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Women Animal Foster Care Workers: An Ecofeminist Critique

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Sociology
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University of South Florida

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Dedication

To my partner, Cheryl, and my Mom, Barbara,
without whom this work would not have been possible.

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ABSTRACT

As with other forms of animal rights activism, animal foster care also appears to be dominated by women. In this paper I explore the role of animal foster care in, and its implications for, a Patriarchal society based on hierarchical dualisms. I argue that through their work as animal foster care workers and adoption facilitators these women do create positions of power for themselves, but that those positions remain subordinated to, and in some ways embrace, existing structural power relations—Patriarchy. More specifically, I argue that by constructing and assuming a social role that includes a culturally accepted power differential—the human-animal dichotomy—these women challenge individual level powerlessness, yet reinforce the very structural system that oppresses them and the animals in their care. I highlight how, by organizing around ideas about feral, abandoned, and surrendered animals as innocent and in need of human help and intervention and thus a social problem, these women simultaneously construct themselves as experts on human-animal relations, and the family. As adoption experts, these women exercise authority in deciding what constitutes a “good” match between animals and their adoptive human families. Constructing and maintaining “a” meaning of pets as family members, furthermore, enables women to maintain their traditional sphere of power—the private realm of home and family. I argue that through such constructions and practices animal foster care workers help alleviate the current “social problem” of animal homelessness, yet perpetuate hierarchical relations and the idea that animals need human help.

Introduction

Nowhere is patriarchy's iron fist as naked as in the oppression of animals, which serves as the model and training ground for all other forms of oppression. (Cantor, 1983, 27)

While ecofeminists are at the forefront of promoting understanding of the interconnectedness of speciesism and sexism, the literature on ecofeminism is primarily concerned with broader theoretical explorations of the human-nature dichotomy. Little attention is paid to the connections between speciesism and sexism where “love” of animals is the motivation for their exploitation and oppression. Likewise, current research on human-animal relations within the sociological literature primarily seeks to explain the myriad roles of animals in people’s lives and their effect on their human companions, rather than the unequal status of such domestic cats and dogs in contemporary society. In this paper I bring together these divergent approaches by exploring how, through simultaneous (re)constructions and practices, animal foster care (AFC) providers challenge individual level powerlessness while simultaneously reinforcing Patriarchal oppression.¹

My focus is on foster care for “homeless” feral and domestic animals: free-roaming cats and dogs, cats and dogs surrendered by owners or other family members, and cats and dogs rescued from the local humane society. Thus, my work focuses on “problem” animals—the homeless animal. First, I explore the notion that stray animals are homeless and that this is a social problem in need of intervention. I look at how, by defining cats and dogs as “pets” and thus family members, AFC workers construct themselves as experts on human-companion animal relations and the family and how, by acting on such ideas, they construct the social role of AFC provider. Next, I describe

the kind of work involved in relieving the problem of animal homelessness and engaging in activities centered around the betterment of animals, as well as how AFC workers exert a level of control over these animals and the people who wish to adopt them. Clearly, these women do not see themselves as contributing to Patriarchal systems. They recognize that on an individual level people harm animals and they are actually trying to help the victims of animal cruelty. But, a critical analysis using the ecofeminist theoretical perspective would claim that, because the AFC role is primarily a woman's role that focuses on care and nurturing, AFC workers' actions tend to reinforce gender relations within the family.² Furthermore, AFC workers not only embrace Patriarchal ideas of domination and control by dominating animals and gender relations by defining the AFC role as expressive, they further reinforce Patriarchy by embracing "masculine" emotions and emotional expression while controlling "feminine" emotions and their expression.³ It is imperative, therefore, to explore how these women reinforce Patriarchy by their efforts to relieve its symptoms.

Methods and Data

This study is based on three data sets: transcribed interviews, site observations recorded in field notes, and introspective personal experience. I conducted informal interviews with six practicing animal AFC providers. In addition, I observed volunteers working at three different pet adoption centers. Finally, throughout this project I draw upon my personal experiences with my own pets (past and present), with the three cats I have fostered in recent months, and with the cats whose cages I have kenneled once a week at one of the adoption centers over the last eight months.

All of the volunteers I interviewed are female, white and middle aged (30s and 40s); most appear to be middle class. Three of the women are married with children, one is divorced, one is single, living alone, and one's family structure is unknown. All but one foster cats exclusively. Questions were open-ended and the interview proceeded in a conversational manner. In this way participants were able to share their thoughts, stories, and feelings as they arose in the course of our conversations and, for those five interviewed at the adoption centers, during the course of their work. I met and interviewed six AFC providers when conducting observations at Shelter for Animals (SFA) and Adopt-A-Pet (AAP) over the course of several weekends. The interviews ranged from one-and-a-half to three hours in length. I took brief notes during our conversations and, immediately following the interviews, I transcribed the discussions from my notes and memory. Three interviews were conducted at two different SFA adoption centers located in local Animal Annex pet stores. Two participants (Ann and Sue) were visiting the adoption center to deliver medical records for cats that had recently been fostered by Ann, and who were now at the center waiting for adoption. A

third interview was conducted at one of these SFA adoption centers and two other interviews were conducted at an AAP adoption center. All are located in local Animal Annex pet stores. These three participants (Cindy, Brenda, and Mindy, respectively) were staffing the on-site adoption center. One interview was conducted by telephone with Linda who, until she relocated to another state, had fostered dogs for AAP. This participant was recruited after responding to a group email I sent to various local animal organizations asking for volunteers to participate in this study. Because Linda had, until very recently, served as AAP's volunteer coordinator, her email address was still on the organization's website. Linda fosters dogs exclusively.

During these interviews it quickly became apparent that feelings of love and responsibility as well as obligation and righteousness are common emotional experiences shared by these foster care workers. Analysis of the stories and comments offered by these AFC providers reveals how AFC workers create and use the AFC role to access and exercise power. Upon closer inspection, however, the use of this role tends to reinforce traditional gender roles, and thus unequal gender relations.

In addition to conducting interviews, over the course of several weekends I observed workers at the same three adoption centers. During my time there I observed several interactions between potential adopters and volunteers as well as interactions between various workers. What was interesting about these interactions was the seemingly immediate connection that took place between virtual strangers (volunteers, adopters, and pet store customers). As with social movements and other social groups, AFC, as a source of emotional, social, and political connections, serves as a conduit for meeting like-minded people and making meaningful social connections with people who love animals. It is important to note, however, that the pool of women who usually volunteer at the center is limited to a few, thus participants were not selected from a

random sample and do not fully represent the larger population of AFC workers, most of whom are foster providers only and never volunteer at the centers.

Finally, my personal experiences have been an invaluable source of inspiration, practical knowledge, and insight. With my own pets, for example, I share the kind of bond and commitment commonly talked about by AFC workers. Likewise, when fostering cats, I experience myself as knowledgeable and have feelings of responsibility as other AFC workers do. And, as a kenneler I find myself looking forward to visiting and playing with the cats at the adoption center each week. It is through such intimate personal experiences that I am able to nurture my love of animals, to further understanding of human-animal relations, to make connections with those who open their homes to homeless animals, and to grow as an individual and scholar. Rather than reacting to the information I observe, I interact with it. In this way, I am better equipped to understand and explain the social phenomena of the AFC worker.

Theoretical Framework

The following theories come from two general theoretical approaches to understanding and explaining social phenomena: symbolic interactionism and critical theory. While these may appear conflictual, they are in fact, complimentary and interdependent. Trying to understand individual circumstances and behaviors, and social phenomena and problems independent of one another limits our ability to see and appreciate their interconnectedness. One cannot anticipate the consequences of an individual's or group's actions without considering the social and historical context in which they take place and from which they follow. So, while the reality experienced and lived by social actors is important to understand, when seeking to understand the social factors involved in those experiences, the cultural forces contributing to and shaping those realities cannot be ignored. Likewise, the role of individuals in shaping their lives and their world should not be overlooked. Social life, then, is a dialectical process of interplay between social interactions and social facts/forces. For this reason, I have chosen to explore one possible understanding of AFC work by applying two seemingly divergent perspectives: symbolic interactionism and critical theory.

