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# Human reactions to rape culture and queer performativity at urban dog parks in Portland, Oregon

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## ABSTRACT

This article addresses questions in human geography and the geographies of sexuality by drawing upon one year of embedded *in situ* observations of dogs and their human companions at three public dog parks in Portland, Oregon. The purpose of this research is to uncover emerging themes in human and canine interactive behavioral patterns in urban dog parks to better understand human a-/moral decision-making in public spaces and uncover bias and emergent assumptions around gender, race, and sexuality. Specifically, and in order of priority, I examine the following questions: (1) How do human companions manage, contribute, and respond to violence in dogs? (2) What issues surround queer performativity and human reaction to homosexual sex between and among dogs? and (3) Do dogs suffer oppression based upon (perceived) gender? It concludes by applying Black feminist criminology categories through which my observations can be understood and by inferring from lessons relevant to human and dog interactions to suggest practical applications that disrupts hegemonic masculinities and improves access to emancipatory spaces.

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## Introduction

In order to better understand themes within human geography and the spaces to which it applies, this article seeks to uncover emergent themes in human and canine interactive behavioral patterns represented within urban dog parks by examining the spaces through feminist, queer, and animaling lenses. By doing so, it thus aims to (re)consider moral decision-making in both human and animal spaces and to better understand how it is influenced by assumptions around gender and sexuality. Already, there has been much work done on unconscious bias in relation to the geographies of sexuality and gender which has revealed consistent patterns of beliefs in upholding themes within heteronormativity, patriarchy, and male entitlement (Lykke 2010). Lacking from the existing research, however, is an

application of these themes to human–animal spaces as they would be interrogated by feminist geography. Further, as people are exceptionally skilled at hiding these biases in daily interactions (even from themselves) and uncovering them has required a variety of methods (Banaji and Greenwald 2016; Vedantam 2010), here I propose another such method for uncovering unconscious biases around gender, sexuality, and race and their applicability in unique urban spaces in which humans and animals intersect (cf. Urbanik and Morgan 2013).

While this research primarily involves applying theoretical considerations from feminist and queer theory, and draws inspiration from applications of Black criminology, to non-human animal observations collected over the course of a year in urban dog parks, the inherent relationship between human, dog, and dog parks brings the question into the realm of human (specifically feminist) geography. Feminist geography, in the broadest sense, examines the ways in which geographical concepts such as space, place, and environment interact with society in ways relevant to the feminist researcher. Over the last few decades, feminist geography has emerged and developed a number of internal debates about the role, meaning, purposes, and goals of applying a feminist lens to questions in human geography. Even by the late 1990s these debates had grown by a considerable degree (see Jones, Nast, and Roberts 1997) and they continue unabated today (see Sharp 2009). This study is not meant to resolve these disputes so much as to contribute to the rich and fruitful vein within feminist geography that understands gendered constructions and oppression in its relationship to certain physical spaces set against specific places and situated within particular environments. In particular, it delves into the space of (some) urban dog parks and explores the way the cultural expectations defining such spaces contribute to gendered assumptions and oppression, including of human women and of non-human animals (here: dogs), with the hope of delineating the features of a surprisingly oppressive and violent space.

Indeed, theoretical and empirical research into critical facets of human geography has already uncovered much of the underlying reality of how people and cultures construct gender identity, race, and other features through the use of spaces and places, perhaps most profoundly within McKittrick (2006). McKittrick's cornerstone observation is that the fundamental nature and use of (public) spaces is intrinsically bound up with the ways in which we have been led to understand the hegemonic presence of the white male subject. This problem manifests both in actuality and in concept, is consistent throughout both history and geography, and is intrinsically manifest in the materiality of everyday spaces (McKittrick 2006). Here, I introduce instead the parallel concept of the *oppressive human* with relationship to that of the *oppressed dog*, which is subjected to the often speciesist, typically anthropocentric hegemonic presence of the human subject. The central concept relevant to the oppressed (dog) was noted by Tuvel,

