

Chapter 3

Queering Our Relations with Animals

Multispecies Sexuality beyond the Laboratory

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We live in seemingly perilous times. Continued ecological destruction is coupled with resurgent conservatism in North America and many other areas around the globe. Such difficult times, however, provide an opportunity for critical reflection, personally and collectively, and the forging of new politics for more livable futures. This time, what Donna Haraway (2016) calls the “Chthulucene,” or a “timeplace for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth” calls into question the taken-for-grantedness of existing social and political relations and underscores the need for the creation of (or return to) unfolding relations of care and concern (p. 2). Part of this process requires (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017) means refiguring our relations with nonhuman animals and earth-others (Plumwood, 2002). It is not my intention to carry water for Haraway’s equivocations regarding experiments on animals and other cruel and ethically unjust practices (for some examples, see Haraway 1997, 2003, 2007). But critical animal studies scholars should neither abandon her work, as has been argued by some (Weisberg, 2009). In this chapter, the analysis will critically and productively respond to Donna Haraway’s challenge to “stay with the trouble,” in order to further this life-affirming reorientation by extending “queer care” (Seymour, 2013) and concern to nonhuman animals in laboratories, including those used in experiments thought to elucidate a supposed biological origin of homosexuality. An examination of these experiments provides an opportunity for queer care and allyship with nonhuman animals, an alternative understanding of queerness, and illustrates the possibilities of multispecies, egalitarian relations in times of mounting precarity.

To this end, this chapter will unfold in three parts. First, I will provide a brief sketch of a dominant paradigm of homosexuality-related experimentation on animals known as the Phoenix model or an organizational-activational hypothesis (Terry, 2000). According to Jennifer Terry (2000), the history of this approach began with a high-profile 1991 *Science* article by out-gay experimenter Simon Levay who claimed to have found a correlation between the size of a collection of cells in the human hypothalamus and sexual orientation in men. Levay's pronouncement met with much interest in the popular press and among gay rights advocates, came at a time of both overwhelming Christian conservatism and the widespread medicalization of gay persons in response to the AIDS epidemic. Like successive studies that center research methods involving humans, Levay's study relied on invasive animal experiments for their cache and broader scientific support. This chapter will move beyond Levay's study to explore contemporary invasive experiments on animals that follow the same methodological premise that early exposure to sex hormones determines one's later in life sexual orientation.

Second, I will examine the assumptions these studies make about sexuality, nonhuman animals, and our obligations to them. Using a feminist ethic of care approach, largely inspired by María Puig de la Bellacasa's *Matters of Care* (2017) and the rich history of feminist animal care ethics (Adams, 1995; Adams & Donovan, 1999; Donovan & Adams, 2007; Corrigan & Hoppe, 1989; Gaard, 2017; Gruen, 2015; Hogan et al., 1998), I will argue that experiments on animals amount to an unjust withholding of care, or a *carelessness*, which not only inflicts undue pain and frequently death onto the animals, but denies them the ability to seek and experience pleasure. Such experiments, as well, further a narrow, deterministic understanding of sexuality, particularly queer sexualities, which forestall richer conceptualizations and expressions of queer pleasure and relations. In this portion of the analysis, I will address contemporary moves in the LGBTQIA+ community toward assimilation, what Sarah Schulman (2012) calls the "gentrification of gay politics," which seeks to bolster arguments for queer inclusion using scientific studies, including experiments on animals, to promote the idea that queers are "born this way" and therefore deserving of legal protection on this basis. This move, while understandable considering the continued political clout of politicians such as Mike Pence and their virulent anti-gay supporters in the United States, it is ultimately not only tactically flawed but binds us to a contrived articulation of queerness and puts our interests at odds with the interests of nonhuman animals.

Finally, I will attempt to articulate an embodied understanding of queerness that centers relationality, care, and pleasure. Such a non-anthropocentric queerness, which is vitalist and dynamic at its heart, centers multispecies relations of care which privilege an unfolding pursuit of sexual pleasure

and flourishing. Queer relations of care question taken-for-granted humanist assumptions about our supposed individualistic subjectivities and instead seeks interdependent kin relations with nonhuman animals and earth-others. The embodied experience of pleasure, including in sex, play, and touch, is, according to cognitive ethologist Jonathan Balcombe (2009a), a central aspect of the rich subjectivity of human and nonhuman animals. While remembering that pleasure and care are non-innocent and thick in history and practice (Haraway, 2016), both nevertheless provide the potential for life-affirming webs of relationality that reject hard demarcations between species and other humanist identity-based categories. In this understanding, queerness is not biologically determined and static but a vitalist unfolding of relation making. In this way, the ongoing doingness of sexuality and sex making provides the possibility for thick, caring kin relations, a type of being-with across species, for more livable futures.

