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**Book Review: *Just Like Family: How Companion Animals Joined the Household* by Andrea Laurent-Simpson**

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Alicia Justice Melich  
Department of Anthropology  
California State University, Los Angeles

In the present day, more people are choosing to be childfree, or have children later in life, and marrying at older ages. The concept and definition of family are changing and reflecting these demographics. The nuclear heteronormative couple with two children is no longer the first image that comes to mind when a person thinks of the word *family*. Andrea Laurent-Simpson, a Research Assistant Professor and Senior Lecturer in the Department of Sociology at Southern Methodist University, offers an insightful approach to the “multispecies” family in America in her book *Just Like Family: How Companion Animals Joined the Household*. Her educational background includes a PhD in Sociology from Texas Woman’s University, and her research focus is based on family and fertility, non-human animal interaction, and identity theory. Laurent-Simpson’s main purpose and goal of this book is to “explain why the presence of the multispecies family is an important domain of research, particularly for family scholars. . . and to demonstrate how the multispecies family has developed in the context of increasing diversification of familial structures within the United States” (2021:23). She offers a sociological lens of the development of this new family form by analyzing her original data. This data includes 35 in-depth interviews with people who own dogs, cats, or both, from different types of family structures in the US, including families with children and families without (by choice or by circumstance), veterinary visit observations, pet advertisement analysis, and the author’s personal narratives.

The purpose of this review is to highlight sociological literature on non-human actors and their social importance and relevance in not only the discipline of sociology but also to highlight a post-humanistic and non-human-centered approach to the subject of non-human social actors. The introduction to her book is a simple yet impactful one; this book is about family, a “multispecies” family. In Chapter 1, she analyzes how different

historical macro-level devices have driven the multispecies family to appear. Laurent-Simpson also reviews the literature on the socio-historical impact of “postmodernity” and how it reflects in recognizing animals as sentient beings. She argues that we cannot fully understand the multispecies family as a new family type without looking at the influence of the Industrial Revolution and the changing family structure in the United States. Identity theory is used in Chapter 2 to observe how traditional family identities form within families without children. She also highlights the expectations of the role of the “parent” in American culture. She shows how her participants are parenting their pets as children, which results in the changing definition of family and who can take ownership of the said family label. In Chapter 3, she shows how childless and childfree participants talk about the role of “parent” to a non-human participant and how that role is affirmed by their loved ones and close family members. Chapter 4 is supported by a literature analysis examining the identities assigned to pets when human children are part of the home. She explores the emotional fulfillment and the identity formation that occurs from being a pet parent and how this role affects behaviors and lifestyle choices. In Chapter 5, Laurent-Simpson analyzes macro-level evidence in pet product ads to connect the multispecies family dynamic as being reproduced and cemented in mainstream American Culture. She highlights how the mass entity of advertisements has embraced the new multispecies family as a unique and distinct structure with different needs than the single-species family. She uses her analysis of advertisements that include pets as her evidence of this. Lastly, in her conclusion, she states there is a gap in the scholarly literature about the multispecies family and calls for scholars to look at the impact of multispecies relations on identity and family structure in the United States.

The exploration, thoughtfulness, and rich analysis of the multispecies family given by Laurent-Simpson provides a clear and relevant piece of literature supported by sociological theories, data, and personal anecdotes. The book achieves the author’s goals of demonstrating the importance of researching the multispecies family without being pretentious or overly academic. Her writing is accessible to a multitude of readers. It provides an

abundance of qualitative data and theoretical sociological support from several authors to cement her own analysis. It is a relevant book to the changing of traditional family structure. Although impactful and meaningful, this book could benefit from a deeper look at the ethical repercussions of “pet ownership,” the actual acquirement of the pet, and what the commodification of family pets implicates.

This book provides an opportunity for the sociological field to broaden the definition of family and look to include non-human participants in more research. It takes a nuanced approach to the reaction of capitalistic fatigue and offers a liminal reaction to liberating the traditional, white-dominated notions of family. This book is meant for anyone who has a pet, any animal lover, or any person who recognizes that a family takes many forms and knows there is no limit on love and what a family can look like. It is a validating, informative love letter to anyone who has ever loved an animal. This book provides a practical application to expand the definition of family to include nonhuman participants. In final thoughts, I found this book to be affirming to pet lovers, clear and informative, and provides an abundance of sociological evidence. This book can provide a foundation to more scholarly works about the multispecies family and the possibilities for growth are endless.

## REFERENCES

Laurent-Simpson, Andrea. 2021. *Just Like Family: How Companion Animals Joined the Household*. NYU Press.