you (like - not like) your (dog - cat)? Why?
 - i. What did you do with your (dog - cat)?
 - j. Was your (dog - cat) (good - bad) to you? Why?
 - k. Someday would you like another (dog - cat)? Why?
 - l. What would you name this (dog - cat)?
(Show appropriate pet's picture)
 - m. Tell me something about this pet (dog - cat).
8. Do you know anyone with a (dog - cat)?
 - n. Do you (like - not like) the (dog - cat)? Why?
 - o. What would you like to do with the (dog - cat)? Why?

- p. Is the (dog - cat) (good - bad) to you? Why?
- q. Would you ever like a (dog - cat) of your own? Why?
- r. What would you name a (dog - cat)?
- s. Tell me something about this (dog - cat)?