

ARTICLE

Feminisms, Fuzzy Sciences, and Interspecies Intersectionalities: The Promises and Perils of Contemporary Dog Training

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Abstract

Tracing histories of interventions in dog training, this paper examines the contemporary divide between "dominance" and "positive reinforcement" training practices. Drawing from writings by scientists and trainers, this article traces the many ways that the doings of much contemporary dog training embody "fuzzy sciences." Examples from ethnographic fieldwork conducted in an animal shelter help demonstrate the ways specific fuzzy sciences of training are feminist, while others are not. The article closes with a consideration of the ways that relationships between humans and animals not only reflect but also shape experiences of race, gender, sexuality, nation, species, and breed, or "interspecies intersectionalities." The article concludes by thinking through the lens of "interspecies intersectionalities" in order to elucidate a promising expansion of the feminist fuzzy sciences of dog training.

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Introduction

In November 2002 I adopted my first dog, Haley, a brown-and-white pit bull-type whose cropped ears and proclivity for swimming gave her the appearance of a landbound seal. Like many a new dog owner, I was eager to embark on the task of building and shaping our relationship and asked others for training tips.¹ I was also a novice when it came to reading dog body language. These practices came to a head one afternoon when Haley and I were at the dog beach and I intervened in her play with another dog when I thought she was getting aggressive by “rolling” her—flipping her over onto her back. The appalled looks on the faces of those around us quickly demonstrated what my earlier research missed—in this space, “rolling” was not condoned. Ashamed, I collected Haley and left. Later, when we returned to the beach, a red-haired white woman in a hat approached me and gently steered our conversation toward training and behavior. The woman, Alice, summoned her dog, Ghana, a dark-brown pit bull-type, and rewarded him with a treat from a pouch strapped to her waist, then walked around the park with us while casually demonstrating the basic elements of positive-reinforcement-based training.² I began to meet with Alice and Ghana regularly, acquired my own treats pouch, and eventually took classes with Alice’s trainer, Alex, a white butch woman whose business card featured a pit bull in profile. This process introduced me to a divide that is central to today’s dog worlds, one into which Haley and I had unwittingly tumbled through that roll on the sand, which I will term *positive reinforcement* versus *dominance*.

The language of *positive reinforcement* and *dominance* identifies a contentious division in contemporary worlds of dog training. While terms such as *positive training*, *force-free training*, *old school*, *traditional*, *pack leader*, and more also mark this divide, I center my writing in *positive reinforcement* and *dominance* because these terms index not only the unclear, fuzzy, role of capital-S Sciences in these discussions but also the complex moral and philosophical stakes involved in their practice.

The Association for Professional Dog Trainers (n.d.) demonstrates this fuzzy role, noting that “those individuals employed as dog trainers are largely ‘self educated’”; the majority of today’s professional dog training experiences involve someone without any formal Scientific schooling, regardless of training approach. Contrasting affective politics figure in the divide itself; training celebrity Victoria Stilwell’s catchphrase— “Kindness is powerful. Pass it on”—shapes her Positively training approach, while dominance expert Cesar Millan (“Does your dog respect you?” n.d.) pushes people to ask not “whether their dogs give them ‘unconditional love’” but rather whether their dogs respect them. Further, as I learned through years of following training debates and doing ethnographic fieldwork at an animal shelter, the doings of most training approaches rarely align with textbook methods. Yet I contend that the people I spoke to and witnessed do practice a science in their work with dogs; these, I argue, are the “fuzzy sciences” of dog training.

My intervention in this article explores how the doings of contemporary dog training not only reveal “fuzzy sciences,” a deliberately lowercased and multiple sense of science, but also how feminisms shape these fuzzy sciences, yielding sciences out of feminisms and, more specifically, what I term “feminist fuzzy sciences.” These feminisms are multiple, in part because what feminisms *are* involves their own fuzziness; understandings of feminisms emerge from buttons and bumper stickers as well as rigorous academic study, and often draw from both in a co-constitutive praxis and theory where lived experiences *are* theorizing and theorizing *is* activism. In this sense, while this piece draws from the work of scholars such as Donna Haraway (2008) and Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2012), it also involves more prosaic feminisms. Further, I elaborate a concept here that draws from Kimberlé Crenshaw’s (1991) work on intersectionality in order to interrogate the ways relationships between humans and nonhuman animals not only reflect but actively shape experiences of differences such as gender, race, sexuality, species, and breed: what I term “interspecies intersectionalities.”

The following article explores feminist fuzzy sciences and

interspecies intersectionalities by combining my fieldwork and autoethnographic examples with published and publicly available materials on training and writings in feminist science studies and human-animal studies. Beginning with the positive reinforcement (hereon referred to as *R+*) and dominance divide, I turn to questions of care, epistemology, and relationality to articulate how and why some fuzzy sciences are feminist. I join this discussion with questions of interspecies intersectionalities in training worlds, which I follow with an exploration of the fuzziness of on-the-ground work through ethnographic examples from my fieldwork site. I close with an examination of fuzziness as a concept and the kinds of disruptions and connections, fuzzy and otherwise, that thinking feminist fuzzy sciences together with interspecies intersectionalities yields; these, I hope, are the promising sciences out of feminisms this article details.

