

I Menageries, Enmeshment, and Irreducibility

INTRODUCTION

The children's storybook *Two Moms and a Menagerie* (Robertson, 2015) tells the story of a biracial lesbian couple who first adopt one and then a second human child, before the family then adopts a growing number of animals: a cat, a dog, a hedgehog, two mice, a hen, three geese, two hamsters, a guinea pig, and spiders and snakes. The house becomes so full that the family decides to relocate from the city to a country farm to make room for everyone. The book closes by saying 'They had space to run and space to roam. The animals were delighted with their new home. They all lived together, this special family. Two boys, their moms... and a menagerie'.

We share this narrative of a children's storybook, as it speaks to some of the themes of this book. Our focus is on 'queer entanglements': how the lives of animals and humans may constitute a queer menagerie in the context of homes and broader environments co-inhabited by animals and lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, transgender, and non-binary (LGBTQNB) humans. In the context of *Two Moms and a Menagerie*, however, there is nothing in the story that would suggest such menageries are specifically queer *per se*. By contrast, and as we will elaborate throughout the present book, we would argue that there are indeed many reasons why LGBTQNB people and the animals they share their lives with may constitute very specific queer menageries and very specific forms of queer entanglements.

As indicated above, the queer entanglement of human and animal lives includes within it the idea of a queer menagerie, and requires a specific lens through which to view the lives of animals and their LGBTQNB human companions. In the first instance, a queer

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menagerie challenges the concept of ‘menagerie’ itself. Historically, the concept referred to a collection of animals kept for the purposes of display to humans; curating a menagerie was by definition a human action that paid little mind to the desires of animals (Robinson, 1996). A queer menagerie differs—at least in our usage—because it goes well beyond including humans in the ‘display’, and most importantly, because it examines power relations. For us, specific attention must be given to how humans and animals are bound together, in ways that often serve to privilege the former over the latter.

This framing of a queer menagerie must also apply an analysis of power to what is ‘displayed’ within such writing. It must attend not simply to representations of LGBTQTNB human and animal lives, but must also look at how such representations are shaped by broader and usually human-centric contexts. This calls for a specific epistemological, political, and methodological focus in academic writing under the banner of a queer menagerie. In terms of epistemology—and different to (for example) bricolage—a queer menagerie provides a theoretical framework that does more than bring together differing standpoints for the purpose of display, but rather does so in a way that highlights the operations of power that it seeks to examine. This, then, is an inherently political epistemology. It is one that acknowledges the primacy accorded to human voices within a queer menagerie, but still seeks to find ways to focus on animal voices. The methodology that follows from such a politics is one that is purposively eclectic. However, our underlying theoretical perspectives are critical, feminist, and intersectional. In the context of the present book, we draw on primary and secondary data on a breadth of topics related to animal and LGBTQTNB human lives in a way that constitutes something of a queer menagerie: a series of lives on display for very specific epistemological and political reasons.

In the remainder of this introductory chapter, we more carefully map out the ideas briefly introduced above, and in so doing, we set up a framework for the remainder of this book. As a starting place for this introductory work, in the next section of this chapter, we focus on

providing definitions of the populations we focus on, and our reasons for our specific areas of focus. We also discuss our positionality as authors. Having explored both definitions and positionality, in the sections that follow we then focus on histories and presents of animal and LGBTQTNB human lives, and we map out some potential ways of understanding why it would seem that such histories and presents take unique forms in the lives of LGBTQTNB people and the animals they live with. We finish the chapter by outlining our two key concepts, 'enmeshment' and 'irreducibility', concepts that help us to understand and represent the work of curating a queer menagerie. This introductory chapter concludes by providing an overview of the chapters included in this book.