Interactionist theory addresses the relationship between individuals and social systems, such as role use and reality construction through interaction; it is ideal, therefore, for identifying such connections. Critical theory, on the other hand, seeks to uncover the ways in which individual perception contradicts underlying reality, and thus is an ideal tool for placing the everyday experiences and interactions of people in a larger social context. Combining these theoretical approaches, then, can be useful in

exploring the kinds of cultural consequences that can be anticipated from various types of individual and group thought and action.

Consequently, the use of multiple perspectives in exploring AFC is important for understanding and appreciating the experiences and realities of AFC workers as well as the cultural underpinnings influencing and shaping their beliefs and work. In the case of AFC, using social constructionism, role theory, and ecofeminism seems an appropriate mix of theoretical perspectives for making sense of AFC. I explore such questions as: How do AFC providers perceive and experience their work? What is the connection between their work and particular social systems? And, what are both the intended and unintended consequences of their actions for both species and gender relations?

Finally, while this practice of combining micro- and macro-theoretical approaches could be said to minimize my respect for and truthfulness to the perceived reality of my participants, it is, I believe, necessary and important to critically examine benevolent everyday activities in order to uncover unknown and unacknowledged aspects not previously considered by those who participate in such activities. Furthermore, while this approach *may* be argued to jeopardize my credibility and trustworthiness with these women as AFC workers, it *does*, on the other hand, demonstrate my commitment to them as women and volunteers, which are fundamental aspects of AFC. Following an overview of the theoretical frameworks that inform this work is discussion of both the beliefs and practices of AFC workers as told by the participants themselves, as well as discussion of my critical analysis of these same thoughts and behaviors as framed by critical theory. This is a complicated and difficult process that, at times, may appear indistinct. But, I do try to remain faithful to the personal interpretations of what these women think and do as I seek to understand the connections between AFC work and the larger society, as well as the consequences presented by each.

Social Constructionism

A fundamental tenet of the social construction of reality is that social reality is created and sustained through social interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, 60). Through interaction social actors are confronted with the objects, ideas, and experiences that, depending on how they are interpreted, form the basis for their everyday reality. In other words, how people interpret and define their social world and their place in it determines the meanings their lives and experiences will have for them. Consequently, creating and sustaining reality through interaction, interpreting those interactions as a way of making sense of the world around us, and behaving in a way that is in line with the reality we construct is, sociologically speaking, the cycle of everyday social life.

Our interpretations of the objects, ideas, and experiences of our everyday lives are largely determined by what Loseke (1999, 15) calls “categories of meaning,” “names we attach to objects in our world...labels for types of things or types of people.” Furthermore, the meanings associated with any given “category of meaning,” such as pet, are socially constructed; they are, in other words, culturally defined. The important implication of categories of meaning is that they determine our actions and, thus, justify the treatment suggested in the solution of a social problem. Loseke (1999, 14), for instance, explains, “the meaning I’ve attached to the physical category of ‘cats’ [as pets] makes it impossible for me in my normal daily life to think of them as food.” So, by categorizing (defining) cats and dogs as pets, certain forms of treatment are understood as acceptable while others are understood as unacceptable. As Loseke makes clear, eating our pets is not considered appropriate. What is appropriate, however, is caring for them and extending their lives. In fact, according to one study, the bond between people and their pets is often times so strong that many pet guardians claim they would give a scarce medicine to their pet before they would give it to a non-family member (Cohen, 2002, 632). Another study found that 56% of dog owners and 38% of cat

owners were willing to spend any amount of money necessary for medical care for their pets (Albert & Bulcroft, 1987, 15). “Even homeless people keep animals and feed them before themselves” (Olson & Hulser, 2003, 140). Clearly, the pet, as family member, is different from any other category of animal.

On the other hand, the actions derived from the definition and categorization process can inadvertently perpetuate oppressive structures. In his work on the “Jewish problem” in Nazi Germany, Berger (2003, 273) describes how categorization systems were used to justify a “solution” to a perceived problem. In this example, the category of “Jew” as victimizer was resurrected based on a centuries-old tradition of anti-Semitism and combined with German nationalism and racial theory to (re)construct a powerful categorization of the meaning of Jew. Using Arendt’s (1963) concept of the banality of evil, Berger (2003, 273, 277) explains,

A dehumanized group like the Jews can be constructed and then isolated and even exterminated through social processes that are in themselves quite ordinary or banal....one did not have to be a madman or monster to perpetuate extraordinary evil, [he writes,] [r]ather, many individuals did their job (of killing) as if it were the most ordinary thing to do.

This concept of the banality of evil demonstrates the enormous potential of constructed realities to contribute not only to prejudice, segregation, and discrimination, but also to domination, oppression, and even genocide. Along these lines, AFC, the ordinary and socially legitimate practice of providing temporary housing for animals, medically controlling their population, and adopting them into loving homes (potentially read: enslaving, sterilizing, and selling them) could be described as banal (and even evil) domination.

Role as Resource Perspective

Unlike the theory of social constructionism, the idea of social role as resource is still a relatively new one. Historically, role theory has developed within two separate camps—structural and interactionist theories. The important difference between these theories is their opposing perspectives on social structure and human agency. While the structural approach understands roles as the norms and expectations attached to a preexisting social position within a social structure, interactionists stress the negotiable aspect of roles, emphasizing opportunity for and exercise of creativity and compromise in social behavior through interaction. So, while structuralists understand social behavior as dictated by social status, interactionists understand social behavior as associated with but distinct from social position. In other words, the structuralist sees roles as scripts that are followed in daily social interaction, and the interactionist sees roles as a general guideline for interaction that social actors perform with some degree of autonomy. What is similar between these perspectives, though, is that both “assume the primacy of structural positions” in determining human behavior (Callero, 1994, 229).

Following the interactionist approach to role theory in their study of the Hollywood filmmaking industry, Baker and Faulkner (1991, 281) view role behavior as “the purposive construction of relationships (and positions) and [emphasize] creativity in role playing rather than mere conformity to expectations.” By reversing the common understanding of human behavior as “enacted from a fixed, preexisting position,” they demonstrate how “roles are first claimed and then enacted *into* positions” (emphasis in original). In other words, according to Baker and Faulkner’s (1991, 281) concept of role as resource, “[r]oles are used to *create* positions and their relationships (i.e., social structures)” (emphasis in original). Consequently, as a social resource roles are “used to pursue interests and enact positions (1) by providing a social classification that defines and signals a person’s social identity....and (2) by granting access to a variety of

resources (social, cultural, and material capital), thus providing the *means* for one to pursue their interests” (Baker & Faulkner, 1991, 283-284) (emphasis in original). Following this perspective, roles are used as a way of “provid[ing] the institutional and cultural means to compete and negotiate...[as well as] grant legitimacy, stake claims on various resources, and delimit jurisdiction” (or authority) (Baker & Faulkner, 1991, 284). According to this theory, then, position (or status) is not taken for granted; rather, it is assumed to be the consequence of role use. Important here is that “[a]s a result, the issue of power is central to this perspective [because] roles are regarded as tools used in a competitive struggle to control other resources and establish social structures” (Callero, 1994, 230).

If, as Callero (1994, 230) claims, “oppressive structures [such as Patriarchy] cannot be accepted as inevitable [but rather] must be viewed as social constructions and the product of role use,” then the role of women in perpetuating oppressive structures (such as patriarchy and speciesism) must be explored to the fullest. Like other social roles, the role of AFC provider is also a resource, created and sustained primarily by women, who, through this role, exercise power and influence and, consequently, shape society. The concept of role as social resource, therefore, is key to understanding empowerment and oppression in AFC where, through role-making and role-playing, AFC workers employ individual agency and (re)create social structure.

Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is at the forefront of studying power and oppression between men and women and between “man” and nature. Ecofeminists are committed to exploring and further understanding the link between men’s oppression of women and “man’s” oppression of animals. In the epigraph at the beginning of this paper Cantor reminds us that sexism (domination of men over women) is an extension of speciesism (domination

of “man” over animals). According to ecofeminism, each of these systems of thought is a product of and perpetuated by Western Patriarchal ideals of dualism (McGuire & McGuire, 1993, 2-3). The ideological separation of humans and nature, like male and female, is the basis for the dichotomous categorization and valuation of those that are actually inextricably part of and linked to each other (humans to nature and men to women). Consequences of the imbalanced power relationships that result from male domination are violence against nature and violence against women. It is the hostile/malevolent (mis)use of power and its perpetuation that are of primary concern to ecofeminists. The act of labeling, separating, and valuing, as a social process, concentrates power within particular groups at varying degrees relative to each other. These “lines,” furthermore, understood as rigid and fixed by their (re)creators, extend beyond the intended categories and overlap with others to create an increasingly complex system of inequality. Adams (quoted by Hoffman, 1995, 4-5), for example, explains, “[w]e cannot just stop at the human/animal barrier, because that barrier is part of the construction of patriarchy....Manhood,” she explains, “is constructed in our culture in part by access to meat-eating and control of other bodies, whether it’s women or animals.”

This argument seems accurate given, for example, the historical practice of associating “undesirable” groups, such as blacks, women, and criminals, with animals, thus conferring a less than human or nonhuman identity onto that “inferior” group. Referring to blacks as monkeys, women as chicks and foxes, the poor as pigs, and criminals as animals and beasts in general serves to justify actions against and, more importantly, despite these groups. “Language,” says Adams (1990, 72), “fuses women’s and animal’s inferior status in a patriarchal culture.” This same practice, she explains, “oppress[es] animals [as well] by associating them with women’s lesser status” (Adams, 1990, 72). Furthermore, feminists “expressing our outrage at the treatment of animals—

that a violent man treats a woman like a dog [for example]—actually validates the oppression of animals, implying that while these things should not be done to women, they *may* be done to animals” (Kappeler, 1995, 320) (emphasis in original). This formulation, Kappeler (1995, 321) contends, demonstrates how we “tacitly recognize this form of oppression and exploitation as ‘acceptable.’” And if feminists argue that “we need to oppose *all* forms of oppression,” she continues, then “we need to challenge power even where it is apparently benevolent use of power...” (emphasis in original). Exploring the exercise of power in unequal relationships, then, is key to understanding oppression, but more importantly, it is essential to planning action to eliminate the concentration and (ab)use of power by some at the expense of “others.”

It is the benevolent (mis)use of power that is central to my critical examination of AFC where treatment of animals (the human-animal dynamic) is based on love for them. This is important because “[w]hen human society moves beyond speciesism—to membership in animalkind—‘animal’ imagery will no longer demean women [and other oppressed groups] or assist in their oppression, but will represent their liberation” (Dunayer, 1995, 23). Moreover, when critical social scientists and activists recognize and acknowledge the ubiquity of the benevolent use of power by themselves and various oppressed groups, only then will an alternative to structural domination and oppression be found. Finally, because ecofeminism operates at the nexus between sexism and speciesism, it is a fundamental tool for exploring the role of power in AFC and its implications for Patriarchy.

Patriarchy

Before discussing power and Patriarchy in AFC however, it is important that I explain what I mean by Patriarchy and how it relates to this social practice. My conceptualization of Patriarchy follows that of ecofeminism which, as explained above, is concerned with power relationships and their interconnections. While ecofeminism has a variety of perspectives, ecofeminists overall agree that oppression of women and oppression of nature are fundamentally connected. According to this perspective, “in Patriarchal cultures, reality is divided according to gender, and a higher value is placed on those attributes associated with masculinity...” (Birkeland, 1993, 18). It is the link between the organizing social structural system of Patriarchy (a system of hierarchical dualism) and masculinity (unequally valued socially constructed characteristics) that is important to the ecofeminist perspective. Thus, it is value hierarchies in general and not just gender hierarchy that characterize Patriarchy from the ecofeminist perspective.

According to this theory, because Patriarchal thinking is infused in social structural systems, such as politics, work and family, it extends legitimacy to masculine traits and qualities. Patriarchy, then, from the ecofeminist perspective, is understood to be a social system of power and control where legitimate power and authority are linked to masculine qualities. Consequently, internalization and naturalization of value based difference, where man and masculinity are considered superior to woman and nature (including animals), is not necessarily confined to the male experience. Masculine identified women who accept such dichotomies and hierarchies also understand and experience masculine culture as superior. For example, women in contact sports such as boxing, sciences such as medicine, and professions such as business, to name just a

few, often internalize and perpetuate contemporary masculine ideas of emotional detachment, individualism, and competition. It is the practice of constructing a reality of gender and species difference and participating in Patriarchal practices of domination that are central to this study of AFC, where personal empowerment derives from Patriarchal/"hierarchical dualism" (Birkeland, 1993, 18).

Social (Re)Constructions in Animal Foster Care

Animal Homelessness: A Social Problem

Free-roaming cats and dogs are not new phenomena. Defining them as a social problem, however, is relatively new. In the 19th century, purported threats of rabies outbreaks and legislation developed in the interest of public health began the process of redefining roaming animals as “homeless animals” and, consequently, led to the creation of the “animal shelter” (Irvine, 2003, 552-553). In shelters, over time, “homeless” became equated with “unwanted,” this shift in meaning calling for and legitimating human obligation to and responsibility for these “unwanted.” As with animal shelters, AFC workers frame the problem of unwanted pets in ways that encourage public support (Irvine, 2003, 551). Similar to “frame bridging,” AFC providers accept and draw on existing cultural ideas of animals as innocent and helpless, which then become the organizing force around which AFC mobilizes (Snow et al., 1986).

AFC providers accept and incorporate into their own meanings the innocence and helplessness of feral, abandoned, and surrendered animals as well as the reality that it is dangerous for them to live on the streets. They believe, furthermore, that humans are responsible for and obligated to these animals. Based on such constructions, AFC workers reason that their work is a legitimate, moral, ethical, responsible, humane, and important approach to alleviating the problem of homeless animals. Linda explains,

I'm doing the right thing. I'm doing the right thing. I can't just do what they [people who abandon and surrender pets] do and not do what's right. People don't take responsibility. And I've learned that I can't solve the world's problems, I can only do a little part and that if I don't do it, who will... These dogs are dogs that nobody cared about and nobody

took the time to train. These dogs don't know [how to behave]...Dogs are very social and, just like anti-social people, get into trouble and don't know how to act. Anti-social dogs have problems, but we blame the animals when it's our own fault that they chew the furniture, or whatever, and want to get rid of it.

Talking about "saving lives" by rescuing these animals from the perceived misery and dangers of street life expresses a strong belief in the seriousness of the problem.

Likewise, claims of "being needed" by those deemed powerless and thus "doing what's right" by sacrificing and making the hard decisions demonstrates the perceived value and importance of their work. And, finally, "assigning responsibility" of animal behavior to human companions, too, exhibits a firm belief in the role of human companions in contributing to (and even causing) the problem of animal homelessness.

Through such constructions, then, the existence and seriousness of the problem, as well as the necessity and importance of their work become irrefutable. Each construction working to create legitimacy and elicit public support, both of which are vital to solving (as well as creating and sustaining) any social problem.

Pets: Members of the Family

An important aspect of the (re)construction of animal homelessness as a problem in need of action is the definition of these animals as pets and family members. Unlike other domesticated animals, such as cows and horses for example, "[p]ets are different because they are the only animals that are...domestic. They are distinctive not only because they are often kept within the home but because they are retained there as favorite animals and treated with special fondness and affection" (Savishinsky, 1983, 113). Pets are household animals.

There is another shift in meaning and status, however, through which a "pet" becomes a family member. According to Hickrod and Schmitt (1982, 60), this process entails seven junctures (critical turning points): entry, naming, probation, engrossment,

realization, mood joining and routinization, and separation. The points relevant here are entry and naming, where the “considerable interaction between the person and the pet [transforms] it into an *interactional object*” (Hickrod & Schmitt, 1982, 60-61) (emphasis in original). Interaction between foster provider and foster animal is critical to the socialization function of AFC. I discuss this more fully later. Equally important is the naming of animals. In the organizations I have studied, all foster animals are named, usually by the foster provider. Thus, AFC would appear to initiate this transformational process by naming the animal and socializing the animal through interaction (including using the animal’s name as part of those interactions).