THE "SCIENCE" OF SEXUALITY

In the fall of 1991, Simon Levay, then an experimenter at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in California, published an article in *Science*, which claimed to have found a connection between a collection of cells in the human hypothalamus and one's sexual orientation (Terry, 2000, pp. 159–160). Of these studies Levay (2011) writes, "I interpreted this finding as a clue that biological processes of brain development may influence a man's sexual orientation" (p. VII). Levay (2011) argues that his research, which immediately made national headlines, was not meant to pathologize gay people. On the contrary, such experiments should be used to support legal rights and protections for gays (p. X). Because being gay is simply a *natural* variation in human sexuality, Levay and others argue, gays should be afforded protection from discrimination and other forms of homophobia. Indeed, these experiments, argues Levay (2011), emboldens gay activists and "validates their own sense of being 'born gay' or intrinsically different from straight people" (p. X).

In the decades following Levay's *Science* article, the "science" of homosexuality has become institutionalized in the academy and widely accepted by gay rights advocates and public discourse. Indeed, biological determinism has become the preferred gay origin story. For example, Jacques Balthazart (2012), an experimenter conducting homosexuality-related experiments on animals, writes, "The origin of homosexuality must be sought in the biology of individuals who express this particular sexual orientation" rather than in social or environmental factors or conditions (p. IX). Balthazart makes clear that experiments on animals undergird the supposed science of sexuality.

“Animal studies are of great support in understanding the controlling forces of sexuality. These studies demonstrate the existence in animals of neurobiological mechanisms determining the behavior and sexual orientation that also seem to be present, *mutatis mutandis*, in human studies” (Balthazart, 2012, p. X, italics in original).

In a common sexual orientation experiment involving nonhuman animals, particularly rats and ferrets, Balthazart (2012) writes, a “test animal . . . [is] offered a choice between a male or female sexual partner” both of whom are restrained behind dividers on either side of a “three-compartment cage” (pp. 48–49). The “test animal” is able to move freely through the cage while the “stimulus animals” are restrained. The experimenter then records the sex of animal that the “test animal” “orients its sexual behavior” toward (Balthazart, 2012, p. 48). As a control, this experiment is performed on animals without any biological manipulations and later on “test animals” who have been surgically manipulated. In these experimental models, experimenters physically and biologically manipulate both the “test” and “stimulus” animals in a myriad variation (ensuring nearly endless possibilities for nearly endless rounds of testing). Common examples include removing the animals’ ovaries and testes and surgically damaging different areas of the animals’ brains (Balthazart, 2012, pp. 48–50).

In another variation, experimenters inject animals *in utero* or shortly after birth with hormones or hormone inhibitors and then later perform the behavioral experiment mentioned above (Balthazart, 2012, p. 50). According to Balthazart (2012), when male rats are injected *in utero* or immediately after birth with an estrogen inhibitor, they are “not masculinized and tend to prefer other males to females” in these tests (2012, p. 51). These male “test” animals “allow the male stimulus [animal] to mount them . . . thus showing a form of sexual preference that, in humans, would be qualified as homosexuality or at least bisexuality” (Balthazart, 2012, pp. 50–51). In a similar experimental model using female “test” animals described by Balthazart (2012), experimenters “treat” young female rats with estrogen, which “increases their preference for females, a preference that would be classified as homosexual in women” (2012, p. 51). Similar experiments are conducted in “test” animals that have been similarly hormonally manipulated and then exposed to “olfactory stimuli” including soiled cage bedding of the same and opposite sex (Balthazart, 2012, pp. 52–53).

Such experiments, “carried out in strictly controlled conditions,” are appealing to experimenters because of the relatively quick sexual development and short lifespan of experimental animals (Balthazart, 2012, p. X). Likewise, experimenters are thought to be able to easily genetically modify experimental animals in such a way as to isolate biological—and environmental—variables in ways that would be impossible in humans. According

to Balthazart (2012), studies in humans, particularly prospective studies which would follow the self-identified sexual orientation of a select group of persons over a predetermined time, would be “extremely difficult and expensive” and invasive experiments, like those conducted on animals, would be “impossible to perform [on humans] . . . (for obvious ethical reasons)” (p. X). Balthazart, however, does not appear to consider the ethical implications of conducting these invasive experiments on animals.