Science and Training

Readers less familiar with today's training debates are no doubt wondering what *R+* and *dominance* mean, so here I delve into some of the key players and thinkers, beginning with *R+*. Rooted in behavioral scientist and psychologist B.F. Skinner's (1938) research into "operant conditioning," *R+* is one of four quadrants Skinner outlined, which include positive and negative reinforcement and punishment. In Skinner's schema, *positive* and *negative* indicate adding or taking something away, while *reinforcement* and *punishment*, respectively, increase and decrease the future occurrence of a behavior. Translated, *R+* would be when a dog gets a reward for presenting her paw to "shake" in order to encourage future "shakes," and positive punishment occurs when a dog gets a shock from an electronic collar when she barks in order to discourage future barks. Negative reinforcement occurs when the pinching of a prong collar lessens because a dog stops pulling on a leash; negative punishment happens when I withhold kisses from my dog until she approaches me calmly.

Skinner's work was not widely disseminated in dog worlds until Karen Pryor's 1984 book *Don't Shoot the Dog*. Littered with practical examples comparing training approaches from the different quadrants—"roommate leaves dirty laundry all over the place," which might be positively punished through yelling and scolding or, conversely, reshaped using R+ through buying "beer and [inviting] over members of the opposite sex whenever quarters are tidy"—Pryor's book deliberately emphasized R+ (Pryor, 1984, pp. 104, 124). In this, Pryor translated the Science of Skinner's behaviorism into a local, practical science for regular dog owners and handlers. Patricia McConnell, an ethologist and applied animal behaviorist, echoes this approach in her book *The Other End of the Leash* (2003), in which chapters subtitled "How Your Body 'Talks' to Your Dog and How to Make Sure It Says What You Want" translate the Science of ethology into practical tips on human versus dog body language. For example, McConnell's training tips involve rather doggish bodily signals: "The best way I know to visually 'call' a dog to come is to bend down as if in a doggie play bow, turn away from your dog, and clap" (p. 23). Notably, McConnell's advanced degree and Pryor's lack thereof highlight a norm in dog worlds; while many of the field's luminaries claim postgraduate Scientific degrees, many others do not. Indeed, one notable figure in the dominance school who has written in adamant disagreement with what she called the "new behaviorists" while lacking a Scientific degree is poet, philosopher, and obedience trainer Vicki Hearne.

Before outlining Hearne's work, I want to give a brief etiology of dominance training. Loosely based in thinking derived from research by animal behaviorist Rudolph Schenkel (1947) on captive wolves, in which problem behaviors denote a dog's need to ascend the pack hierarchy to "alpha" status, dominance training also draws from the 1950s work of trainer William Koehler, who used "corrections"—"a sharp upward jerk on the training lead, performed as impersonally as possible"—to teach a dog and earn his/her respect (Hearne, 1986, p. 45). However, dominance training also emerges from police- and military-dog training approaches

utilized in the early to mid-twentieth century and, more broadly, from cultural narratives about wolves, such as Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series.

A close follower and friend of Koehler, Hearne (1986) desires complete obedience as a means to confer "nobility, character, and dignity on the dog" (p. 43). Hearne's work with Salty demonstrates her approach. She begins by first "placing," or moving, Salty's limbs into position and saying "Salty, Sit!" Hearne soon gives the command without placing, noting, "If she refuses to sit, or just doesn't think to sit, I give her a harsh, emphatic sit correction" (p. 55). For Hearne, corrections act as a language that respects Salty's "moral and intellectual capacities" by giving her a means of communication: the bodily movements of obedience (p. 45). When Salty later presents a "clean-edged," formal, obedience-style sit, compelling Hearne's response, Hearne delights in Salty's enlarging "the context" of their language. She exults that "understanding has been enlarged by enforced obedience!" (pp. 56, 30, 45).

Popular S/sciences: Millan and Stilwell

While the above figures stand in for a plethora of professionals involved in today's training debates, their names and approaches are less familiar to laypeople who encounter the R+/dominance divide.³ In this section I take up two celebrity trainers whose contrasting approaches illustrate the roles of Sciences, sciences, affective politics, and feminisms in the more popular version of the divide: Cesar Millan, television's "Dog Whisperer" and a firm proponent of dominance methods; and Victoria Stilwell, whose television show "It's Me or the Dog," publications, and public appearances feature her own training brand, Positively.