The concept of pets as family members is common in AFC. During a conversation with Linda, she explained that a common reason people surrender animals is because they (the humans) are pregnant. To this Linda says, “Animals aren’t disposable. How do you choose? What do you do if you have a second child, get rid of the first one?” This statement expresses the assumption common in AFC that pets, like children, are (and should be) of equal status in the family. Such ideas express how the (re)construction of the role of pet as family member, from the AFC perspective, is fundamental to both understanding the “problem” of animal homelessness as well as developing suggestions for combating it.

AFC Providers: Experts on Human-Companion Animal Relations and the Family

Because AFC providers are at the center of these (re)construction activities, they are positioned simultaneously as experts on the issue of animal homelessness and on the institution of family. For example, speaking about her involvement with programs pairing at-risk delinquent youth with dogs as part of rehabilitating the youngsters, Linda states:

Dogs just want to love you and be loved. These kids never learned how to love or how to deal with loss, that’s what animals can teach us. You have to be consistent with dogs or they won’t respond to you. They

teach you how to socialize within groups, how to form relationships, and how to deal with loss [as they have to give them up]. They teach us empathy and compassion.

Mindy, likewise, says, "It's good when they [cats] have a lot of stimuli. That way they aren't afraid of people. [I]f they're too afraid, people won't want them. People always want the friendly ones." Not surprisingly, knowing what people want and how to deliver it are important aspects of AFC. And, because AFC workers are key to maintaining dominant ideas about what people and pets can (and should) expect from each other, their expertise is reinforced as benevolent and legitimate.

As someone who fosters dogs, Linda explains, "Aggressive dogs are a problem because they put everyone at risk, including the dog." Since she is also a parent, she discusses how to handle the interaction between her foster animals and her children.

I don't set them [her child and foster dog] up for failure. We [Linda and her husband] introduce them properly. You know, you pet the dog, you pet the child. You let them [the dog and the baby in their crib] sleep in the room with you so they know what's going on. [Later she tells me that] Children should be involved in volunteering...By fostering children learn compassion, empathy, socialization, and relationships.

Understanding the "nature" of animals, knowing the limitations of children, and anticipating interaction between them is valuable knowledge in AFC. Otherwise, predictably safe relations could not be created and sustained in the AFC environment or home. Such statements also demonstrate how AFC volunteers understand the familial and social consequences of their participation in socially responsible work.

These examples show that AFC workers see themselves as people who "know" the proper interaction between humans and these animals, and the importance of participating in volunteer work such as AFC for humans and their children. In turn, this perception contributes to the reality that animal homelessness is indeed a social problem that should, ideally, be addressed by those who possess such knowledge.

Practices in Animal Foster Care

Organizing Around the Idea of Animal Homelessness

As “experts,” AFC providers perform the AFC role in several important ways. Motivated by beliefs in the innocence and helplessness of animals, AFC providers form a community with others who share their ideas, values, and commitments by forming organizations to address the animal homelessness problem. In addition to the many organizations similar to those I have studied here, a great number of breed-specific rescues exist all across the country. From Persian cats to St. Bernard dogs, there is likely an organization formed to ensure the well-being of that specific breed.

Aligning with such groups, local pet stores across the nation donate space and supplies that assist these organizations in completing their mission: caring for homeless cats and dogs and placing them in permanent homes. Animal Annex, for example, provides cages in each of their stores for local animal rescue groups to house and display animals so they can be seen and played with by “animal people.” These adoption centers are managed and staffed by the rescue organization with the support of the corporate office and store management, who supply litter and food for cats in the store and, when available, laundry facilities for animal bedding. Many national pet food and supply manufacturers donate money and supplies as well. And local humane societies frequently assist animal rescue groups by providing low cost sterilization services for foster animals.

Thus, as individuals who share the core ideas and values found in AFC come together, they form countless animal rescue organizations that then solicit various levels of support from local and national businesses serving the pet industry. In addition, these

groups commonly align with other similar formal and informal organizations, networking and sharing resources and information vital to the survival of the fight to end animal homelessness.

Socializing Foster Animals

An important part of this fight is making an animal (more) adoptable. Socialization “is very important,” says Cindy. “The family fostering the animal gets to know the personality of the animal so that they can have a good idea of where they will fit in [the type of home and family], like, yes cats, no dogs, doesn’t like to be picked up.” Linda, likewise, explains that:

You socialize them [dogs] by identifying their strengths and weaknesses, just as you would your own dog. Matching animals with humans is important because, I can’t live with just anyone, and neither can they [dogs]. You don’t help socialize and rehabilitate them [dogs] by keeping them in the yard or garage. Some people just don’t understand that. They think that fostering is just providing a home and food, but it’s more than that, it’s hard work.

Thus, spending time with a foster animal and documenting its qualities and traits is an important part of knowing the animal, which aids in matching it to the “right” family. It is also important to interact with and condition the animal for a future life as a family pet. By playing with the animals in their care, foster care providers get the animals accustomed to thinking and acting with humans as they would with litter mates: familiarizing them with humans, helping the animal to feel comfortable around humans, establishing predictability and trust. In addition to instilling a receptive attitude in the animal, AFC providers teach foster animals appropriate behavior. For instance, by training cats to use a litter box and dogs to obey, AFC providers teach cats and dogs appropriate expectations about living in a human family. Such practices serve to acclimate foster animals to the human family, making the animal (more) appealing to prospective families and thereby improving the chances of it being adopted.

Socialization of foster animals is key to moving them into permanent homes. Acting as an AFC provider requires that foster animals be observed, their strengths and weaknesses documented, and their expectations and behaviors conditioned for their role as family pet. And, while the amount of preparation no doubt varies by AFC provider, the importance of this function of AFC to successfully address animal homelessness appears universally understood.

Adopting Animals into Permanent Homes

The ultimate goal of the fight to end animal homelessness, then, involves placing free-roaming and unwanted animals into permanent loving homes. When the animal is deemed ready by its foster provider, it is made available for adoption. At this point, for those providers who process their own adoptions, the focus shifts from the animal to that of the prospective adoptive family. Their work socializing the animal is well on its way, and the time has come for them to interview and assess prospective adoptive families.

Having established standards of human-companion animal relations, and having socialized the animal to conform to these norms, evaluation of the qualification of adoption applicants begins. Through the animal adoption process the AFC worker enforces the standards. And, as with most actions, with practice comes a refined expertise. Each having processed animal adoptions for several years, Brenda and Mindy say that “You know what to look for. For example, we won’t adopt to college students. We’ve had a student who lives with a roommate adopt a cat then leave the roommate with the cat, but they [the roommate] don’t want it and they return it to us. So we won’t adopt to them.” While there are some commonly held standards, the selection process also allows individual women flexibility. “I’m very strict about who I adopt to,” Linda says, “[s]ome people aren’t...[N]ever ask yes or no questions. You don’t ask, ‘Do you want an inside dog or an outside dog?’ Everyone will tell you they want an inside

dog. You ask them, 'Where is the dog going to sleep?' 'Where is their food?'" Such interview strategies clearly mean to evaluate the intentions and expectations of human companions for their pets and the consistency of such attitudes with those of the processor.

The adoption function may, in fact, be the most important part of the fight to end animal homelessness. A socialized pet in foster care, without a permanent home, remains an unwanted animal. If fosterers cannot "move" animals from their care into permanent families, more and more animals will remain on the streets. Clearly, then, placing foster animals into permanent homes, moving them through the system, and continuing the cycle is critical to the purpose of AFC—saving lives.

Emotion Work in Animal Foster Care

Inherent in this practice of loving and letting go, however, is the emotional challenge of caring for animals on a temporary basis, while retaining the strong love of animals that compels one to action in the first place.