LAB SEX AND THE UNDERSIDE OF ORIGIN STORIES

In her incisive reading of the use of nonhuman animals in homosexuality-related experiments, Jennifer Terry (2000) explains that Levay and others rely on an “organizational-activational hypothesis,” also known as the “Phoenix model,” a simple, reductionist understanding of sexuality that posits a male/female gender binary with correlative male-typical and female-typical behaviors (2000, pp. 160–162). According to the Phoenix model, with early exposure to sex hormones, when the brains of humans and other mammals are thought to be “female” in nature, the brain either remains female (and heterosexual) or matures into a more developed “male” (heterosexual) brain (Terry, 2000, pp. 161–162). Variations in brain development depend on the amount of sex hormone exposure (Terry, 2000, pp. 161–162). Male and female homosexuality is thought to be a result of a variation—or abnormality—in the individual’s early exposure to sex hormones (Terry, 2000, p. 162). One’s sexual orientation, resultant of early exposure to sex hormones, remains fixed, then, throughout one’s life regardless of later hormonal exposure. In this hypothesis, the “male homosexual brain” is thought to be structurally and hormonally similar to the “female heterosexual brain” and the “female homosexual brain” more closely aligned with the “male heterosexual brain” (Terry, 2000, p. 162). As a result, both male homosexuals and female heterosexuals have a supposed innate orientation toward being “mounted” (often called “lordosis” in the scientific literature) and heterosexual males and homosexual females are innately oriented toward “mounting.” In Levay’s research, sexual orientation is largely reduced to mounting and being mounted, with one’s preference determined by their early exposure to sex hormones (Terry, 2000, pp. 163–164).

As should be clear, the Phoenix model of sexuality, employed by Levay and others, offers an impoverished—and deeply flawed—understanding of sexual identities and expression of both human and nonhuman animals. Indeed, as Terry (2000) notes, “the simplicity of observation and quantification of [these animal experiments] disguises the problem that overt behavior alone cannot tell us much about sexual fantasy, psychically based libidinal

investments, or the complexity of sexual desire” (p. 165). The Phoenix model relies on regressive, deterministic conceptualizations of gender, sex, and sexuality. Terry (2000) writes that such experiments largely follow prevailing patriarchal norms, which posit a dominant, heterosexual, and active male engaged in reproductive, heterosexual intercourse with a submissive, responsive, heterosexual female.

Appeals to the *natural* or one’s essential *nature* are never innocent or value-neutral. They have often been used by scientific disciplines and other institutions of power to justify the oppression of vulnerable persons, be they queer people, women, people of color, or nonhuman animals. For example, in *Beyond the Natural Body*, Nelly Oudshoorn traces science’s search for the innate or “natural essence” of femininity from the uterus (pre to mid-nineteenth century) to the ovaries (mid-nineteenth century), and finally in sex hormones (twentieth century) (2013, pp. 112–113). The search for a female “essence” involved coercive and invasive experimentation on women, so much so that women often compared their treatment, particularly in gynecological examinations, to that of experimental animals (Lansbury, 1985). Likewise, claiming that there is an innate *nature* or origin of homosexuality, occurring in a milieu still thick with homophobia and misogyny, offers little hope for more than a retrenchment of heterosupremacy. Indeed, in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick expresses exactly these concerns, what she deems the “underside” of a medicalized fixation on the “homosexual body” (p. 43).

According to prominent sexual orientation researchers, one’s attitude toward homosexuality “tends to correlate with their views of the causes of sexual orientation” (Bailey et al., 2016, p. 46). As the story goes, those who hold “positive attitudes” tend to believe one is born gay as a result of genetics or other biological factors while those with “negative attitudes” tend to ascribe one’s non-heterosexuality to “social causes” including gay predation (“recruiting”) of children or the idea that one chooses to be gay (Bailey et al., 2016, p. 46). While the researchers acknowledge a “pessimism about causal research’s importance in resolving social questions” (Bailey et al., 2016, p. 62) concerning the rights or acceptability of homosexuality to a heteronormative public, and the ambivalence with which such findings have at times been used, they nevertheless double-down on their belief in the validity and importance of sexual orientation-related research, including its importance for arbitrating questions of gay rights. In this way, researchers want to have it both ways, on the one hand, acknowledging how anti-gay actors have used their own scientific findings, sometimes misconstrued and sometimes not, to promote anti-gay policies and violence, while at the same time washing their hands of blame and rearticulating the supposed social and political importance, and the scientific validity, of their work. According to the researchers,

Scientifically, sexual orientation is an important, fundamental trait that has been understudied because it is politically controversial. This is a mistake. The more politically controversial a topic, the more it is in the public interest to illuminate it in a revealing and unbiased manner. (Bailey et al., 2016, p. 46)

The researchers betray a naïveté when they assert that such research can be done in an unbiased manner or disseminated in a way that does not carry with it the ability to impact queer persons negatively.