Famously self-taught as a trainer, Millan focuses on two key tenets in his work: "pack leadership" and "energy" ("Cesar's essentials," n.d.). While pack leadership rests in the insistence that a human needs to be at the top of a perceived hierarchy, implicitly drawing on Schenkel—an understanding repudiated by more recent Scientific work, such as that of

wildlife biologist L. David Mech (1999)—Millan’s sense of energy is decidedly non-Scientific: “energy = intention × emotion.” Millan’s explanation of these concepts underscores this distance: “because dogs communicate with energy...they instinctually seek and follow pack leaders who exhibit both calm and assertive energy” (“Pack leadership technique 1,” n.d.). And while Millan’s training facility, the Dog Psychology Center, invokes the Science of psychology in its name, my research has not unearthed evidence of any trained psychologists employed there. In fact, Millan’s materials include only one overt mention of Science, an article by J. Bastian (n.d.) titled “Science catches up to Cesar” that points to a study where GPS devices were used to track social ranking and personality traits in a pack of hunting dogs. Positing that this “first hard evidence that social hierarchy does exist” bolsters Millan’s approach to training, the article also evokes a temporal distance from Science, positioning Millan ahead of and apart from such research.

Like Millan, Stilwell’s beginnings as a trainer were informal—she worked as a dog walker before taking seminars with trainers and branching out into her own brand. Unlike Millan, Stilwell counters dominance narratives, noting that “instead of looking to become alpha, top dog or pack leader over us, most dogs simply want safety, security and those things which generally make them feel good” (“Myth versus fact,” n.d.). Unlike Millan, Stilwell embraces Science, pointing out that R+ “has been universally endorsed by the behavioral scientific community at large as the most effective, long-lasting, humane and safest method in dog training.” However, Stilwell notes that “positive training is not a scientific term,” for her philosophy is more affective than scientific: “For most of us, it does not take scientific journals to tell us what our instincts have already said: it is more humane to reward than to punish” (“What is positive training?” n.d.). Combined with her 2016 “Kindness Is Powerful” joint campaign with State Farm Insurance, Stilwell’s claim of not practicing a Science emerges from the way her methods mix behaviorism with care and kindness.

Thinking-with Feminisms

Stilwell's affective politics reveals a mix of morals and emotions in the training debates I outline here. Indeed, caveats like Stilwell's are part of why I name these sciences of translation and practice as lowercase and fairly fuzzy sciences. However, caveats like Stilwell's also point to one of this piece's key interventions, for differences in moral-affective politics between adherents to R+ versus dominance methods underscore a key distinction in how I read their respective fuzzy sciences: their feminisms.

A critical disparity in the R+ versus dominance debates involves different understandings of the roles of love, happiness, and respect in training. As noted earlier, Millan desires respect rather than love from a dog. Similarly, while Hearne (1986) mentions the need to respect the "superior knowledge" of a tracking dog who makes an unexpected turn, a less mutualistic respect shapes her larger body of work, evident in her liberal references to the importance of human "mastery" and a dog's need to "surrender" to the language of "enforced obedience" (pp. 24, 57). Conversely, R+ adherents point to the importance of pleasure; Pryor (2009) comments on the "happy, cooperative, attentive clicker dogs" involved in her clicker academies, while McConnell (2016) proclaims, "I want each of my dogs to be as happy as they can be." The disparity between the approaches seemingly hinges on the ways that R+ involves a caring cultivation of happiness that can be easily, if loosely, connected to feminist ethics, while dominance leans more heavily on respect in the form of obedience.

In many ways, the materialities of the practices I examine seem to bear out an admittedly facile alignment between a prosaic feminism involving care and R+ in contrast to dominance tied to respect and obedience. For example, Millan is widely derided for his punitive practices; one blogger, in response to a video in which Millan strikes a dog's abdomen, notes that he "doesn't whisper to dogs. He kicks them" (Hoffman, 2014). Similarly punitive, if not as extreme, Hearne's "corrections" involve the application of pain to a dog's neck. In contrast,

Pryor's R+ interventions come out of work with marine mammals where collars, leashes, and kicking are impossible, so that the only option for shaping behaviors is to proffer carefully timed rewards (author field notes, 8 June 2013). Then there are McConnell's body-based teachings, as with her encouragement to think about how human and dog bodies "talk"; hers is a different kind of affective politics, one more in keeping with the bodily capacity "to affect and be affected" but which nonetheless affirms and rewards behaviors (Massumi, 1987, p. xvi).⁴ In these ways, the materialities of these training practices align with the division of R+ on the side of a fuzzy but feminist ethics, in contrast to dominance as a painful form of respect.