Animals become pets through a process of “keying,” which involves a transformation in the meaning an animal has for its human companion(s) from “animal” to “pet” (and thus family member) (Hickrod & Schmitt, 1982).⁴ They explain that as there is considerable interaction between a person and their companion animal, the meaning of the animal is transformed into “pet” through a gradual process that seems to happen *to* the individual who only *realizes* her/his attachment to the animal after becoming attached to it (Hickrod & Schmitt, 60, 63-64) (emphasis in original). “Realization” of an animal as pet takes place in the context of and in connection with the family. In most cases, once families and their animals negotiate the early stages of their lives together, family members “develop intense feelings about them” (Hickrod & Schmitt, 1982, 62). Similar to the interaction between family members and their pets, AFC providers and the animals they foster also experience a considerable degree of interaction with each other. Unlike in the family, however, in AFC this interaction is not meant to lead to “realizing” the animal as family member. In fact, contrary to the type of transformation inherent in contemporary human-animal relationships in the family, the AFC environment requires that this very transformation not take place.

While foster animals are part of the foster family, they are not family pets, nor are they loved as family pets are; at least that would seem to be the goal. Brenda states, for instance, “I used to foster, but then I stopped for a while. It’s hard; you get attached to

them so fast and you don't want to give them up." This coincides with the claim of Hickrod and Schmitt (1995, 66) that once an individual "realizes" their pet has become a family member, their attachment to the pet is often so strong that they are not willing to give it up unless a crisis occurs. In the case of foster care however, where the goal is to do precisely that (give them up), minimal attachment would seem a necessary requirement. Ideally, then, "keying" and "realization" of animals as foster animals seems to be a conscious effort that takes place before an animal is unintentionally "keyed" as pet.

How and how well workers respond to this demand (of battling the keying process of animal into pet) may be the most important factor enabling AFC workers to continue their work of organizing around, socializing, and adopting animals. Not surprising, several emotion management strategies emerged during my conversations with the six AFC providers I interviewed. These strategies are: establishing boundaries and meaning, telling stories, narrowing one's focus, and enlisting others in the adoption process.

Establishing Boundaries and Meanings

I keep telling myself they're not mine; they're not mine. I have mine. (Mindy)

You start to get it in your head that these [foster animals] aren't yours, you have yours. You love them and bond with them, but they're going to a good home where they will be loved. And there are others that need you. (Sue)

The described feeling of being needed and of doing something good appears important to AFC workers. When asked how she sees her primary role as an AFC provider Linda says, for example, "I couldn't live with myself by not doing the right thing. And it feels good." By drawing boundaries between their personal families and their AFC work ("mine" versus "theirs") these women construct themselves as knowers of, and experts

on, the animal overpopulation problem. In this way, AFC providers enable themselves to define and understand their work as necessary and important for society.

Furthermore, through feelings such as these, AFC workers are able to elicit and suppress emotions in the appropriate degrees deemed fitting and necessary for their work.

The importance of such emotion work is better understood when considered in the context of “feeling rules,” which “guide emotion work by...govern[ing] emotional exchanges” (Hochschild, 2003, 56). Just as is the case in human interaction, rules govern human-animal interaction as well. Contemporary cultural norms that regulate human-companion animal interaction suggest, for example, that love of pet and acceptance of it as family member are appropriate in an industrialized nation such as the United States. As discussed under *Social Constructionism*, acceptable and unacceptable forms of treatment of the family pet, based on the cultural meaning of pets, govern human-pet interactions. Because such rules encourage (strong) attachment, they are ineffectual and inappropriate for AFC work where the rules governing love of a foster animal, a common precursor for AFC, must be maintained, but maintained at a minimum. Thus, the kind of assertions above, common among AFC providers, serve as “rule reminders” prompting workers of the norms that, though less popular in mainstream society, are appropriate for AFC (Hochschild, 2003, 57).

Finally, I observed an interesting aspect of “feeling rules” among AFC workers. In their attempt to manage their attachment to foster animals, the approach of most of these women appeared more focused on eliciting some positive feeling about what they were doing and why they were doing it from within, rather than suppressing negative emotions. Medical students, for example, “accentuate positive feelings” of pride and excitement “[b]y transforming an uncomfortable contact [with a patient] into an analytic

event [where] students can produce the feelings of excitement and satisfaction that they have learned to associate with problem solving” (Smith and Kleinman, 1989, 63).

Likewise, by distinguishing between pets and foster animals and reinforcing a reality of acting socially responsible, AFC workers are able to overcome getting “too” attached to foster animals and to elicit positive feelings of self-worth and accomplishment, thereby minimizing any discomfort they might encounter in their work. The approach by one woman, however, seemed more about suppressing negative emotions. Commenting on her strategy for dealing with the depression associated with this work Mindy says, “I’ve numbed myself.”

Telling Stories

Stories are memories, narratives about past personal experience (Plummer, 1995, 22, 24). The use of stories in AFC appears to be a common practice that serves to elicit both desired emotions based on previous experiences as well as feelings of satisfaction and pride associated with the act of sharing the stories themselves. Linda explains,

I have a scrapbook with pictures of every animal I’ve fostered, each one with its own wonderful story. It feels good to share those stories and know that I’m doing the right thing. I keep in touch with the people who adopt my dogs and I get to visit them and see them happy.

“Stories are symbolic interactions” (Plummer, 1995, 19). As such, stories give meaning to feelings that reconnect the AFC worker with a previous lived experience that frames their current situation. In this way, AFC workers, like other social actors, create and sustain a reality. The belief that they are needed and that what they do is necessary and important empowers AFC workers. Keeping memories alive through story telling enables these workers to take control of their situation and manage their emotions.

In his analysis of power in sexual stories Plummer (1995, 28) explains, quite convincingly, the strong connection between power and emotion. He explains, for

example, that “shame may prevent a story from being told” while “pride may lead to it being shouted.” According to this argument, what stories are told, then, can be the result of one’s emotional relationship with *her* story. Of “method acting” Stanislavski says, “feelings are a result of something that has gone before. Of the thing that goes before you should think as you can. As for the result it will produce itself” (Hochschild, 2003, 40). Similar to this, the practice of telling and retelling stories, too, can elicit desired emotions by recalling past emotional experiences. Thus, as shared memories, stories serve a vital role in empowering AFC workers with strategies for managing difficult emotions.

Finally, as an emotion management strategy in AFC, stories can be useful in eliciting and reinforcing positive satisfying emotions that enable workers to combat complex negative feelings associated with loving animals and giving them up. They not only remind workers of appropriate “feeling rules,” but elicit a desired emotion as well. While considered as an interactional process by Plummer (1995, 19), this strategy can work at the individual level as well. Looking through photo albums, reading diary entries, watching videos, sharing these “emotion memories” with others or reliving them alone, have the power to enable AFC workers to manage unpleasant emotions and elicit rewarding emotional experiences and thus continue their work (Hochschild, 2003, 41).

Narrowing One’s Focus

The emotional labor involved in AFC is so great that burnout is a common problem in this work. Linda plainly states that “Many [fosterers] ward it [burnout] off by focusing their attention on that one dog...Most rescue people don’t see the larger picture, they see the small picture.” While Linda provides an explicit statement about what AFC workers do, Mindy provides a more applied perspective to this approach when she says “I love cats. It’s good when they have a lot of stimuli, that way they aren’t afraid of

people.” This comment demonstrates, in several ways, how AFC providers focus their attention. Mindy’s attention on cats versus other animals and her focus on directly interacting with cats and preparing them for their lives with human families narrows her perspective. In this way, Mindy can exclude from her consciousness the array of animals exploited and neglected by society as well as the more abstract and overwhelming issue of animal homelessness in favor of the relative few she has in her home.

Hochschild (2003, 49-50) notes that institutional emotion management mechanisms in the form of institutional rules and customs serve to manage how workers feel by limiting the setting in which they work, thereby limiting what they see and, more importantly, what they feel. To “manage feeling that threatens order” in a teaching hospital, for example, Hochschild (2003, 49-50) notes that customs associated with autopsies, such as “covering the corpse’s face and genitalia, avoiding the hands, later removing the body, moving fast, using white uniforms, and talking in uniformed talk,” put distance between a medical student and the deceased person by designing the “stage” in a way that controls the way medical students see, and thus experience, the body. On an individual level, medical “students transform the person into a set of esoteric body parts....[They] reduce the person for the moment...Focus[ing] real hard on the detail at hand, the fact, or the procedure or the question” (Smith and Kleinman, 1989, 60). In the absence of such measures that create distance between doctors and patients “[s]eeing the eye of a dead person might call to mind a loved one or oneself; to see this organ coldly violated by a knife might lead a student to faint, or flee in horror, or quit medicine then and there” (1989, 49-50). If medical students are to successfully complete their medical training, creating an environment that limits feeling, both institutionally and individually, is crucial.