[C]onsider how human values are imposed on animals through cultural imperialism. Cultural imperialism takes place when 'the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype

one's group and mark it out as the Other' ... In cultural imperialism, what the dominant group says, thinks and does goes ... Their values are what matter, and what will become infused as 'universal' values. The idea that human values matter whereas animals' values do not is what underlies nearly all justifications for the use of animals. That humans value medical experiments, meat-eating, animal entertainment in zoos and pet-keeping are all seen as more important than any value animals may have for themselves. In addition to the way pets are forced to live by human cultural standards (including that we 'keep them indoors or put bells around cats' necks to impact their success at hunting or forbid dogs from digging or otherwise scavenging for food'), laboratory animals are also evidently forced to live by human standards. (Tuel 2014, 116)

In particular, regarding the interaction of human beings and animals both inside of and apart from physical space, humans project their moral beliefs and assumptions onto animals and yet also consider animals 'outside' the moral sphere. In public spaces, we see this failure when we consider spaces neutral, rather than gendered, raced, anthropocentric, or otherwise bound up with axes of oppression (Beebejuan 2016; Lendrum 2017; McKittrick 2006). In animals, we see this inconsistency when applying human moral values to dogs by calling them 'loyal' or 'disobedient' or when referring to cats as 'self-sufficient' or 'arrogant' and yet accepting behaviors like fighting and torturing small animals as value-free and 'natural.'

In the example of the urban dog park, it is natural to see how such a moral inconsistency compares against McKittrick's (2006) concept of the hegemonic presence of the white male subject as an ethical standard against which other individuals, races, and dogs are to be compared. As such, human relationships with both human-animal spaces and animals themselves provide a richly revealing double site of morality and amorality. This forms an a-/moral paradox within human geography and within 'animaling,' in which humans ignore the moral valences of public spaces and yet feel free to express deeply-held moral beliefs and assumptions through their perceptions of and interactions with animals (who are presented as bearing full responsibility for them and yet understood not to be responsible). To this end, recent studies in feminist geography have uncovered greater depths of the constructions of race and gender within spaces, including public spaces (Beebejuan 2016; Lloro-Bidart 2017). Likewise, ethnographic research in social psychology, animal related discourses, and animaling, have included targeted investigations of how and when animals interact with human companions in urban environments (Birke, Bryld, and Lykke 2004; Graham and Glover 2014; Instone and Sweeney 2014; MacInnes 2003; Tissot 2011). Critically observing how people engage and navigate these provides a fruitful way of understanding anthropocentric oppression, which can serve as a theoretical model for accessing unconscious or concealed bias around gender, race, and sexuality paradigmatic of both society at large and the relevant spaces themselves as microcosms thereof.

Throughout this work the word 'rape' describes human perceptions of dogs forcefully penetrating other dogs who have given no indication of wishing to engage in sexual activity (see Palmer 1989). Of course, the following caveat applies. Because of my own situatedness as a human, rather than as a dog, I recognize

my limitations in being able to determine when an incidence of dog humping qualifies as rape. In particular, from my own anthropocentric frame, it is difficult if not impossible to ascertain when canine sexual advances are un/wanted, or when they are rapes rather than performances of canine dominance, which introduces considerable unavoidable ambiguity in my interpretations of this variable. Though tangential to raise at this juncture, these limitations raise a pressing question to the study of animal geographies: how are we to/can we know other species' experiences of the world in a way that stays true to the animals' experiences without being filtered through our own human perceptions and social conditioning (with regard to animal behavior, especially)? I do not seek to probe this question and will, instead, use care throughout the article to indicate that my observations of canine sexual behavior at the dog park fall upon a challenging spectrum in which consent is difficult to determine. Furthermore, I am aware that this could be interpreted as a dismissive attitude towards the seriousness of rape, but the opposite is the case. It is these very dismissive attitudes that this work seeks to uncover and repair. In addressing anthropocentric attitudes to dogs, however, because human-dog interaction is intrinsically bound up in the expression of deeply entrenched human moral beliefs but also provides a site for denial of responsibility for them, it is important to describe the actions of dogs as they are in terms of violence, and particularly sexual violence, to best understand the significance of subsequent human responses. Therefore, the use of the word 'rape,' though thusly qualified and jarring, is used following critical reflection, to disrupt the human tendency to both project and deny moral evaluations in interactions with dogs and to analyze the ways in which sexual violence arises in 'everyday' situations within public dog parks.