However, tracing care and kindness in these practices is not quite so simple. For example, a jerk on a prong collar will not kill, but it might teach a dog to associate running at another dog, a neighbor's house, or into the street with bad consequences and may well be the only teaching a dog experiences. In this sense, there is a form of care, but one geared more toward protecting a dog from missteps in a larger world of vehicles, neighbors, and social relationships. Further, both Millan and Hearne are known for their outspoken pit bull advocacy and interest in rehabilitating dogs—indeed, such narratives are central to much of Millan's television work and Hearne's writings, as with her 2007 book *Bandit: The Heart-Warming True Story of One Dog's Rescue from Death Row*. In addition, and as fellow training enthusiast Haraway commented on an earlier draft of this article, there are plenty of cases where dogs in dominance-style training relationships "learn fast and well and live companionable lives with very little coercion—maybe less than in relationships where R+ methods are done badly and result in confusion, leash pulling forever, frustration, and ultimately a fair amount of positive punishment" (personal communication, 23 February 2017). Claims to care and kindness run throughout and across the training divide, albeit in different forms and with material disparities, which is why I now turn to another key interlocutor in order to propose a more precise affective ethics in thinking feminist fuzzy sciences.

Feminist science and technology studies (STS) scholar Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2012) frames care as “an affective state, an ethical obligation, and a practical labor,” one that inheres in the spaces between us, for “not only do relations involve care, care is itself relational” (pp. 197–198). Puig’s relational care involves what she terms “thinking-with,” a connective sensibility that marks how the sharing of caring through relationality involves a shared commitment to mutuality. For example, “thinking-with care” includes a responsibility to speak-with others rather than speaking-for or speaking-about them; this is a proximity of shared stakes and worlds rather than the distance of officious pronouncements on the desires of others. In this sense of -withness, Puig articulates a need for epistemic proximity through mutuality rather than, say, erasure.

The proximity upon which Puig insists demarcates the distinction I read between R+ and dominance; thinking- and speaking-with require a reach toward a mutual language, not the imposition of that of one party onto another. In the context of this writing, I would argue that thinking-with a dog involves labor like that McConnell encourages, wherein a human literally positions their body in a way that is more easily legible to the dog in “calling” the dog with their body. Indeed, thinking-with dogs through training involves communication through a shared language of bodies and bodily movements rather than a human-centric language of verbal obedience. Importantly, this is a form of care absent from dominance training, where obedience to a human-centric language of collar jerks and spoken commands make the -withness elaborated here impossible. Importantly, this is a form of care that denotes the feminist ethics I seek in the feminist fuzzy sciences of training.

In highlighting the mutuality of the relationships Puig poses through thinking-with, I am invested in the ethical obligations that she traces, so here I turn to Haraway (2008). Describing how practices of training animals “to cooperate actively with people in scientific protocols and husbandry facilitate a mutual engagement rather than the transmission of a language of obedience”—one can think here of zoo animals trained through R+ methods for medical procedures—Haraway

notes that “trained animals are subject to less coercion of either physical or pharmaceutical kind.” However, this is not an argument for just any kind of training, for Haraway posits that such “training involves an asymmetrical relationship between responsive partners,” where the term responsive transmutes into “response-able,” which indexes a willingness “to learn to know more,” or “to learn to learn” (p. 336). This sense of response-ability demarcates training that functions as a practice of learning rather than coercion, training motivated by curiosity rather than unquestioning obedience.

Much like Puig’s thinking-with, response-ability decenters the human, for the learning through training that Haraway describes travels both ways. Distinct from the rote application of a particular method or gear, response-ability requires a learning to learn that is a learning to discern. This is a learning that finds language in widened eyes and yawns, one that holds as valid and seeks to better understand nonhuman ways of communicating and understanding. I see much of response-ability in R+ training that I do not find in dominance approaches. Even as the roles remain unequal—there is a human holding a leash, after all—the simple fact that most R+ approaches do not seek a relationship in which the human is an ascendant “alpha” whose language of respect a dog must learn underscores my larger point: R+ training, in its orientation towards thinking-with dogs and response-ability to them, reveals a promisingly feminist fuzzy science that challenges human exceptionalism.

While thinking-with care and response-ability are central to my claiming of R+ training as a feminist fuzzy science, another feminist intervention shapes this writing: interspecies intersectionalities. In this, I draw from feminist and legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw’s (1991) landmark formulation of *intersectionality*, which highlights the inextricability of a range of oppressions related to race, ethnicity, ability, gender identity, class, sexuality, citizenship, and more. For example, intersectionality challenges claims made on behalf of “women’s rights” by pointing out how disparate experiences of “women” yield different political needs—the concerns of a working-class, able-bodied trans

woman of color are not the same as those of a middle-class, white, disabled cisgender woman. While there are numerous definitions of *interspecies*, I am fond of the one given by Jasbir Puar and Julie Livingston (2011) to “refer to relationships *between* different forms of biosocial life and their political effects” (p. 3). Conjoined, *interspecies* and *intersectionalities* describe how relationships between humans and nonhuman animals not only reflect but also shape experiences of gender, race, sexuality, class, nation, species, and breed.

While many of the discourses I examine in this piece lend themselves to analysis through interspecies intersectionalities, I want to clarify the term first. Consider my relationship with Haley. When she came into my life, I identified as female, an identification that changed. As I began the process of medically transitioning to present as more masculine, I noticed that, even when I was not easily legible as either male or female, I was safe with Haley at my side, while my whiteness, queerness, and middle-class status tended to make other humans read her as not dangerous despite her breed and clipped ears. Read through the analytic of interspecies intersectionalities, our relationship involved a mutualistic becoming in which our identities were articulated through and made possible by each other and our disparate connections to “political effects.”