According to the comments by the AFC workers I interviewed, it appears that individuals, too, can utilize this strategy of narrowing the worker's view (in this case the self's view) as a way of managing feelings. By focusing attention on the immediate case at hand and ignoring the larger looming social issue, AFC providers are able to limit their thoughts and feeling, thus, enabling them to establish and maintain feelings of self-worth and accomplishment. Such feelings are critical to the ability of AFC providers to continue their work of fostering and surrendering animals.

Enlisting Others in the Adoption Process

Mindy admits, "Sometimes we do our own [adoptions] and sometimes we do others'. Sometimes we have someone else do our cats because it's hard, you know, nobody's good enough [as an adoptive family]." The use of "we" in this statement implies that other AFC providers also use this strategy. The principle here is similar to narrowing one's focus where AFC workers control the focus of their work. In this case, however, the worker abstains from the adoption process and enlists cooperation from another worker. In those cases where an AFC provider finds it difficult to successfully negotiate the adoption process, someone who is less attached must step in and handle the adoption of their foster animals; otherwise, a satisfactory family may not be identified by an AFC provider who has grown "too" attached to the animals she's fostering and who has come to believe that she is the only one who will care for the animal adequately.

The unique characteristic of this strategy is that, unlike the other strategies I've discussed, this strategy requires interactive participation on someone else's part. That is, in this case the AFC worker is not active in confronting and managing difficult emotions. Rather, she deliberately withdraws active participation, employing a strategy that enables her to manage her current feelings as well as those yet to be confronted in the adoption process by accepting her attachment and avoiding painful decision making,

at least when she chooses it. Thus, when an AFC provider is cognizant of an “inappropriate” degree of attachment to their foster animals, they can, by making the decision to enlist someone else to handle the adoption process, manage current as well as anticipated feelings of pain, frustration, and, possibly, burnout. Emotion management, then, as a strategy for controlling emotions, is an important part of AFC.

Social Implications of Animal Foster Care

From the symbolic interactionist perspective, how these women construct and understand themselves and the AFC role is important to understand, because, according to sociology, it is through such social interaction that a way of life is created and sustained. But, to stop here and not question meanings and actions is to dismiss a very important part of sociology, because critical examination of human constructions and practices is also an important element of sociology. By applying critical theory to what AFC workers do and why they do it, we are able to uncover possible contradictions between how these workers perceive their work and the underlying reality which works to perpetuate hierarchal relations. I believe, consequently, that through role construction and role use the women involved in AFC are able to access and exercise legitimate power by defining the reality of animal homelessness and their role in it, forming and exercising authority within AFC organizations, and managing difficult emotions. Still, this em(power)ment remains at the individual level. The oppressive Patriarchal social structures of human-animal and gender relations (speciesism and patriarchy) remain unchallenged and are, in fact, reinforced.

Role Construction: Empowerment through Defining Reality

“Maintenance of [subjective] reality is one of the most important imperatives of social order” (Berger, 1990, 17). Thus, probably the most fundamental form of power is the ability to define reality, for to define what is considered real is to determine peoples’ actions and the social outcomes that result from those actions. The legitimacy of the work by AFC providers, as with that of any social group, rests on how well their beliefs

mesh with those of the dominant culture. AFC workers understand free-roaming, abandoned, and surrendered cats and dogs to be innocent and in need of help. This core belief is the basis for their work of caring for unwanted cats and dogs and placing them in permanent loving homes. This perception however relegates animals to a powerless childlike status where human intervention and care are seen as necessary for the survival and wellbeing of the animal. In the case of AFC, then, workers accept the dominant cultural ideology of the inferior status of animals (relative to human animals) to justify what could be defined as capturing, sterilizing, enslaving, and selling animals. Furthermore, AFC providers (re)construct the condition of free-roaming cats and dogs as homeless, and thus a social problem not only deserving of but ethically requiring human intervention. “Homeless” becomes equated with “unwanted” as these animals are defined as innocent victims of individual human behavior, which justifies AFC providers’ efforts to help these animals by stepping in and taking over where individuals have failed. The ability to confer such labels and establish such meanings demonstrates the existence of unequal power between human and nonhuman animals. Similarly, when AFC providers speak as “experts” about “safe interaction” between humans and foster animals, they imply a sense of superior intelligence and feelings of supremacy, demonstrated as domination and control over the natural beast (e.g. a dog).

By defining these animals as “pets” and family members and the AFC role as caregiver of these family members, AFC providers position the problem of animal homelessness within the private sphere of family, the traditional limit of female authority and power, thereby upholding the traditional feminine (mother) role. In the home, traditional ideals of parental commitment and sacrifice (primarily the mother role) are borrowed and expanded to include the family pet. Using the institution of family and constructing their role as “expressive,” rather than “instrumental” inadvertently perpetuates and legitimates womens’ limited social role and thus Patriarchy. Therefore,

as Marciano (1986, 24) says about “the family”, AFC “is not an alternative to patriarchal social rewards such as power and control, it is within and is the transmitter of, the same system.”

As a result of their constructions, I would argue that AFC workers concentrate on the symptom, rather than the problem itself—domination. And in this way, AFC providers in fact contribute to the problem by individualizing it and approaching it through the institution of family. Ignoring systemic issues of domination and oppression (of both animals and women), AFC workers contribute, albeit unintentionally, to that very system of domination and oppression. In other words, AFC providers, and other women and men, are the instruments of (re)creation of Patriarchy when they continue to “subscribe to its premises, whether explicitly or by omitting any examination of those premises” (Marciano, 1986, 24).

Role Use: Empowerment through Dominating the “Other”

How a problem is defined determines how one approaches it, what actions they take toward changing it. In the case of AFC, the belief that animals are innocent and in need of help provides the basis for AFC workers’ actions. These workers understand their work as being an important contribution toward alleviating animal homelessness. They also know however that their efforts cannot solve this problem. The goal of AFC is to save as many lives as possible in a culture that systematically devalues, discards, and destroys cats and dogs. They approach this by organizing around the belief that animals are innocent and helpless; collecting unwanted, abandoned, and surrendered animals; working to reduce animal overpopulation through medical procedures; preparing cats and dogs for future lives as loved family pets; and permanently placing these animals in appropriate homes. But, as with the social constructions in AFC, the practices, too, mirror and perpetuate Patriarchy.

In a very key way, AFC organizations earn legitimacy by aligning with existing Patriarchal (and capitalistic) organizations and corporations, such as pet stores, humane societies, and pet supply manufacturers. Patriarchy, “as with all systems, is structured to make adherents of its [re]creators” (Marciano, 1986, 20). Thus, organizations and roles embraced by the dominant system are unlikely to challenge the very system that spawned them. AFC, as a product of Patriarchal ideology and practice, adheres to Patriarchy by placing women in the caring role, reinforcing the female role as home and family centered, and mirroring the characteristics of Patriarchy—dichotomization (speciesism), hierarchy and subordination (domination), and exercise of power in the name of responsibility (oppression).

AFC and other groups organized around animal homelessness accept the Patriarchal idea of the human-nature dichotomy—speciesism. As discussed earlier, it is the belief that homeless animals are innocent victims of human companions who do not want them that guides AFC workers’ actions. Consequently, free-roaming and surrendered animals are dominated by AFC workers who, as a rule, *trap, sterilize, enslave, and sell* them. “I first got involved” in AFC, says Brenda, “when I tried to catch three stray kittens in my neighborhood so that I could find them homes...[After several days of coaxing them with food] I carried the first kitten in the house, the second I was able to lure inside with food, the last one had to be trapped.” *Trapping* is common for catching feral strays. As soon as possible the animal is “*fixed*,” or spayed or neutered. (Note the use of language here, where “fixing” an animal implies “doing the right thing,” like healing a broken bone or curing an illness.) Again, this action is based on the belief that the root of the problem is human (ir)responsibility of animal reproduction, rather than, say, human encroachment of land and resources necessary for the survival of all living beings.