This kind of analysis is valuable on three counts. First, it enables a deeper understanding of human interaction with their own species and the deeply entrenched systems of gendered, racial, and homophobic oppression often concealed beneath layers of discursively constructed norms which enable their perpetuation. Second, it defamiliarizes our understanding of dog interaction and denial of moral significance and reveals ways in which humans are complicit in perpetuating similar systems of oppression within dog culture and animal spaces which intersect with our own. Third, it forces us to confront realities of oppression and violence within public spaces and to consider their gendered reality and the means by which we perpetuate those problems, inviting us to reconsider dog parks through feminist and animal geography as emancipatory rather than oppressive spaces. It therefore forces us to confront and unpack our own biases and assumptions about humans, animals, and spaces while considering those of dogs living alongside humans and thus allows us to extend our work for social justice towards the oppressed dog while de-masculinizing, thus improving, urban public spaces.

Consequently, I examine the following questions, which are underdeveloped within intersectional animal/feminist literature: (1) How do human discourses of rape culture get mapped onto dogs' sexual encounters at dog parks; particularly, how do companions manage, contribute, and respond to 'dog rape culture'? (2)

What issues surround queer performativity and human reaction to homosexual sex between and among dogs? and (3) Do dogs suffer oppression based upon (perceived) gender.

To answer these questions, this article engages feminist geography and broader feminist literature and draws on nearly 1000 h of public observations of dogs and their human companions conducted at three dog parks in Southeast Portland, Oregon, beginning on 10 June 2016, and ending on 10 June 2017. I conducted my study within Portland cognizant of its unique character as an urban area yet aware that it may not necessarily generalize to other urban spaces of different spatial politics and social relations. Particularly, Portland is a highly progressive city that is largely racially white. While it falls outside of the scope of this study to generalize to other urban spaces, the significant progressive orientation of Portland suggests that similar research in other spaces could reveal themes relevant to cultural and political geography. I chose dog parks because they provide an obvious field site for observing how people and dogs socialize in public spaces and how these interact with gender, and because of frequent incidents of unwanted penetration (dog humping/rape) that take place in full view that present a canine analogue of rape/sexual culture onto which human rape cultures are dynamically mapped. With the possible exception of zoos, no other urban venue provides this observational opportunity (cf. Garner and Grazian 2016).

This research extends established discourses in social psychology and human geography and is informed by *in situ* observations that examine people and dogs in urban public spaces. This particular article builds on the theoretical approach of the Chicago school concerning social behaviorism and symbolic interactionism and applies feminist and feminist geography lenses (Cooley 1998; Cottrell 1980; Lendrum 2017). By drawing on public observations, I see my work as based in, building upon, and extending the theoretical and practical reach of these lines of literature along with other intersecting domains of inquiry, particularly as it applies to the growing literature about dogs and urban environments (Booth 2016; Holmberg 2013; Instone and Sweeney 2014; Lykke 2010). There are, however, significant gaps in this literature relating to gender, geography, queering, and rape culture, and to fill these gaps I turn to critical feminist and queer scholarship of recent decades and more recent literature in feminist geography and the geography of sexuality.

### **Methods: studying dog and their human companions at the dog park**

From 10 June 2016, to 10 June 2017, I stationed myself on benches that were in central observational locations at three dog parks in Southeast Portland, Oregon. Observation sessions varied widely according to the day of the week and time of day. These, however, lasted a minimum of two and no more than 7 h and concluded by 7:30 pm (due to visibility). I did not conduct any observations in heavy rain. While engaging in observation, my approach was to sit or walk around the dog

park, observe, take notes, talk with people or inspect dogs, and then inconspicuously leave, rendering this work primarily under the umbrella of multispecies urban ethnography. Of note, while some quantitative data was collected, especially regarding dogs' gender, their human companions, and various facets of the behavior of dogs and their human companions, this study is best considered mostly qualitative in nature and did not make use of rigorous statistical analysis.