Definitions

The acronym 'LGBTQTNB' that we use in this book encompasses lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, trans, and non-binary humans. This specific acronym is not intended to be exclusionary of, for example, agender, pansexual, or asexual humans, or humans born with intersex variations. Certainly, many of the topics we explore in this book are likely to be applicable to other groups of humans. Nonetheless, our focus is on groups of humans for whom we have empirical data to work with: either primary data (i.e., generated ourselves through surveys or interviews) or secondary data (i.e., collated from existing sources such as online forums, documentaries, and news stories). There is also the possibility that some of our data speak to the experiences of heterosexual people, inclusive of trans people who are heterosexual. This point highlights the fact that our acronym is inclusive of diversity in terms of sexuality (encompassing lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer humans) and diversity in terms of gender (encompassing trans, non-binary, and cisgender humans), though we have sought where possible in this book to clearly draw out differences in both forms of diversity, rather than collapsing them together in all instances. As such, while we use the acronym LGBTQTNB, we also

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focus on specific groups within this acronym as appropriate throughout this book.

In terms of animals, our primary focus in this book is on animal companions, specifically domesticated animals who live in domestic homes. Again, this is because our data primarily reflect LGBTQTNB human relationships with animal companions. We use language that reflects our understanding of animals as sentient beings with their own worldviews and sense of self. Certainly, there are limitations to how much humans can ‘know’ animal worldviews and sense of self, and, as we discuss further in this chapter, any such knowing is largely driven by the views of humans. We do, however, where possible, incorporate what we know of the views of animals who live with LGBTQTNB humans. In addition to our primary focus on animal companions, we also pay attention to animals bred for human consumption as well as animals who live in the wild.

Finally, in terms of language, we are mindful that our use of ‘queer entanglements’ and a ‘queer menagerie’ does very specific linguistic work. We are mindful of the critique made within Ansara’s cisgenderism framework of the problems associated with appending the word ‘queer’ to, for example, trans and non-binary people, functioning as it can to coercively queer these diverse populations (Ansara, 2010). Our use of ‘queer’ in the context of this book, then, is not to refer to a population (i.e., we do not use ‘queer’ to refer generically to LGBTQTNB people). Rather, it is to refer to a way of thinking about, theorising, studying, and advocating for the entanglements of animal and LGBTQTNB human lives.

Our Positionality

In writing this book, we come together as a queer menagerie of academics with differing genders, sexualities, gender histories, engagements with animal rights, experiences of living with animals, and experiences of academia. While we work together as a team, we are very mindful of our differing experiences and standpoints, even within our broad parameters of feminist, intersectional, and critical

human–animal politics. The presentation of the materials in this book represents something of a unified approach to thinking about queer entanglements, but this does not belie the fact that each of us has very different experiences in the world. What brings us together is our commitment to understanding queer entanglements, our commitment to animal rights, and our views about the importance of focusing on animal and LGBTQTNB human lives.

Also, in terms of a queer menagerie as it applies to us as authors, each of us has or does live in a close relationship with animal companions. Among us we have worked in animal shelters, have fostered animals, have advocated for the rights of animals, have taught about the lives of animals (and their humans) to our students, and have resisted the marginalisation of critical animal studies within academia. Our relationships with our animal kin fundamentally shapes how we come to writing this book, and many of us have sat alongside our animal kin in writing this book. Our collaborative work, culminating in this book, is thus itself a queer menagerie: it centres an academic praxis that is inseparable from our own life worlds and standpoints situated in a relationship to animals, both those whom we live with, and those in the world more broadly. A desire to connect with and advocate for the lives of animals in the world more broadly is reflected in our commitment to veganism, another aspect of what we see as forming part of a queer menagerie, as we will explore later in this book.

HISTORIES AND PRESENTS

In this section, we explore three interrelated aspects of historical and contemporary views on LGBTQTNB people's relationships with, and accounts of, animal companions. It is only relatively recently that attention has been paid to the historical relationships that LGBTQTNB people, and in particular lesbian and bisexual women, have enjoyed with animal companions (Sally, 2018). Yet despite this recent attention, a retrospective focus on animals in lesbian and bisexual women's lives is largely limited by a reliance upon mentions of animals in the public writings of women *thought* to be lesbian or bisexual (given

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historical prohibitions). By comparison, in contemporary accounts of LGBTQTNB people's lives much greater attention has been paid to animal companions including in terms of animals as surrogate children and the commodification of animal ownership through consumerism. Contemporary accounts in many ways offer a different lens to those of historical accounts, though, as we shall see, at certain junctures there are key overlaps.