Because these animals must be monitored, socialized, and adopted, they must be *confined*. Feral animals (free-roaming) and potentially feral animals (surrendered) must therefore be enslaved, dependent on humans for their very survival. The animals' abilities to adapt to a life dictated by and lived with humans is critical to their continued survival. Euthanasia, while rare and not supported in AFC, is sometimes "best." If the health of an animal is seriously compromised, and/or if it appears unlikely that the animal will be able to successfully adapt to a human family, and/or if a foster care provider cannot be arranged, euthanasia can be a last resort. Ann, a veterinary technician, spoke of a stray dog that was brought into the clinic she works at:

There were these people who brought in a dog that had been hit by a car and had two broken hips...[It would have been expensive] and the dog was older and it wasn't a very nice dog. We put it down [euthanized it]...We do do surgeries, and we do do some like that, but this one just wasn't going to work.

Ann's story illustrates how, if an animal cannot (or will not) adapt to being a pet, euthanasia can be constructed as the most "humane" thing to do. But notice how the decision is made *for* the animal.

For the overwhelming majority of cases, however, a suitable family can be found and the animal can be placed in a permanent home. Here, the AFC provider exerts authority, enforcing organization standards of appropriate homes by interviewing and evaluating prospective adoptive families. And, when other pets, especially dogs, are already present in the prospective home, an in-home assessment is common. Linda explains:

We require that all household members be present because, just as not all people get along, not all dogs get along either. Being a pack animal, dogs must find a hierarchy, they have to have one. The last thing you want is for them to fight it out. If you just get it that they are pack animals, you understand this and you introduce them properly, you put everyone on a leash and take them outside on neutral territory, that kind of thing.

Again, this is an exercise of power.

An “*adoption fee*” is charged for each animal placed in a permanent home. This transaction, while not called selling, is required for every adoption. While the bulk of financial support comes from public and corporate donations and fundraisers, this fee is necessary to help defray the costs of the organization, especially universal medical expenses such as spaying/neutering and vaccination costs. Unlike those who sell animals for profit, adoption facilitators are to place foster animals in loving and caring permanent homes with families they deem to be appropriate. While adoption processors seek to achieve the standards they help to construct, eligibility, as we have seen, can vary between organizations as well as between individuals within them. For example, in the state where she relocated from, Mindy explains, “they [the AFC organization she volunteered for] were very strict about not declawing cats, and I am too. I won’t adopt cats to someone if I believe they will declaw it. Others will, though, if they feel the home will be a good home, but I don’t agree with that.” Such flexibility can blur the line between selling an animal and placing a pet.

In those cases where prospective adopters are deemed unacceptable, providers exercise ultimate authority by denying adoption applicants. Brenda tells the following story: “There was a woman who wanted to adopt a cat because her cat of seven years was killed by dogs in the neighborhood. When I found out the cat was declawed and allowed to be a sometimes in-door/out-door cat, I denied her application.” While such individuals may still be able to acquire a pet elsewhere, the message of the AFC adoption processor is clear—voluntarily removing a cat’s natural defense system is irresponsible and inappropriate caregiver behavior and unacceptable for the animals in their care.

Emotion Management: Empowerment through Dominating the “Self”

Not only is domination of “other” apparent in AFC, so is domination of “self.” The motivating force that compels AFC workers to love and care for cats and dogs on a temporary basis is overwhelmingly described by AFC providers as love of animals. Furthermore, because AFC requires that providers care for and socialize the animals they foster, the emotional challenge of controlling their level of attachment to the animals is common to their work. Consequently, simultaneously eliciting positive emotions of love and satisfaction and suppressing negative emotions such as loss and frustration are necessary in AFC work, a social activity motivated and sustained by love. This daily struggle to maintain their love of animals while caring for them on a temporary basis is a common part of AFC work.

Similar to the domination and control exercised over a perceived inferior species in AFC, this practice of managing one’s emotions, too, requires domination and control over perceived “inferior” qualities. Emotions and emotional experience are, like other social constructions, dualistic and unequally valued. This, according to McGuire and McGuire (1993, 3), is characteristic of the dualistic thinking made popular by Patriarchal ideology where “[t]he patriarchal belief system places higher value on linear, mechanistic, analytical, and rational qualities [read masculine], [while] [t]he intuitive, emotional, anarchic, and earthy are negatively perceived as passive, weak, irrational—and female [read feminine].” By associating certain emotions and their expression with masculinity, and “others” with femininity, the categories of “female” and “male” (dualistic categories associated with Patriarchal thinking) and the emotions associated with each gender become naturalized. Disparate values in emotions, moreover, also become constructed as innate with masculine emotions and emotional expression perceived as appropriate and therefore legitimate and feminine emotions and their expression as inappropriate and thus illegitimate to feel and/or express in a rational society.

Given how important gender is to a Patriarchal culture the significance of the roles of gender socialization and the related socialization into emotions for both women and men remain fundamental concepts of contemporary sociology. Guidelines for proper emotions and emotional expression ensure continued dichotomization of the sexes and their conduct and, consequently, their life chances, including access to power. Because one's life chances are contingent on their ability to conform to dominant ideals and practices, access to power and empowerment are strongly linked to conformity. Without conformity legitimacy can be hard to attain, and without legitimacy success can be even harder to realize. Furthermore, because "masculine" emotions and emotional expression are considered appropriate in the public sphere, the fact that those who wish to participate in it conform to its precepts is not surprising. Like social movements and other philanthropic organizations, AFC workers also borrow the values and practices of their dominant culture in order to participate in it. It is in this way that these individuals and their work can achieve social acceptance and success. Management of "feminine" emotions in favor of "masculine" ones, then, while considered appropriate, perpetuates Patriarchy and masculinity precisely because they are deemed legitimate in public professions.

AFC, like other caring professions, is very emotionally demanding work. Mindy says, for example, that when she started volunteering as a kenneler with a local organization where she used to live that "I just wanted to stay back and keep busy. I didn't want to foster because I knew it would be hard..." Giving them up after fostering them is hard says Sue because "[y]ou love them and bond with them..." Likewise Brenda says, "I used to foster, but then I stopped for a while. It's hard; you get attached to them so fast and you don't want to give them up." And in those cases where animals are severely injured and unlikely to respond to foster care Linda says "It pisses me off that other people abuse them and I have to make the difficult decision to do the right

thing [and put them down, euthanize them].” The types of emotions described by these foster providers illustrate the pain and frustration these individuals feel in their daily lives as they struggle to balance their love of animals and the need to let them go. This balance however, is achieved by controlling emotions considered to be irrational, unproductive, and useless in AFC, or at least, the display of such emotions. In doing this, AFC workers, again, mirror and perpetuate Patriarchal ideals and practices.

By creating and sustaining a reality through such emotion management techniques as establishing boundaries and narrowing one’s focus, AFC workers experience personal empowerment as they construct the reality that they are needed and that what they are doing is necessary and important. Such constructions allow AFC workers to feel reassured and confident in the work they do while controlling current and anticipated feelings of pain and uncertainty. Likewise, emotion management practices such as telling stories and enlisting others in the adoption process empower AFC workers by enabling them to establish and maintain feelings of self-worth and accomplishment in their work while controlling unpleasant feelings of self-doubt and frustration. So, while managing their emotions empowers AFC providers by allowing them to manage unpleasant and difficult emotions as well as to elicit and reinforce positive rewarding feelings that are associated with loving animals and letting them go, this also means it enables them to continue their work dominating the “other.” Through emotion management of “particular” emotions, then, AFC workers reinforce and perpetuate dominant ideas of masculinity and femininity that are critical to a Patriarchal social system.

Discussion

A key tenet of sociological theory and ecofeminist theory is that scholars, while recognizing their position in society and its influence on their perspective, are called to align with the oppressed and assist them in their struggle for freedom. Moreover, this assistance should not involve imposing ways of thinking and acting that “should” be done. Of the oppression of animals Adams says, “we must act in solidarity with the oppressed. We cannot just speak ‘for’ them. We’re not saving or protecting or bestowing something on animals, but recognizing who has privilege and power over them and challenging that” (Adams quoted in Hoffman, 1995, 3). Implicit in the claim of AFC workers that “AFC saves animals’ lives” is the awareness (though likely not conscious) that animals are oppressed by human animals. Yet, as stated earlier, it is oppression at the hands of individuals, rather than as part of a social system.