During these observational sessions I gave particular scrutiny to two space-defining categories of a-/morally salient behavior: human companion behavior as it related to dogs and canine actions. The following fall into the former (moral behavior) category: how human companions engaged, ignored, or broke up 'dog fights' (aggression between or among dogs) and dog humping/rapes, collection of dog droppings, use of leashes, humans raising their voices (subjectively determined), use of shock collars, and general human and dog interactions, especially ways in which gender, apparent gender, or gendering inter-/acted within the spaces. The following fall into the latter category of a-/moral canine behavior: penetrative acts among dogs, humping without penetration, dog fights, and urinating and defecating in unauthorized areas (e.g. on a human's leg or another dog's head or body or in the communal water bowl). I ignored non-violent dog interactions that elicited reactions and punishments from owners (such as canine coprophagy) because, while they remain relevant to those lessons derivable from observing human-dog interactions within animal spaces that reveal themes of material-semiotic performativity of human/animal relationships (cf. Birke, Bryld, and Lykke 2004), they fall outside of the purview of this investigation.

Out of strict necessity to the research, I routinely left the area immediately around the park bench to inspect individual dogs in order to ascertain evidence concerning gendered and gendering behavior at the dog parks, the importance of which became even more striking over the course of my fieldwork. Throughout, I used a slightly modified inductive grounded theory approach that articulated and generated emerging themes from my recorded observations (Thomas 2006).

The usual caveats of observational research also apply here. While I closely and respectfully examined the genitals of slightly fewer than ten thousand dogs, being careful not to cause alarm and moving away if any dog appeared uncomfortable, there is some relevant margin of error concerning my observations about their gender in some instances. It is also more than possible – in fact it is inevitable, though I endeavored not to make assumptions – that I misgendered some of their human companions (that is, I tagged a gender to a person who did not self-identify with that gender). In some of the more extreme cases, as is related to pronounced dog behavior (starting fights, urinating on people, humping or other penetrative acts), I attempted to address this shortcoming by asking human companions their preferred pronouns, as situating the results against McKittrick's (2006) hegemonic presence of the white male subject required this data. If people were comfortable with my question, I then interrogated them further and inquired sensitively into their sexual orientation. I compared some of these results with human behavior in

response to what is ubiquitously considered pronounced, inappropriate/immoral dog behavior (see above). To protect anonymity, in no instance were any human names recorded, and to avoid an anthropocentric difference in treatment of humans versus dogs, whose privacy I needed to violate to perform genital inspections, I always interacted with dogs in the most minimally intrusive way possible.

The first and last letter of dog names, however, were recorded, along with their fur colorations and distinctive patterns, but these have subsequently been changed to protect the identity of both the dogs and of their human companions. I did not inquire into social class, income status, educational level or the self-identified race of human companions. While data at the intersection of these variables may have proven helpful, especially for revealing the full texture of the relevant and material geographies within urban dog parks, for ethical reasons these factors were not elicited in this study.

I also did not inquire as to the breed of the dog, which admittedly leaves out a crucial axis of animality – neither animality nor ‘dogs’ represent a monolithic biological category. A few considerations kept me from including this potentially relevant variable, which may play a role as indicated by intersectional research about race and dog breeds (cf. Kim 2015; Kim and Freccero 2013; Nair 2010). First, from my experience most dogs at dog parks in Portland are mixed breeds; second, I did not want to engage in breed stereotyping or other animal/dog essentializing; and third, some human companions are offended when asking the breed of their dogs. Most importantly, I do not consider myself qualified to make judgments as to a dog’s breed as I have no formal training in this area and therefore consider this an opportunity for future intersectional geographies research. Similarly, while I initially attempted to note whether or not male dogs were neutered, in many cases it was impossible to make this determination (other issues like cryptorchidism or recent surgeries made this determination additionally problematic, especially as I sought to be as non-intrusive as possible with my canine subjects). Early on I abandoned my attempt to collect this data due to the high likelihood of making errors.

