

# Emotional Labor, Gender, and Social Interaction in Animal Care

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# Outline

Introduction - Animals and Society

Methods - Ethnography

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Social Facilitation

Conclusion



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# Animal Care



68% of households have a pet, up from 56% in 1988.  
60.2 million households have a dog.  
47.1 million households have a cat. (APPA 2018)

Animal care employment expected to grow much faster than average.  
(BLS 2018)

“For urbanized Westerners, the human-pet relationship is the only real relationship that most of us ever have with nonhuman animals.”  
(DeMello 2012:147)

# Methods



Animal boarding facility in northern Utah.

Ethnography - 11 Weeks from September to November, 2017 (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2014).

Worked and talked with employees 2-3 times a week, and conducted semi-structured interview.

# Gender

*BLS Labor Force Statistics from Current  
Population Survey 2018*

## **Job**

## **% Women**

Veterinary and Lab Caretakers

86.3

Animal Trainers

72.6

Nonfarm Animal Caretakers

77.6

In a study of dog rescue in Michigan - “Women dominate all its facets, from its leaders to its foot soldiers” (Markovits and Queen 2009:340).

Why is the industry so dominated by women?



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# Gender

“Men like cars . . . They don’t like jobs like this - caring for things. It’s the same reason you don’t see a lot of men in nursing. Caring isn’t in their nature.”

“I don’t know. I guess the stereotype of women being better nurturers and caregivers maybe. That they like working with animals and that kind of thing versus guys I guess. I don’t know.”

“Actually the one person who left right away was a guy. We were gonna hire a guy and he didn’t like it so, I’m not sure why.”

(In referencing the same person above) “He just wanted to play with puppies and kittens all day long. He didn’t last long.”

“Guys just don’t seem to want to come in. It’s weird.”



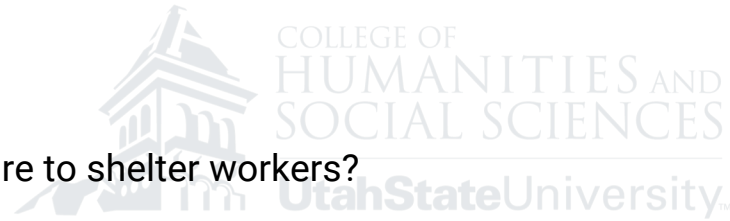
# Emotional (and Physical) Labor

Service workers are required to show (and feel) certain emotions, in addition to completing their regular tasks (Hochschild 1983).

Emotional labor required in many positions of “feminized labor” (Hochschild 2009).

Shelter work can be emotionally taxing (Arluke and Sanders 1996; Taylor 2010).

How does the emotional labor experience of boarding workers compare to shelter workers?



# Emotional Labor

3 fronts - animals, customers, coworkers.

“Yup there’s two giant holes in my leg. Let me see if she’s up to date on her rabies shots.”

“Good people don’t report dogs.”

“I need to just...correct the dog without getting frustrated myself, which is not easy sometimes.”

While interacting with the owner, “Fido had a lot of fun today!” then after they leave, “I hate Fido. He’s the biggest jerk on the planet.”

“I had problems with him at first but he had his own issues so.. He was going through his own problems at the time.”

“I’m really big on animals. . . There’s something about getting licked by a dog when you’re sad.”



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# Social Interaction

Western views of animals have shifted to viewing animals as coactors in social interaction. We routinely speak to them, with them, and for them (Arluke and Sanders 1996).

Our interactions with animals help us form our own sense of self (Irvine 2004).

“We also speak through them; sometimes people use their dog or cat as a sort of mediator to communicate information to another person” (DeMello 2012).

Animals allow for conversations and interactions that otherwise might not have occurred (Irvine 2008).

Pedestrians with dogs (certain species) elicited more smiles and conversation in an experiment (Wells 2015).

How do cared for pets facilitate social interactions?



# Social Interaction

“Are you saying get this off of me?”

“She just goes, ‘oh God, save me from it!’”

“Learning some lessons are we?”

“Stop, you’re okay.”

“Why you gotta be like this? It’s alright. It’s alright. I take it back.”

# Conclusion and Implications

Future growth of pet ownership and caretaking.

Application and comparison to other caretaking fields.



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