In this paper I have tried to remain true to the personal experiences of the women who participated in this research as well as the act of AFC itself. It has not been my contention that AFC workers and other “animal lovers” knowingly and purposefully dominate and exploit animals and that the practice of AFC should discontinue. Nor do I believe that AFC is the source of the problem of animal homelessness. My purpose, simply, has been to critically examine the latent role of AFC in, and its implications for, the larger society. With this said, I do believe that the work AFC workers do is important and necessary for saving the lives of countless cats and dogs and facilitating loving human-companion animal relationships, and that they do this in several key ways.

AFC workers combat animal homelessness by raising public awareness and educating individuals about animal homelessness and the plight of homeless and

unwanted cats and dogs. At regional pet adoption expos, local adoption centers, and neighborhood fundraising activities AFC workers spread the word about the need for and availability of animal fostering services as a valuable resource for caring for innocent homeless cats and dogs and placing them in permanent loving homes. They contribute to loving human-companion animal relationships by helping match people with compatible pets. Determining compatibility is an important part of AFC's work to alleviate animal homelessness, because mismatches between people and their pets is a major source of the problem of animal homelessness. AFC providers also contribute to the commitment and loyalty of human companions for their pets by doing the initial training of cats and dogs that makes it easier and more satisfying for human companions to adopt and keep a pet. Furthermore, AFC workers enhance quality of life for animals and humans alike by giving cats and dogs the lives that might otherwise be cut short and allowing human companions to experience again, or for the first time, the love, loyalty, and commitment of pet companionship. Such efforts attempt to guarantee the best possible future for the animal by contributing to the formation of strong(er) family bonds that are sought out by so many animal lovers. Finally, unlike many humane societies, AFC workers do this by providing a pleasant atmosphere for individuals and families to view and interact with prospective pets that have been socialized to live with human companions. This environment alleviates guilt on the part of prospective adopters who can rest assured knowing that if they do not find the right pet for them among the cats and dogs available at any given time, the animals will not be destroyed and will eventually be placed in permanent homes

While I believe that AFC is an important and valuable resource for mitigating animal homelessness, I also believe that AFC workers, who are primarily women, create pockets of power under the larger umbrella of Patriarchy where a woman-centered value system of ethics and caring prevail. These niches, however, reinforce, rather than

challenge, Patriarchal ideas of both species and gender relations. AFC, because of its speciesist and Patriarchal assumptions about animals and animal homelessness, unwittingly perpetuates these oppressive structures and accommodates animal exploitation (speciesism) and sexism by dominating cats and dogs and relegating the AFC role to that of care giving, or even mothering. It does not actively pursue a solution to the “real” problem, which appears to be rooted in Patriarchal ideas of dualism.

Exploration of benevolent everyday activities, such as AFC, is very important for a more complete understanding of how power operates in not only human-animal relations but human relations as well. The exploration of power relations in AFC sheds more light on the interconnectedness of oppressive structures and how responses aimed at relieving oppression can actually work to reproduce that very system of oppression. We tend to ignore, for example, such critical questions as urbanization and the limited spaces for animals to dwell. And, why developing more and more pristine land is favorable when many neglected and abandoned residential and corporate land and buildings lay in decay in both urban and suburban areas. Why continue to expand our reach deeper and deeper into surrounding environmentally sensitive areas while simultaneously withdrawing reinvestment into and commitment to areas already domesticated? As Linda says of dogs, “we socialized dogs hundreds of years ago and now we’re responsible for them.” Could not the same be said of land? Should it? Or, might taking responsibility for human domination simply mean reframing it as benevolent? Of animal rights activism, for example, Kappeler says, “we do not protect those actually being killed, we exploit their victimization to ‘protect’ and patronize those surviving and within our reach” (1995, 322). Lacking the power to confront the power structure that engages in, legitimates, and perpetuates aggression toward animals (and other oppressed groups) as well as the power to protect its victims, AFC, like (other) benevolent animal rights organizations, could be said to “(ab)use the threat of death and

extinction in the interest of ‘allowing’ [them]selves an attitude of protectionism (and consequently victimization of the oppressed)...” (Kappeler, 1995, 322). After all, they do admit that their work of finding homes for homeless animals is “a short term solution to a long term problem” (Linda).

I am not arguing that AFC is, itself, a social problem, though I do understand it to be a problematic social activity. As with other benevolent organizations, AFC accommodates the perpetuation of the source of the problem they work to alleviate (e.g. Irvine, 2003). In this example, AFC perpetuates the problem of animal homelessness by accommodating its social structural source—Patriarchy (hierarchical dualism)—which displaces and then defines the reality of free-roaming cats and dogs as problematic. We, as a society, have created a society around this way of thinking, and, as a social institution, this is precisely what AFC does—reinforces a socially constructed reality by responding to the social problem as defined by a social system created and designed based on that very system of belief. AFC workers can never, nor do they claim to have the potential to, solve the problem as it is currently defined. What AFC workers can do, however, is consider and be open to efforts targeting social change. But, AFC workers must first be made aware of the root of the problem, encouraged to redefine the problem as they now see it, and persuaded to incorporate into their efforts (not necessarily replace them with) organization and action targeting Patriarchal beliefs systems that assign animals and women unequal status.

As an AFC provider and human companion to three wonderful cats, I have found it difficult and enlightening to write this thesis. I have struggled with the meaning and basis of my foster care work and my relationships with my own pets. Thus, I hope to accomplish several things by critically examining AFC. First, I hope to contribute to a practical solution to the problem of animal homelessness by questioning the current definition of the problem as one of individual failure and responsibility rather than

systemic oppression. Second, I hope to further understanding of the interconnectedness of oppressions by examining more closely the potentially participatory role of AFC women in Patriarchy. And finally, because behavior is inextricably linked to thinking, I hope this work encourages “animal lovers” to evaluate their own beliefs and assumptions about *their* human-animal relationships and interactions.

Notes

1. Like Janis Birkeland (1993), I capitalize “Patriarchy” to distinguish it as a particular way of thinking about this concept that includes hierarchical dualisms in general. This definition is more comprehensive than the conventional meaning of patriarchy as male dominance over women. I discuss the ecofeminist meaning of Patriarchy further in the section entitled “Patriarchy.”
2. While I do not adhere to a belief in dichotomous sexes or genders, I use the dichotomous terms throughout since hierarchical dualisms (see note 1) are the focus of this essay. Moreover, I use the term “gender relations” as a synonym for gender roles/norms. I do this with the assumption that the significance of gender (femininity and masculinity) lies in its relation to gender roles, which determines how females and males are expected to think, feel, appear, and behave in relation to others, including each other.
3. Developed by Robert Bales (1950), the concepts of expressive and instrumental roles describe two general types of group dynamics. Expressive leaders are concerned with the emotional wellbeing of group members and thus their continued involvement in the group. Instrumental leaders, on the other hand, are more concerned with task management and achieving the goals of the group.

In the family the traditional mother role, as provider of emotional support, is understood as expressive, while that of the father, as financial provider and disciplinarian, is understood as instrumental. Because the mother role is expanded to include the family pet and the goal of AFC work is to ready foster animals for adoption into families, the constant flow of foster animals into human families necessitate the continuation of the traditional feminine role of mother. Likewise, the AFC role demands personal sacrifice and commitment and presents emotional challenges similar to that of a mother for a child. In this way, the work of AFC provider, as caregiver and guardian of unwanted cats and dogs, contributes to the continuation of the traditional feminine role as caregiver and protector of the innocent and helpless.

4. “Keying” is taken from Erving Goffman’s work on “Frame Analysis.” According to Erving Goffman, by providing a point of reference, a primary frame gives an experience meaning (1974, 43-44). “The pet as keyed family member,” according to Hickrod & Schmitt, “relates back to the primary frame of the family” (1982, 58).

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