Allowing researchers to define and defend what it means to be gay can be understood as what Sarah Schulman (2012) calls the “gentrification of gay politics,” which includes, in part, the transition in gay community leadership from “organic to appointed” (p. 115). Schulman (2012) writes,

This is a classic gentrification event. Authentic gay community leaders . . . become overlooked . . . [as] too unruly, too angry, too radical in their critique of heterosexism, too faggy, too sexual. . . . So instead of the representative radicals, there was an unconscious but effective search [among gay elites and dominate power structure] for palatable individuals with no credibility in the community, no accountability to anyone, with no history of bravery or negotiation with other queers, who were then appointed in their stead. (p. 116)

For many contemporary gay rights advocates, and an ostensible gay-supporting public, researchers and animal experimenters like those above function as some of these new spokespersons, arbitrators of what it means to be gay and therefore what gay politics should look like. Turning toward experiments on animals or other types of scientific validation of queer existence relinquishes queer peoples’ ability to define one’s sexuality and future and instead hands that power over to the sciences.

Whether ostensibly affirmative or plainly oppressive, scientific experimentation thought to unearth one’s supposed *nature* are thick with historical legacies and sticky with affect (Ahmed, 2010). The Phoenix model of homosexuality is steeped in a history of scientific fascination with sex and the sexual practices of human and nonhuman animals. Rather than mutually exclusive, experiments on animals have been, and to an extent continue to be, constitutive of experiments on humans. For example, Patricia Hill Collins (2004) delineates how anti-Black racism fueled a scientific discourse of Africans as animal-like, in their sexual practices and behaviors, which therefore justified their subjugation by whites (pp. 99–100). As ecofeminist Greta Gaard (2004) reminds us, dominant racist discourses linking people of color and others with nature occur within a society that devalues nature (p. 27). In this way, the devaluation of nature becomes coupled with the devaluation of those thought to be closer to it, including people of color, women, and

nonhuman animals. Appeals to nature are used as an arbitrator of one's rights, or lack thereof, and to *naturalize* oppression. According to Gaard (2004), queer people exist, for such arbitrators, in an ambivalent relation to nature, as animal-like in their nonheterosexual sexuality, and going against nature for that very same reason. Nature becomes both the opposite of heteronormative dominant culture and the very model upon which straight heteronormative culture is to be measured.

Compulsory heterosexuality is part of homophobia and erotophobia which, according to Gaard (2004), manifests as "a fear of the erotic so strong that only one form of sexuality is overtly allowed, only in one position, and only in the context of certain legal, religious, and social sanctions" (p. 25). As nature is eroticized in a society that devalues nature and the erotic, those thought to be closer to nature, or animal-like, are sexualized in a way that further distances them from heteronormative persons. Rather than seeking to explore and reimagine queer relationships with nature, something undertaken by Gaard (2004), queer ecologists (Mortimer-Sandilands & Erickson, 2010) and others, assimilationist gay politics seeks to distance gays from nature and in turn reaffirms nature and the erotic as something to be devalued. Indeed Rachel Epstein (2005) sees "the desire to be 'normal' taking the form of a distancing from and a pathologizing of significant part of queer communities" (p. 5). According to Epstein (2005), this desire involves a process of "desexualizing ourselves in order to be accepted" (p. 5). Rather than seeking assimilation or normalcy, and therefore an impoverished queer sexuality, we would do well to instead work toward "embracing the erotic in all its diversity and building coalitions for creating a democratic, ecological culture based on our shared liberation" (Gaard, 2004, p. 39). Contra sterile domesticity, an erotic queer ecology, which engages with environmental and animal protection as intrinsically queer, offers the potential for dynamic, life-affirming queer relations.

THE CARELESSNESS OF EXPERIMENTS ON ANIMALS

Experiments on animals are cruel and unethical. They unjustly inflict pain and suffering, and withhold care and nonhuman animals' potential to experience pleasure and rich, fulfilling lives. Such experiments can be understood as anthropocentric violence: a type of deluded *carelessness* that denies more than human worlds and our ethical obligations to them. Experiments on animals reinscribe our supposed species difference, separation, and supremacy, over other animals. But, as we know, such clear demarcations, between species or other humanist categories of difference, are no longer possible (if they ever were). For example, were one to slow their thinking and simply observe

their surroundings, whether urban or rural, day or night, they would find that we are “*already* in relationships with other animals,” we are entangled, and such entanglements carry ethical obligations (Gruen, 2015, p. 2, emphasis in original).