Importantly, interspecies intersectionalities also highlight how disparities in power and discursive erasures figure in human-animal relationships. For example, consider Hearne’s (2007) subtitle for *Bandit*: “The heart-warming story of one dog’s rescue from death row.” Much of today’s discourses surrounding pit bull-type dogs like Bandit connect to race—terms such as “dog racism” are frequently bandied about among advocates protesting anti-pit-bull legislation, while others are quick to point to the problems posed by “thugs” and their pit bulls (Holland, 2013; “Mymind,” 2013). Meant to garner sympathy by leaning on a connection with prisons and injustice, Hearne’s title also reveals a whiteness that emerges through narratives of salvation involving a dog’s body marked by association as brown/black that might be paraphrased as “white

femininity to the rescue.” Notably, this story of salvation erases the violences that affect humans, mostly of color, caged within prisons today, for Hearne does not critique the racism of the prison-industrial complex. Read through the analytic of interspecies intersectionalities, Hearne’s and similar pit-bull advocacy work builds on “like race” thinking that ignores how the assertion of proximities between people of color and nonhuman animals—as when, say, President Obama is likened to an ape—are a key tactic in race-related oppressions.

The analytic of interspecies intersectionalities applies to many of the readings I present here. Consider critiques of Millan’s lack of formal credentials that claim that “his machismo” as part of the problem (Rafkin, 2016); read through interspecies intersectionalities, this sense of his race and masculinity as distancing him from Science reveals how racism shapes perceptions of his relationships with animals. There is also Pryor’s casual heteronormativity in her explanation of R+ training—a roommate gets rewarded with alcohol and the presence of members of the opposite sex when they clean. Read through interspecies intersectionalities, we can see how (presumably white) heterosexuality informs the larger logic of R+ training and the human-animal relationships it shapes. Further, there are the literal spaces of training themselves; seminars such as McConnell’s (2003) *Both Ends of the Leash* run into the hundreds and even thousands of dollars to register and attend and are overwhelmingly populated by white and presumably cisgender women; class and whiteness both shape access to and are shaped by these spaces. Both Stilwell’s and Millan’s respective television work underscores these dynamics, for in-person access involves literal and cultural capital out of the reach of most, such that both spaces of training reify class norms and/or the rescue narratives critiqued above, even as television comes to demarcate such practices as norms while it functions as a low-cost means of teaching. Read through the analytic of interspecies intersectionalities, the training discourses I examine here are overwhelmingly white, racist, classist, and often heteronormative.

The above readings draw from interspecies intersectionalities as

an analytic, one that troubles the ways I have drawn from thinking-with care and response-ability in this article thus far by demonstrating how race, gender, class, sexuality, and more are formative to the training practices, fuzzily feminist and no, that I describe. However, interspecies intersectionalities also works as a sensibility in this writing. Less exact than an analytic, the sensibility of interspecies intersectionalities functions as a way of feeling, an alertness sensitive to the troublesome dynamics I note above but one that also, inexactly, pushes me not just to think but to feel towards ways of knowing and doing these human-dog worlds differently, to sense alternate connections and imagine otherwise. In this sense, and in keeping with the prosaic feminisms this piece references, interspecies intersectionalities attune me differently, pushing me to notice how, say, the politics of a dog-rescue group's Facebook post connecting the oppression of migrant workers with pit bulls is messed up, but also pressing me to feel for and toward different imaginings wherein other feminist and fuzzy interventions join with rather than erase the work of poor, indigent, and marginalized people so that different human-dog worlds might be built that disrupt rather than solidify human-animal oppressions. In order to begin to think through this sensibility, I turn to a training site rife with its own complex interworkings of race, gender, class, sexuality, species, and breed: an animal shelter.

Fuzzy Shelter Sciences

My fieldwork site, an open-admission California shelter with a high volume of pit bull- and chihuahua-type dogs, demonstrates another form of fuzziness, for its employees and volunteers evince significant disparities in their applications and interpretations of different training approaches. When I began my fieldwork, I was surprised to learn that one of the shelter workers with whom I interacted frequently was a Millan fan. Bethany, a brown-haired white woman who served as one of the main coordinators for dog adoptions, even lent me her copy of Malcolm Gladwell's *What the Dog Saw* (2009), which contains a laudatory profile of

Millan. Like many of the staff, Bethany brought her own dog, Simone—a calm black-and-brown mixed breed—to the shelter with her. I witnessed Bethany’s Millan-influenced approach through Simone. For example, one afternoon Simone was interested in lying down in the largest of the dog beds, as was another staff dog, Pharaoh, a spindly, fawn-colored greyhound cross. Growling softly, a stiff Simone body-blocked Pharaoh and then leisurely curled in three tight circles before settling down on the bed. Hearing this, Bethany walked over and grabbed Simone by the muzzle, pulling her off the bed while staring at her with hard, unblinking eyes, and said “NO” in a low, threatening voice. She then made Simone lie on the floor near her feet and returned to her conversation (Author field notes, 26 May 2013).