## Results

### *Navigating ‘Dog Rape Culture’*

Averaging across my data, in my observational vicinity there was approximately one dog rape/humping incident every 60 min (1004 documented dog rapes/humping incidents) and one dog fight every 71 min (847 documented dog fights). (Here, I use Palmer’s (1989) criteria for rape, noting my anthropomorphic limitations in assessing when a humping incident constitutes rape in dogs. NB: the phrase ‘dog rape/humping incident’ documents only those incidents in which the activity appeared unwanted from my perspective – the humped dog having given no encouragement and apparently not enjoying the activity.) These numbers increased or decreased based upon the number of male dogs present at any given



time, rising at times to one such incident or the other every three to five minutes during peak male-density periods. In general, more dog rapes/humping incidents occurred when more male dogs were present, and, somewhat surprisingly, 100% of dog rapes/humping incidents were perpetrated by male dogs. Neither the time of day of the incident, weather, the number of human spectators present, or the gender of the dogs or humans in the vicinity was a statically significant variable in dog rape/humping incidents rates. Overall, 86% of dogs raped/humped were female dogs, 12% were males, and the gender of the victimized dog could not be determined in 2% of the cases. I cannot provide accurate numbers on the sex of the instigators of dog fights because I was not always viewing an interaction when a fight erupted.

Human companions took active roles in intervening in incidents between dogs, providing an avenue for insight into the gendered status of the a-/moral paradox in human interpretations of domesticated canine behavior. Humans made some attempt to intervene in dog fights 99% of the time, by raising voice(s) (91%), attempting to physically intervene (19%), and other behaviors (29%) including shocking dogs who wore electric dog collars, swinging leashes, pulling out food, blowing horns, and in rare cases singing at the dogs or (once) doing jumping jacks next to the dogs, presumably as a distraction.

The response to dog rapes/humping incidents, however, was markedly different than to dog fights. The data suggest that the deciding variable for whether or not a human would interfere in a dog's rape/humping incident was the dog's gender. When a male dog was raping/humping another male dog, humans attempted to intervene 97% of the time. When a male dog was raping/humping a female dog, humans only attempted to intervene 32% of the time. Moreover, humans encouraged the male dog (to 'get her, boy!' in one case) 12% of the time and laughed out loud 18% of the time when a female dog was being raped/humped. Humans only laughed 7% of the time when a male dog was raped/humped, and many male owners showed shame consistent with a homophobic response in many such instances (Anderson 2004; Doherty and Anderson 2004).

These figures were also skewed by the gender of human companions. Female human companions attempted to intervene in a dog's rape/humping incident, regardless of the dog's gender, 98% of the time. Male human companions were far less likely to intervene in the rape/humping of a female dog than a male dog, with interventions occurring only 18% of the time. (As previously mentioned, I do not have accurate data on the sexual orientations of human companions to know whether or not that variable was statically significant regarding attempts to stop a dog's rape/humping, though this intersection between sexual orientation and dog rape/humping prevention willingness could constitute a fruitful vein for future research.)

### *Issues of queer performativity*

As noted above, human companions, especially human males, were more likely to intervene in a male dog's rape/humping incident than a female dog's rape/humping incident. When dogs appeared to mutually participate in penetrative behavior (i.e. when penetration was not resisted, especially when dogs appeared to 'court' one another before penetration began) the numbers were similar.

When a male dog 'dry humped' or penetrated a female dog who showed no signs of resisting, 81% of female human companions attempted to stop the engagement. Only 13% of male companions attempted to interrupt the humping behavior. No female dogs initiated humping or other acts which could be considered sexual (since we generally do not consider the sniffing of one dog's anus by another dog to be a sexual behavior amongst dogs so much as a specialized form of canine greeting and sociality), though they occasionally did appear to hump in dominance displays, which nearly always merely elicited laughter and gendered comments from human onlookers/companions and were rarely broken up before they concluded on their own (as data was focusing upon potential dog *rapes*, this variable was not quantitatively recorded in this study).