According to Lori Gruen (2015), humans exist in “social/natural entanglements” with other beings to such an extent that “our very selves are constituted by these relations” (p. 64). Our entanglements with others necessitate a type of ethical engagement that Gruen (2015) calls “entangled empathy,” or “a type of caring perception focused on attending to another’s experience of wellbeing” expressed in “relationships with others [wherein we] are called upon to be responsive and responsible . . . by attending to another’s needs, interests, desires, vulnerabilities, hopes, and sensitivities” (p. 3). Experiments on animals, however, function as an attempt to sever these entanglements. In homosexuality-related experiments on animals, animals behave in a sexually rote, instinctual fashion. They are not thinking, feeling, dynamic—or erotic—individuals or living beings with which we share our lives. Instead, they are posited as objects with predetermined actions and to whom we owe very little. We are not entangled, as the story goes, but (rightly) in control of nearly every aspect of their lives, until we take that too.

The Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics (2015a) defines animal experimentation as “procedures that inter alia, the capture, handling, transport, confinement, manipulation, and subjecting of living sentient beings to procedures against their own individual interests, including those that involve the deliberate infliction of suffering, harm, and/or death” (p. 8).

According to the Centre, “the deliberate and routine abuse of innocent, sentient animals involving harm, pain, suffering, stressful confinement, manipulation, trade, and death should be unthinkable. Yet animal experimentation is just that: the ‘normalisation of the unthinkable’ ” (2015b, p. 3). The normalization process that makes experimentation on animals synonymous with science, progress, and human well-being is buttressed by rhetoric that supports experiments on animals. Experiments which deny the richness of animals’ being as well as their lived experiences in laboratories where they “experience not only pain but also shock, fear, foreboding, trauma, anxiety, stress, distress, anticipation, and terror to a greater or lesser extent than humans do” (2015b, p. 3).

Such adverse effects of laboratory life for nonhuman animals extends to what is commonly thought of as ubiquitous and benign laboratory conditions and routines such as monitoring and handling by experimenters and technicians. According to ethologists, rats and mice, like many animals, fear people and avoid humans and their touch unless habituated to them as juveniles (Balcombe et al., 2004, p. 49). Accordingly, “laboratory routines are associated with stress, and . . . animals do not readily habituate to them. . . .

[S]ignificant fear, stress, and possibly distress are predictable consequences of routine laboratory procedures” (Balcombe et al., 2004, p. 42). While pain, stress, and other negative effects are supposed to be accounted for and minimized in many contexts, the everyday negative effects of laboratory life are often overlooked or unacknowledged by experimenters and regulatory bodies (Balcombe et al., 2004, p. 49).

In the United States, one university veterinarian puts the number of mice and rats annually bred in the United States for use in experiments between 80 and 100 million (Carbone, 2004, p. 26). In laboratories, animals live a shell of an existence wherein nearly everything normal and natural, as well as nearly every opportunity for them to experience pleasure—a hallmark of sentience—is denied. In laboratory cages, mice and rats cannot explore, exercise, forage, or socialize in ways that are normal and enriching. Instead, they are exposed to noxious and stressful sounds, smells, and artificial lights that have been found to cause everything from cataracts to seizures (Balcombe, 2009b, pp. 81–82). Mice and rats, like many other nonhuman animals kept in laboratories, develop behavioral stereotypies, defined as “repetitive, unvarying and apparently functionless behaviour patterns commonly seen in animals kept in close confinement . . . [and] are believed to reflect animal suffering” (Balcombe, 2009b, pp. 225–226). Over 50 percent of mice kept in laboratories are thought to exhibit behavioral stereotypies that can include bar/wire biting, circling, jumping, and may involve self-injury (Balcombe, 2006, p. 226).

In *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (2017), María Puig de la Bellacasa provides us with an understanding of a feminist ethic of care that is “much more than a moral stance” but rather something that “involves affective, ethical, and hands-on agencies of practice and material consequence” (p. 4). Care is an “ethical and political intervention” in a society that privileges the individual over “interconnection and interdependency” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, pp. 4–6). For feminists, care is situated ethics that is attentive to those around us, including the needs of nonhumans, with whom we share the world. Care recognizes a web of relations and obligates us to work toward maintaining those relations for “as well as possible worlds” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 7). For Puig de la Bellacasa (2017), caring relations informs a new biopolitical order, what she calls “Alterbiopolitics,” an affirmative force for “collective empowerment that puts caring at the heart of the search of everyday struggles for hopeful flourishing of *all* beings, of *bios* understood as more than human community” (p. 22). In this way, caring is part of the ongoingness of everyday life and also a coalitional politics for life-affirming, revolutionary change.

Caring, as a sensibility, politics, and practice becomes increasingly important as we race further into what Donna Haraway (2016) calls the

Chthulucene and our commodification of nonhumans, including animals, plants, and others, intensifies. But with an increasing understanding of care as essential to reimagining life on a damaged planet (Tsing et al., 2017), care too, once devalued as feminine and passive, gets folded into the brand of neoliberal institutions. This is done to assuage concerns about unethical practices behind closed doors and to pay lip service to growing concerns about inequity and social injustice. Indeed, Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) writes, “Care is so vital to the fabric of life that it remains an ongoing matter of struggle and a terrain of constant normative appropriation” (p. 8).