Lesbian/Feminist and Homosexual Histories

Histories of lesbian and bisexual women's relationships with animal companions are just starting to be mapped out (Sally, 2018). What is interesting about these histories is how the intersections of women's rights and animal rights often come to the fore. Evident, for example, in Vincenzo's (1961) biography of her late partner Radclyffe Hall, is a commitment by Hall to rescuing animals in need, reflecting a broader movement in the early 1900s, primarily by women, that focused on the rights of animals (Beers, 2006). As Vincenzo notes: 'I am perfectly aware that for people who do not love dogs, there will be too much about them in this story of John's life; but it is her life I am writing and not theirs, and to her, from childhood onwards, dogs were always an integral part of existence' (p. 111).

At the same time, however, examples such as that of Hall (who went by the moniker 'John' as a first name) also serve to highlight that recognition of the rights of animals did not always translate into a broader focus on the rights of all. Sally (2018) outlines that Hall was a known Nazi sympathiser, and other such stories of a love for animals sitting alongside a lack of support for the rights of other humans is a common thread in accounts of lesbian and bisexual women who enjoyed close relationships with animal companions. This suggests that the lives of primarily white and middle or upper-class women, lives where animals played a significant role, were made possible due to their racialised and classed locations, locations that did not necessarily translate into a focus on the rights of other humans.

By contrast, more recent historical accounts, such as those arising from the ascent of lesbian feminism in the 1970s, suggest closer attention to a diversity of rights, including those of animals. Lesbian women writing in the edited collection *Cats (and Their Dykes)*, for example, highlight the broader context of patriarchy as serving to curtail the rights of many people. Zana (1991), for example, draws connections between the abuse of human children, the abuse of women by their male partners, and the ways in which domesticated animals may be held in what she terms a 'more subtle bondage' (p. 71) by their human companions. Anderson (1991) too focuses on how lesbian relationships with cats potentially constitute dominance relationships, one in which the relative power held by humans means that, as she notes, a cat can 'complain about your behaviour as it relates to her. But you're bigger, you have tools at your disposal; you can have your own way' (p. 92).

Reflecting on these early lesbian feminist accounts of interspecies relationships, Hughes (in Carlomusto, 2004) notes that she mourns 'a gay community based around non-biological family, non child-oriented family, [a community] that was based around families we choose, fucking, and animals. . . The energy that other people now put into their children went into building community, doing political work, and also into creatures that wouldn't survive them.' Certainly, as the present book demonstrates, a lesbian/feminist focus on animals is certainly still evident in contemporary accounts; however, as Hughes notes, it is potentially also true that a shift towards both identity politics and a focus on equality between humans has meant that lesbian/feminist attention to the rights of animals, and indeed lives shared with animals, has received less attention as compared to in the past, or, as we shall see below, given attention on very specific terms.

In contrast to historical attention to lesbian and bisexual women and their animal companions, much less attention has been paid to gay men's historical relationships with animal companions. There are several reasons for this, including the possibility that

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women are more open about their love of animals, so they are more inclined to step forward to participate in animal-related studies (Fraser & Taylor, 2017). However, women have always outnumbered men in animal welfare and animal rights movements (Gaarder, 2011). This connects with the historical and ongoing predominance of women in care work (paid and unpaid), including the care of animals (Gaarder, 2011). Care work is seen to be an extension of women's supposedly 'natural' caregiving instincts.