During the span of my observations, there were 29 incidents among 15 dogs in which dogs controlled by shock collars were delivered an electric shock. All of those 15 dogs were male with male owners, and all 15 of the incidents involved a sexual act with another male dog, possibly implying homophobic shame triggering a violent response in the dogs' male human companions. (I witnessed no incidence of female dogs having shock collars applied, though such devices were fairly common on female dogs kept by male companions.) Four dogs with shock collars were repeat offenders, with one of those dogs committing (the clear) rape of female dogs on three separate occasions. Overall, there were 27 occurrences of dogs with shock collars engaged in sex acts with female dogs (whether shocked for it or not); 20 of these were aggressive enough to be deemed rapes and 7 showed no sign of resistance. In every occurrence, when a dog was shocked, he immediately desisted from his behavior.

There were five incidents where three or more dogs were engaged in un-resisted group sexual behavior. None of these incidents, which involved a mix of male and female dogs, were broken up.

### *Oppression of dogs*

Gender had an apparent effect on the way a dog was treated (cf. Kydd and McGreevy 2017). Male human companions referred to their male dogs as 'buddy' 97% more often than did female human companions (4426 documented examples of a male human companion calling his male dog 'buddy' versus 2247 documented uses by female companions of male dogs), who often just called the dog by his name. Males also referred to female dogs as 'girl' (e.g. 'come here, girl,' 'good girl,'

and 'atta girl') 89% more frequently than did female human companions (3543 incidents versus 1872). There was not a single incident when I overheard the word 'bitch' being used to refer to a female dog by a female human companion, but this word was heard a total of 108 times by male human companions. Within this distribution, 22 males used this word more than once, with one male using it 11 times in a single hour on one afternoon.

Frequency of leash use was also more common among male human companions than female human companions. Males were 68% more likely to leash their dogs than females (3266 documented incidents versus 1945, including only those in which the gender of the human companion was determined). And female dogs were 70% more likely to be leashed than male dogs (1641 documented female leashing incidents versus 965 male leashing incidents, limited to those cases in which the sex of the dog was known). The incidence of this was less pronounced when human companions had two dogs, one male and one female. In these occurrences both dogs either were or were not leashed, independent of gender. This also held true whether or not the human companion was male or female. There was no apparent difference in the amount of time a dog spent on a leash between male and female dogs or between male and female owners.

Over the course of my observations there were 39 incidents of an adult human companion striking a dog (I did not count striking by children). All 39 of these incidents were perpetrated by male companions and 29 of the dogs struck were female. In 30 of the striking events the dog was hit with a leash or ball thrower, one dog was hit with an unwieldy large tree branch, one with a boot, two with thrown stones, and the others with hands or feet. There were two incidents of female dogs being repeatedly hit with leashes by their male human companions, one of which resulted in the dog being carried away as she was too frightened to walk. Young children (under approximately five years old) hit dogs relatively frequently and apparently indiscriminately to the dog's gender (a count was not kept), and though this behavior was clearly more frequent in boys than in girls, it was not approved of in any observed cases by their human guardians. Girls, however, seemed more often to be punished verbally while boys striking dogs were far more likely to be intervened upon physically, especially by male adults (cf. McLaren and Parusel 2015). Socializing forces upon children that normalized violence and hegemonic gender constructions are therefore suspected but not derivable from this research.

## Discussion

While there is an emerging field of literature that attempts to establish an ethical infrastructure regulating the behavior of dogs at dog parks, at this time there are no commonly recognized institutional principles that articulate normative behaviors for human companions (Borthwick 2009; Carter 2016a, 2016b, 2016c; Fox and Gee 2017; Holmberg 2013; Instone and Sweeney 2014). Consequently, dog parks occupy unique public spaces in urban areas where various and localized

socializations, including concerning gender, are manifest (Graham and Glover 2014).

As a theoretical and interpretative grounding for my research, I'll consider feminist geography theory and apply Black feminist criminology categories through which through which my observations at dog parks can be understood. Aside from the obvious structural and isomorphic parallels and metaphors between the oppressed animal and prisons and marginalized peoples, this framework fills a gap in the literature by articulating emerging themes between oppressed humans and oppressed animals. An exemplar within this literature is feminist and ethnic studies scholar Hillary Potter. Potter integrates feminist and intersectional theory with criminology (Potter 2006, 2009, 2013, 2015), particularly in terms of understanding and utilizing three factors of systematic and hegemonic oppression: (1) social structural oppression, (2) the intersection and covariant relationship between communities and cultures, (3) the oppressed person as individual. Of course, Potter's work intersects with McKittrick's (2006) explorations of the geographies of race in the obvious ways and therefore allows us to sidestep the limitations of the white male subject. I therefore have extended the relevant umbrellas from peoples to 'beings' in general and (oppressed) dogs in particular. I also extend it to the hegemonic presence of the straight white male subject. Of particular interest here, however, is the isomorphic relationship between the treatment of queer performing male dogs and male humans, and human responses to rape culture (Barad 2011; Giffney and Hird 2008). I did not go into this research seeking this former theme, rather it emerged over the course of my study.