The appropriation of care rhetoric by animal experimenters and their collaborators is endemic. As Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) so rightly notes, such “ethical hegemonic thinking” in neoliberal institutions, deploys ethical rhetoric as a type of public relations “risk management” that translates into a “tick box approach” to supposed ethical safeguards and an “empty regulatory framework” which demotes questions of ethics or care to existing, normative modes of thought (pp. 130–132). Institutional Animal Care Committees (ACCs) and other such bodies, long bemoaned by animal experimenters, nevertheless legitimize the further exploitation of animals by providing animal experimentation with a veneer of ethicality. For example, ACCs are touted by governmental and institutional officials as a robust oversight body ensuring the humane treatment of animals in laboratories. But in actuality, ACCs are biased in favor of approving research protocols and often overlook animal welfare-related issues (Hansen et al., 69–70). According to researchers, this bias in favor of animal experimentation results from the dominating role of animal experimenters and other institutional figures on these committees. Indeed, a review of US animal care regulatory bodies found that they “frequently approve protocols that fail to meet federal standards” (Hansen et al., 2012, p. 69). According to the USDA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) report (2014), between 2009 and 2011 the IACUCs of nearly half of all US laboratories were cited for lack of oversight (Animal Welfare Institute, np). The OIG also found that the USDA failed to properly enforce even the minimal regulations outlined in the Animal Welfare Act, including enforcement actions against negligent IACUCs and institutions found to have habitually violated the Act (Animal Welfare Institute, np).

While ACCs and other regulatory bodies espouse care rhetoric, the responsibility of the everyday maintenance of the nonhuman animals in laboratories often falls onto the shoulders of low-wage laboratory workers. Laboratory “animal care technicians” are often responsible for killing animals, including “surplus” animals, for making a note of animals in pain and administering pain relief, and for routine husbandry (Birke et al., 2007, pp. 99–103). According to interviews conducted by sociologists Birke, Arluke, and Michael, “technicians often saw themselves as buffers between the scientists and animals.

Their role, as they saw it, was not so much to carry out the experiments as such (though some did participate directly in experimental work or in removing tissues), as it was to *care* for animals” (Birke et al., 2007, p. 103, emphasis in original). Although care is always non-innocent and one cannot easily separate it from our “messy worldliness” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 10), the care for animals provided by these technicians nevertheless facilitates the *carelessness* of animal experimentation. According to Gruen (2015), the rationalizations such experimenters and technicians make, either in devaluing the lives of the animals in their charge, or by envisioning themselves as their defender, involves a “willful or affected ignorance” in that they fail to consider nonhuman animals as the “proper objects of emphatic attention” (p. 90). Empathetic attention for laboratory technicians would not simply be routine maintenance or providing pain relief but asking broader questions of our obligations and response-ability toward nonhumans who are not a means to an end but living, relational beings with inherent worth. A feminist ethic of care, which privileges multispecies flourishing and interdependency over commodification and exploitation, rejects experiments on animals even when couched in an appropriated rhetoric of care or ethicality.

QUEERING OUR RELATIONS WITH ANIMALS

If animal experimentation is ethically untenable, and the Phoenix model of sexual orientation is an impoverished understanding of sexuality devoid of any sense of the lived reality of queer people and animals, where are we to go from here? With the legitimacy of both animal experimentation and the Phoenix model unraveling before us, we need to formulate new narratives of both multispecies sexuality and multispecies relationality that is egalitarian and situated. As experimentation on animals seeks to deny and undo our web-like entanglement, we now need to work toward repair and mutual support. Again, a feminist ethic of care provides us with a framework toward new relationships with nonhuman animals and other beings, and new understandings of sexuality that are dynamic, fulfilling, and—importantly—pleasurable!

According to Puig de la Bellacasa (2017), relating with earth-others, caring for and with them, can provide one with “a sense of renewal of collective hope and joy in the face of a frightening and often depressing world” (p. 158). Care, including the everyday doingness of maintaining, can be “joyful” and has the potential to “draw us” toward new relations, new beings, and new understandings of the self (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, pp. 158–159). Unlike other ethical theories, an ethic of care is not based on an abstract intellect but is rather an embodied, affective politics that can involve solidarity and love for those we share our lives with (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 162). While

care is always non-innocent and never perfect, it provides an opportunity for relations that are at once life-affirming while also challenging anthropocentrism, capitalism, and other damaging forces that too often structure our relations with ourselves and with others. Care provides an opportunity for what Donna Haraway (2016) calls “making kin” as an earthly, resilient, regeneration of interrelated and interdependent beings.