Rydström (2000) is one of the notable exceptions to the tendency to pay much less attention to gay men's historical relationships with animal companions. And when he does so it is to map out legal and public accounts of bestiality and homosexuality in Sweden from the late 1800s to the mid-1900s. As Rydström notes, the presumed intersections of bestiality and homosexuality were a product of a focus on crimes against the moral order, with both being framed as 'sodomitical sins' (p. 244). Importantly, this type of moral argument relied upon the differential application of the word 'nature'. In terms of bestiality, the 'nature' at stake was animals: situated within a binary where animals = nature and humans = culture. Bestiality was seen as crossing this binary and indeed placing it in question. Homosexuality, by contrast, was seen as breaching the 'nature' of humans, which was premised on the assumption that humans are fundamentally committed to heterosexual reproduction. Yet despite these two differing accounts of nature, both bestiality and homosexuality appear to have often been collapsed under the banner of crimes against moral order. While this collapsing is somewhat less evident in the contemporary context, one need only to scratch the surface to see arguments such as those made in regard to marriage equality drawing upon historical arguments such as those outlined by Rydström. The religious right, for example, in their opposition to marriage equality, has frequently asked 'what's next? People marrying their dogs?' (Abad-Santos, 2013). The slippage from homosexuality to animal love to bestiality, then, is a spectre that very much still looms in the contemporary context.

Contemporary Accounts of Animals as Surrogate Kin

Certainly, as we saw in the previous section, historical accounts of primarily lesbian and bisexual women's relationships with animal companions have emphasised the ways in which women often consider animals as part of the family. In early accounts, animals may have been considered family members in lieu of human children, while later lesbian feminist accounts appear to reflect concerns that the replacement of animals by human children (following increased access to assisted reproductive technologies) constitutes something of a loss to lesbian women's communities. Contemporary accounts of LGBTQTNB people's relationships with animal companions, however, have seen something of a return of a focus on animals as family members, and specifically in some instances as surrogates for human relationships that may otherwise be lacking. We explore these accounts in this section.

Initial research in this area focused on the role that animal companions can play in the lives of older lesbian women (Putney, 2014). Such research suggested that animal companions offer non-judgemental support, and that this can be particularly salient for women who grew up during a time when lesbianism was socially unacceptable, and who still feared disclosure of their sexuality to other humans. More recent research on older LGBT people (Muraco, Putney, Shiu, & Fredriksen-Goldsen, 2018) suggests not only that animal companions may serve as surrogates for human relationships, but that animals may also serve as 'social lubricants', offering humans ways to build connections with one another (e.g., by walking dogs, visiting dog parks, joining animal-focused social groups).

Research on gay men living with HIV has similarly found that animal companions can play an important role in supplementing missing human-human relationships, though the research in this area is somewhat less equivocal. Early research found that the contribution of animal companions to the well-being of gay men living with HIV depended on the degree to which human confidants were

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available (Siegel, Angulo, Detels, Wesch, & Mullen, 1999). People who had fewer human confidants benefited more from animal companions. Conversely, other early research found that animal companions did not compensate for a lack of human confidants, but rather complemented human relationships (Castelli, Hart, & Zasloff, 2001). More recent research has found that people living with HIV and who live with animal companions report higher levels of well-being and fewer unsupportive interactions with other humans when compared to people who do not live with animals (Hutton, 2014). Qualitative research suggests that the beneficial effects of animal companions for people living with HIV include increased physical activity, companionship, a sense of being responsible for another being, reduced stress, and improved social integration (Hutton, 2015). It is important to acknowledge, however, that animal companions may not automatically improve the well-being of people living with HIV. In the context of treatment regimes and potential HIV-related health challenges, the energy required to care for an animal companion may be as much a burden as a positive factor. Certainly, recent research on gay and bisexual men diagnosed with cancer has found that animal companions may be a net stressor rather than benefit, given the demands of treatment (Wright et al., 2019). As such, a significant constant throughout this book is our desire to complicate a monolithic narrative, and instead to create spaces for contradiction and complexity even in narratives which might otherwise give us comfort.

Other research has specifically looked at how animal companions may be seen as surrogate children for LGBTQTNB people. Gabb (2019) has explored how living with animals may be framed by LGBT people specifically as constituting a couple as a family. Importantly, however, while framing animals as surrogate children, participants in Gabb's study tended to frame animals as not-quite-children or as 'forever children'. This was based on the assumption that animals never 'grow up' and leave home like human children do, but also that animals offer a specific form of love that is not available through relationships with other humans. The idea of animal companions as