I will now briefly apply each of Potter's categories relevant to my observations in which multiple instances (five or more) of behavior were documented.

### ***(1) Social structural oppression***

While there are rich similarities between the oppressiveness intrinsic to homeless spaces available by viewing dogs as inherently disenfranchised from the human sphere (Rose and Johnson 2017), Potter's first prism is particularly helpful in viewing structural oppression in urban dog parks in two distinct ways: the male human response to queer performative acts of male dogs and acts of rape/humping perpetrated upon female dogs.

Occupying the former category, I am particularly struck by the similarities to the literature on compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980). Dog parks are microcosms where hegemonic masculinist norms governing queering behavior and compulsory heterosexuality can be observed in a cross-species environment. They are thusly oppressive spaces that lock both humans and animals into hegemonic patterns of gender conformity that effectively resist bids for emancipatory change. To clarify, within the understanding of compulsory heterosexuality, it is the male who imposes sexual behaviors and expectations thereof upon the female in order to dominate and control her, and any subversion of this in the form of queer behavior

is seen as a threat to this hierarchy and its perception as the natural order. By analogy through an animalizing lens, we should expect male human companions to enforce heterosexuality upon dogs in order to control them while responding to and reinforcing their own hegemonic patterns of masculinity, and this I witnessed in full display by responding to deviations from normative heterosexual behavior in dogs with punishment, sometimes physically. As noted in the data section, male–male raping/humping was intervened upon 97% of the time versus only 32% of the time in male–female incidents, and 100% of physical punishment in response to a rape/humping incident by means of shock collar was for male–male rape/humping incidents. Further, among the 39 times dogs were struck by an adult human companion, 14 times (more than any other single reason) were accounted for male–male rape/humping incidents.

Wherein it concerns rape/humping behavior, the social structural reach of oppressive patriarchal norms reach a zenith in dog parks, rendering them not only gendered spaces but spaces that exhibit and magnify toxic and violent themes intrinsic to gender binaries. There is little male tolerance for queering acts while rape/humping of female dogs is often permitted, condoned, not stopped, or in some cases laughed at. In all cases the (species-centric) mechanisms to keep oppressive, masculinist systems in place are enforced by shouting or hitting (cf. Terlouw et al. 2008). Dog parks are therefore spaces remarkably opposed to progress in both feminist geography and the geographies of sexuality, these being reflective of broader hegemonic constraints of society at large.

‘Hegemonic (straight) masculinist norms’ in spaces like urban dog parks thus substitute for ‘social structural oppression.’ The masculinist norms are a way to oppress queering acts and female dogs, and dog parks are spaces in which these acts of oppression aren’t merely tolerated but are actively encouraged. It is in the unabashed public character of these norms, specifically with regard to discharging them in a public space, where we see Potter’s work reified. Rather than latent structural and oppressive systems that often work to conceal racist and sexist intent, in dog parks the entire oppressive masculinist system operates in plain view (Potter 2013, 2015). Its public character is thus self-perpetuating, reinforcing, and self-approbating.

## ***(2) The intersection and covariant relationship between communities and cultures***

Dog parks are petri dishes for canine ‘rape culture.’ They offer a very public view into the ways human companions foster and perpetuate masculinist systems of communal oppression across species and in public spaces. The cultural norms operating within and upon these spaces form microcultures where acceptable and unacceptable behavior in human communities may be reflected in the way human companions construct their interactions with dogs, particularly in regard to rape culture and queering, and a-/moral interpretations of such behaviors and

their human analogues under the assumptions of rape culture. In essence, dog parks become *rape-condoning spaces* in which human rape culture plays out by the moral permissiveness we extend to animals.