For Haraway (2016), livable futures require a reorientation and reconfiguration of the human for post-anthropocentric times. A post-anthropocentric understanding of kin involves its “stretch[ing] and recomposition . . . allowed by the fact that all earthlings are kin in the deepest sense” (Haraway, 2016, p. 103). No longer tied exclusively to “ancestry or genealogy,” “[k]in making is making persons, not necessarily as individuals or as human” (Haraway, 2016, pp. 102–103). Kin therefore, with nonhuman animals, organic and inorganic earth others, necessitates an acknowledgment of our “intertwined worldings” and a move toward living with “response-ability” toward others, including those once thought radically different from us (Haraway, 2016, pp. 13, 2).

Queer theorists have for some time been engaged in articulating ways for making kin-type relations with nonhumans. For example, in their introduction to a provocative special issue of *GLQ* on “queer inhumanisms,” Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen (2015) discuss the portraits of queer Chicana photographer Laura Aguilar. Of particular interest to Luciano and Chen (2015) are several pieces, which juxtapose fat female bodies, including Aguilar’s, with the US southwest’s natural landscapes. Layered with thinking, meaning, and history, Luciano and Chen (2015) argue Aguilar “enters the very nonhuman fold where some would place her, effectively displacing the centrality of the human itself” (p. 184). Aguilar’s work, according to the authors, invites critical questions about “queer connections . . . between human and nonhuman” and denaturalizes normative human/nonhuman demarcations (Luciano & Chen, 2015, pp. 184–185). Likewise, Aguilar’s pieces evoke a sense of “constitutive pleasure and potentiality of forms of corporeal communing,” opening us a sense of sexuality and the erotic beyond normative hetero-human encounters toward a multiplicity of sexual expressions and experiences (Luciano & Chen, 2015, p. 185).

Indeed, in challenging heteronormative sexual mores, Aguilar’s queer intervention in Chicana nature/culture relations “multiplies not only the possibilities for intrahuman connection but also our ability to imagine other kinds of trans/material attachments” (Luciano & Chen, 2015, p. 185). Positing a queer challenge to the human and humanism allows space to make kin with nonhumans and rearticulate an understanding of sex and sexuality beyond biologically deterministic frames. Indeed, according to Luciano and Chen (2015), “The encounter with the inhuman expands the term *queer* pasts its conventional resonance as a container for human sexual nonnormativities,

forcing us to ask, once again, what ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ might look like apart from the anthropocentric forms with which we have become perhaps too familiar” (p. 189, emphasis in original). Queer inhumanisms, and similar movements such as queer ecology, queer care ethics, and Gaard’s (2004) queer ecofeminism, provide opportunities for challenging homophobia and heterosexism while avoiding the pitfalls of a gay or queer identity shackled to a choice/born gay binary. While acknowledging the real, on-the-ground challenges to queer life that make appeals to biologically innate sexuality appealing, we can nevertheless seek new, more authentic, and life-affirming understanding of queer sexuality if we, like Aguilar, practice corporeal communing with nonhumans.

In their essay “Toxic Sexes: Perverting Pollution and Queering Hormone Disruption” (2014), Malin Ah-King and Eva Hayward analyze endocrine disruption as a result of pollution with an understanding of sex as “dynamic” and an “ongoing process” (p. 1). Sex and sexuality is, for the authors, not predetermined or static but rather entangled with our environments and temporalities. According to Ah-King and Hayward (2014), “Instead of thinking of sex as a nature-given dichotomy, or essentially discrete characteristic, sex is better understood as a responsible potential, changing over an individual’s lifetime, in interaction with environmental factors, as well as over evolutionary time” (p. 6). Rather than biologically innate and unchanging, the authors propose an understanding of sex and sex characteristics as a “sex potential” or a “responsiveness [to a myriad of stimuli] that is ontologically more dynamic than static” (Ah-King & Hayward, 2014, p. 6). Like Aguilar, Ah-King and Hayward (2014) propose sex and sexuality as an unfolding ongoingness that one enacts interrelation to our imperiled world, with and alongside nonhuman others, becoming-with them in our co-vulnerabilities and co-pleasures. This understanding of an “ecoerotic assemblage of gender, species, and nature” approximates what Gaard (2017) calls “ecosexualities,” or an erotically charged being-with animals and earth-others, corporally and spiritually (pp. 161–179). With nonhumans we share potentials for ecosexual future becomings beyond static, hetero-anthropocentric boundaries toward new terrains of sex and species multiplicities.