Other shelter workers who were not overt Millan aficionados also employed dominance-style interpretations. For example, Ben, a gruff white man who came out to me as gay by noting that his favorite color as a kid was purple and “my parents should have known then,” explained to me why they tended to use Simone rather than Pharaoh to test shelter dogs to see if they were okay with other dogs. “Pharaoh’s too dominant,” he explained as I helped him move several tubs of kibble. When I asked what he meant, he replied, “He’s just not that into new dogs.” “So, he doesn’t stay relaxed when other dogs approach?” “Sort of.” I tried again: “So he tolerates new dogs, but doesn’t really enjoy it?” Ben: “Yes!” (Author field notes, 1 March 2013). Interchanges like this, where dominance figured as a catch-all to explain and interpret quite varied behaviors, were frequent throughout my fieldwork.

Of course, many at the shelter were adamantly opposed to dominance-style methods and interpretations, and among them was another volunteer, Cora, a white woman in her late thirties who often wore clothing featuring local animal rescues. While shelter dogs were not usually permitted to meet other dogs while on leash, trusted volunteers such as Cora and, eventually, me were encouraged to take dogs out on “tandem” walks in order to gauge their dog-dog sociability. One afternoon, Cora and I went out with two male pit bull-type dogs, Josh

and Tucker, both outfitted in harnesses. I started off with Tucker, a large, block-headed, brown-and-white intact male, who spent the initial part of our walk mostly ignoring me and my treats, while Cora began with Josh, a lean and leggy brindle intact male. We warily observed as, initially, Josh barked and lunged at Tucker. However, he settled quickly and Cora and I slowly began to walk them closer and closer to each other, watching for any telltale signs such as bodily stiffness, hard eyes, or a forward lean. Eventually, we let Josh smell Tucker's butt, which went well, but Tucker found it fairly exciting and started to try and drag me along, oblivious to my many and varied attempts to get his attention (treats, talking to him, tugs on the leash, etc.). Cora and I then switched dogs, which was when we learned that Josh was not as attentive to me as he was to Cora, who had been heaping verbal praise on him in contrast with my less vocal and more treats-oriented approach. Tucker, on the other hand, continued to pull Cora, who signaled to me that she wanted to turn around. The walk back went smoothly, with Josh continuing to be mildly interested in me and Tucker slowly ramping down into sniffing (Author field notes, 4 June 2013).

Notably, the gear used at my fieldwork site adds additional fuzziness. Gear choices make one's position in the training divide easily legible to others—prong collars, choke chains, and electronic collars are tools of the dominance school, while harnesses, head halters, and treats pouches telegraph an R+ approach. However, because shelter volunteers often work with strong and unruly dogs with whom they are not able to develop lasting relationships, many contemporary US shelters mandate the use of prong collars. In addition, prong policies accommodate the skill sets of shelter volunteers with fuzzy understandings of training sciences. For example, one volunteer at my fieldwork site, Paisley, emphatically approved of the mandated prong, stating that “positive on a prong” was, in her opinion, the only way to help dogs who bark and lunge at other dogs and/or humans on leash, a behavior known as *leash-reactivity* (Author field notes, 4 July 2013). Of course, the pain of a prong collar marks such training interactions as positive punishment, not R+;

understandings like Paisley's of R+, which were quite common at the shelter, underscore the prevalence of volunteers' own fuzziness regarding training sciences more broadly. Then there were those like Cora and me, who found ourselves clicking and treating dogs while controlling their bodies with collars we abhorred; even while we were both fairly adept with R+ methods, the mandated gear necessarily mixed our approaches with dominance-style practices.

Feministly Fuzzy Shelter Spaces

As the above examples demonstrate, most of the training that goes on in the space of my fieldwork site is, in practice, rather fuzzy. I will return to fuzziness as a concept momentarily, but first I want to trace how these examples fit into my larger discussion, beginning with the methods practiced by Bethany, Ben, and Paisley, which draw from dominance methods and which are certainly fuzzily scientific, but not particularly feminist. For example, Bethany's reprimanding of Simone follows a Millan-style approach of controlling the dog, but her "No" comes too late to preclude the interaction, another of Millan's edicts ("How to handle a territorial dog," n.d.). Bodily details matter here too, for the interaction ends when Simone looks away from Bethany's hard stare and obediently goes "down." Bethany is interested in submission and obedience, not curiosity or response-ability. Then there is Ben, whose reading of Pharaoh as dominant is certainly effective in the decision not to use him to test other dogs, but whose use of dominance as a catch-all to describe an emotional behavior—dislike of new dogs—misunderstands Pharaoh's motives; this thinking not only poses the possibility for potentially grave future misunderstandings of dog behaviors, but also fails to take up a deeper curiosity or thinking-with. Finally, Paisley's misunderstanding of the admittedly confusing language of Skinner's quadrants leads her to endorse prong collars to treat leash-reactivity in a way that McConnell (McConnell & London, 2003), among others, would consider one of the worst ways possible. This is because dogs who react on leash almost always do so out of fear, such that they can learn to associate pain with

the approach of a dog or human (or bicycle or skateboard), making them more reactive and fearful rather than less. In Paisley's approach I read a failure to be response-able, for she seems incurious about how a dog's emotional experience shapes such interactions in a way that may lead to future training issues.

Conversely, I find much of feminist fuzzy sciences in Cora's and my interaction with Josh and Tucker. In terms of fuzzy sciences, while Cora and I use R+ methods throughout our interaction, giving the dogs treats when they pay attention and cueing the interaction around their body language, neither of us employs textbook methods, for our motive is not training but curiosity. Cora and I set up the interaction in order to gauge the dogs' interest, to see what *they* wanted to do, a desire we read through their bodies and bodily interactions. In doing so, we engage in thinking-with the language of their bodies and attempt to be response-able to their needs and desires. I realize that it is a bit odd to propose in an academic article that the method in which I participate, however loosely, is the method for which I am rather firmly arguing. I therefore want to note here that my use of Cora's and my example stands in for fairly widespread practices at my fieldwork site; there were many folks sporting treats pouches and the like at the shelter. This is to say that there are many people who try to think-with animals at my fieldwork site, people who are curious about and try to be response-able to the animals there in the best ways they know.

However, even as I find the prevalence of these practices promising, I am less sanguine about the shelter when viewing it through the analytic of interspecies intersectionalities, for my fieldwork site, much like that of the training discourses, is undeniably a space of whiteness. Its demographics—most of the volunteers and staff are white, straight, middle-class women—are only part of this dynamic. For example, many of my interlocutors enthusiastically embraced the language of “rescue” in their work, a term whose history denotes the “civilizing mission” of many an imperialist project. Echoing Hearne's *Bandit*, there were frequent references to shelter dogs experiencing a form of “prison,” including

appeals for rescues to step in on behalf of dogs on “death row,” with no mention of the race-related injustices ongoing in today’s prison industrial complex (Author field notes, 29 March 2013). Then there were the dogs’ names: “Ghana” and “Pharaoh,” not to mention “Apache,” were fairly typical, even as they clearly communicated unconscious white fantasies about connections between animality and racialized otherness.

The goal of most shelter-based interventions, the attainment of a dog’s “forever home,” also merits scrutiny. Automatically precluding the houseless and most undocumented folks, shelter adoption policies tend to center on that imaginary ideal: the family dog. While this approach includes a practical component—in that dogs who would not share their toys, for example, would not be adopted out to households with children—it also informs a related and larger heteronormative ideal. Put simply, like many locales in the United States today, it was understood that “family” stood in for the presence of children, which is to say that polyamorous kin groups of queer folks were not what the staff was asking for when they told potential adopters to bring the rest of the family back to meet the dog. The analytic of interspecies intersectionalities renders these relatings troublesome, for they all reify norms of whiteness, family, heteronormativity, and more. However, interspecies intersectionalities as a sensibility thought-with feminist fuzzy sciences promises an interruption and possibly different ways to take up these doings; I explore this promise in my concluding section.

Conclusion

The uses of *fuzzy* that have come up in this article include *fuzziness* in the sense that the role of Science in dog training is often unclear, *fuzziness* in the mix of formal and informal scientific credentials and training of experts and celebrities in the field, *fuzziness* in the ways that feminisms are understood and practiced, *fuzziness* in that the sciences in question are deeply involved in moral and affective politics, *fuzziness* in the inexact practice of either the Science or sciences of training, and fuzziness in the

mix of approaches used and even required by the policies of my fieldwork site. There is also, of course, the obvious and delightful way that dogs themselves are fuzzy.

I use *fuzzy* more as a descriptor than an analytic, in order to identify a primary characteristic of the complex congeries of discourses involved in US-based dog training and shelter work, which is that there are unclear boundaries among knowledge practices in a number of ways and that, thinking-with the very last sense of *fuzzy* I note above, at least some of these boundary-bridgings productively de-center the human. Importantly, *fuzzy* also neutrally characterizes what many in Scientific and/or more rigorous dog-training worlds dismiss, which is the on-the-ground work done by nonprofessionals. As a modifier of lowercase *sciences*, the adjective *fuzzy* does not diminish them but numbers them among an array of sciences and scientific practices.