Sex as a vitalistic, dynamic process of sexing parallels Rosi Braidotti’s (2013) feminist articulation of the posthuman where “sexuality as process” “means by extension that sexuality is a force, or constitutive element, that is capable of deterritorializing gender identity and institutions” (p. 99). For posthuman feminists, sex and sexuality become an area rich with subversive potential, blurring binary thinking with “multiplicity and heterogeneity” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 99). Part of this process involves “find[ing] out what posthuman bodies can do” which will undoubtedly involve new forms of

erotic sex expression and sexual relations beyond pre-demarcated humanist identities (Braidotti, 2013, p. 99).

These new dynamic nature/culture sexual expressions move beyond some supposed innate, evolutionary desire for hetero-procreation toward a desire for sexual pleasure. According to cognitive ethologist Jonathan Balcombe (2009a), scientists are truculent in their denial of subjective animal experiences, such as their pursuit of pleasure, and instead seek an impoverished understanding of animal behaviors in almost exclusively rote, instinctual terms. This anthropocentric bias, according to Balcombe, rests on the assumption that “animals are unconscious, unfeeling things” rather than “sentient, emotional and aware” (p. 209). However, anecdotal and empirical observations of nonhuman animals have found that they play with one another and with humans, seek out foods that are most appealing to them, and engage in a myriad of sexual and erotic activities, including orgies, gay sex, oral and anal sex, and masturbation (Balcombe, 2009a, pp. 210–212). They do this, according to Balcombe (2009a), not out an evolutionary imperative or procreative desire (although for some this could be a factor), but rather for a material and social desire for pleasure and to feel good. An understanding of nature as pleasurable, social, and even queer, which explodes the binary logics of heterosexism and gender essentialism, are further expounded on by biologist Joan Roughgarden (2009), who encourages the adoption of diversity supporting, rather than suppressing, narratives about nonhuman animals. This would necessitate a rejection of Darwin’s theory of sexual selection and tooth-and-claw narratives about sexual aggression and domination which she argues do not apply to most species.

We know that we can feel pleasure, immense pleasure, when we play, eat, or have sex. As human animals, we have the potentiality to experience a broad range of pleasurable emotions and sensations, it makes sense to extend the potentiality of pleasure to other animals. According to Balcombe (2009), it could even be true that some animals experience types of pleasure unknown to us or at intensities greater than ours (p. 210). Part of figuring out what our “posthuman bodies can do” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 99) involves a search for pleasure, sexual or otherwise, beyond heterosexual norms toward queer “corporeal communing” (Luciano & Chen, 2015, p. 185). Such a search reaffirms queer autonomy and community making, perhaps even our “inhumanism” (Luciano & Chen, 2015) and our abilities to define for ourselves our own identities and futures.

According to Stacy Alaimo (2010), the sexual diversity of nonhuman animals, including their queer relations, matter (p. 56). An understanding of queer animality can “arouse a queer-green, ethical/epistemological/aesthetic response” that can unite intersectional politics around issues once thought separate and distinct such as campaigns for queer rights and animal and

environmental advocacy (Alaimo, 2010, p. 56). Like Balcombe (2009a), Alaimo (2010) is also hopeful that queer animals can provide a challenge to evolutionary heteronormativity and provide an understanding of nonhumans as material and cultural beings (p. 57). For Alaimo (2010), however, queer animals, while existing as a material and cultural challenge to heteronormativity, also “elude capture” in that they likewise “denaturalize familiar categories and assumptions in queer theory and gay cultures” (p. 65). Just as Balcombe (2009a) notes that nonhumans may experience pleasures unknown to us or at intensities greater than ours, Alaimo (2010) notes, “the remarkable variance regarding sex, gender, reproduction, and childrearing among animals defines our modes of categorization, even explodes our sense of being able to make sense of it all” (p. 67). Neither promoting queer assimilation by devaluing nature and animals, nor promoting queer autonomy through an appropriation of queer animality, queer multispecies kin-making instead relishes our heterogeneity and multiplicities. Taking inspiration from queer animals, including those lovely detailed by Roughgarden (2009), we can also seek to explode our existing sense of sex and gender identities and expressions. According to Alaimo (2010), “by eluding perfect modes of capture, queer animals dramatize emergent worlds of desire, action, agency, and interactivity” (p. 67). It is our duty to provide the care and attention these emergent worlds need to continue. By being with queer animals in close kin relations, we reject ready-made, gentrified queer politics or biologically reductionist understanding of queer sexuality. We reject the *carelessness* of experiments on animals or the idea that animals are a means to an end. We, instead, embrace the responsibilities of our interrelation and celebrate pleasure, the erotic, and heterogeneities for multispecies flourishing and queer futures.

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