I want to recognize an additional fuzziness: that of the worlds of dog “rescue” and their overlap with the training worlds I highlight here. For example, I obtained Haley’s successor, Annie, a black-and-white pit bull-type dog, from an African American woman, Anne, who was deeply involved in her neighborhood’s “fix our ferals” campaign. Anne had taken Annie in when she was sick and Anne’s neighbors had intended to put her down. However, Anne struggled with Annie, who had lived all six months of her life in an eight-by-eight-foot concrete backyard and had not been house-trained or socialized extensively with other dogs; Annie joined my household the weekend after she ate Anne’s phone. This example speaks to two larger and common dynamics. The first is that the US world of animal rescue and shelters is only partially represented by the dynamics of my fieldwork site; in fact, much of the work of animal sheltering is done well outside of the official shelter. Unlike my fieldwork site, this labor is undertaken in the main by middle- and working-class people of multiple racial and ethnic identities who frequently cobble together efforts to rehome dogs in which the main goal is to keep them out of the space of the shelter, prioritizing other forms of shelter instead. The second notable dynamic, which became clear to me over the course

of both my fieldwork and ongoing contacts with these types of networks, is that these worlds of “rescue” quite often do not involve much in the way of formal training work, feminist or no; I frequently encounter people who are experts in moving dogs across states but lack the know-how to help them learn the behaviors necessary to do well in their new spaces. This is a fuzziness in terms of *shelter* as a verb and act of care, and this is a fuzziness in terms of a frequently incomplete linkage between the practices involved in keeping animals alive and helping them thrive.

In pointing to these dynamics of fuzziness, I am invested in their potential to disrupt the norms of whiteness, class, and “family values” of the more official shelter space—the folks doing this work do not fit the norms I critique in the shelter—and the promise of possibly joining this work with more overtly feminist fuzzy training practices. These fuzzinesses also involve the sensibility of interspecies intersectionalities, for they help me feel toward new connections that promise alternate ways of building human-animal worlds. In other writings, I have put forward on-the-ground work of free and low-cost veterinary care based on harm-reduction models that strives to keep humans and animals together as a way to undertake variations on this type of work; such efforts interrupt the whiteness and family values of “rescue” while building and affirming different kinds of interspecies intersectionalities. However, in researching this piece, I have come to realize that there are few to no free, sliding-scale, or low-cost resources for humans who love their animals but also need help in terms of training them to better rest or thrive in their homes, in or outside of houses. Drawing from interspecies intersectionalities as a sensibility, I am certainly alert to the colonialist overtones of such potential work; having mostly white people do training outreach to mostly lower-income people, many of them people of color, is not the kind of imagining that would answer well here. This is to say that the disruption I hope for and the invocation of interspecies intersectionalities as a sensibility that might facilitate better and different connections between feminist fuzzy sciences and larger worlds of “rescue” will be difficult to put into practice for a host of reasons.

In closing, I turn to what are, at this point, speculative conversations borne out of extended joint musings with several interlocutors. One of my co-musers is Jane, a Chinese American woman and fellow pit-bull aficionado whom I met during my fieldwork and who now works in a more formal capacity at another shelter. Critical of the implicit whiteness and missionary rhetoric of dog “rescue” worlds, Jane is also invested in addressing the lack of low-cost training services. She is also aware of the fuzziness of the on-the-ground work undertaken by most handlers and that R+ interventions take time that may not be available to many humans. Cora has also pointed out practical difficulties to me, including the investment of time involved in teaching humans how to read and “speak dog.” Another interlocutor, Maggie, a middle-aged white woman who has participated for many years in nose-work trials, has been quick to note that the language of training is its own art, one not easily taught. I name these conversations not to underscore the difficulty of practically imagining feminist fuzzy sciences together with interspecies intersectionalities, but rather to point out how they reveal a jointness, an investment in a shared world-building that reaches well beyond my own efforts to think-with and towards disparate and multitudinous connections among the many worlds and people this article includes—prosaic feminisms, feminist STS, animal sheltering, and training discourses, especially R+. My hope is that those of us in those worlds, and others who are undoubtedly sharing similar conversations, can carefully and response-ably think-with the importance of interspecies intersectionalities as an analytic and sensibility in order to facilitate the crucial work of keeping animals together with the humans that they have often very mutually chosen, and that we can begin to do this together in the way most prosaic feminist movements would have it—as group work, with shared imaginings and deeply collective response-abilities. In proposing this collective work in my conclusion, I hope that it points to the possibility of the propagation of feminist fuzzy sciences as part of the larger world-building projects of what this issue terms “science out of feminisms.”

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Notes

¹ I deliberately use the language of *owner* rather than *guardian* here as part of my broader politics regarding pit bull-type dogs, for claims to ownership provide better legal protection than guardianship when such dogs are legislated against.

² The names and characteristics of the humans and dogs in this piece have been changed to protect anonymity (except for my own).

³ Notably, these discourses also bear a striking resemblance to parenting debates, which is to say that the fuzzy sciences I describe here, feminist and otherwise, are certainly not limited to dog training worlds.

⁴ Despret (2013) also points to this affect in ethologists' "embodied empathy."

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