These spaces and the way humans engage their animal companions within them are also windows into hegemonic masculinist norms and implicit and explicit misogyny that define contemporary urban spaces as they receive approbation from the tacit consent of human spectator companions. This is, for example, manifest in linguistic conventions found within and external to these communities: referring to female dogs as 'girl' and male dogs as 'buddy'; showing a clear gender bias favoring male dogs as friends rather than as possessed pets, slang terms 'dog/dawg' for men who are successfully promiscuous with women, and 'bitch' as a derogatory term for a human female but a technically correct classificatory term for female dogs. These discursive tropes reinforce the nature of dog parks as spaces where human and animal nature intersect and gendered assumptions therefore dominate (cf. Lloro-Bidart 2017).

The intersection of communities, spaces, and culture and the way these act upon each other to reinforce dominant values and discourses is extraordinarily complex, but there is a clear indication that under rape culture, rape itself can be excused under the a-/moral paradox more obvious within canine rape/humping but applicable to the human milieu as well. This unique interaction with the a-/moral paradox of animal morality, even as it is applied to humans, leads such spaces to become rape-condoning spaces (especially for humans in spaces where we socialize analogously to dogs at dog parks, this meaning more freely and in ways that are less socially restrictive or more morally lax, such as in nightclubs), and it is no surprise that they are epicenters of the execution of rape culture-consistent performances. Nevertheless, it is in this category that Potter's work remains most underdeveloped in regard to symbolic social interactions and their various manifestations of gender and queered agency. Fortunately, the ethical infrastructure, though in its infancy, has theoretical groundings from which future research could emerge (cf. Potts and Haraway 2010).

### **(3) The oppressed dog**

There are many ways to define and conceptualize oppression. In the context of this work, I'll borrow from Taylor's definition which has gained considerable traction, 'What it means to occupy a public space in non-normative ways' (Taylor 2013). In this sense the only dogs who were oppressed were those engaging in queering behavior. (NB: This is only a single lens through which to consider oppression applicable to dogs, though there are others [cf. Deckha 2013; Fox 2004; Francione 1995].)

What is particularly interesting is that on Taylor's definition, raped female dogs were not oppressed because rape was normative at dog parks. This raises interesting and highly problematic issues as to the agency of female dogs in particular spaces as well as with intrinsic victim blaming in female dogs which obviously

extends into the analogous circumstance under (human) rape cultures within rape-condoning spaces. Simply put, rape is normative in rape cultures and overtly permissible in rape-condoning spaces, and therefore (human and canine) victims of rape suffer the injustice of not being seen as victimized by so much as complicit in having been sexually assaulted, which can even extend to the feminist researcher herself (cf. De Craene 2017). Also, upon this definition the obvious parallel can be made from yelling at (esp. female) dogs, which was also normative, to yelling at human females in domestic abuse situations. The difference in the later example, however, is that yelling at women in domestic contexts is usually done in private spaces whereas human companions yell at their dogs in public.

Here, Potter's model and analysis of oppression is helpful in conceptualizing non-normative oppressive acts; and her reasoning on these issues comports with other prominent feminist thinkers and researchers in feminist geography (Alinia 2015; Potter 2009, 2013; cf. Lendrum 2017). Specifically, it is through non-normative frameworks by which instances of insufficiently egalitarian (gender, race, or other social constructions) actions can be understood to reify entrenched patriarchal norms. Oppression, then, is normative and in public spaces this acts to reinforce those social behaviors which receive sanction from the community (e.g. yelling at dogs engaged in queering behavior). Ultimately, it is because of the non-normative act that agents lose their sovereignty to entrenched (masculinist) norms, and it is for this reason that dog parks may resist being emancipatory spaces and instead perpetuate and exacerbate gendered, animalized gendered, and speciesist oppression.

## Application

The immediate applications of this research are first to improve the features of urban spaces, including public dog parks, and second a call for awareness into the different ways dogs are treated on the basis of their gender and queering behaviors, and the chronic and perennial rape emergency dog parks pose to female dogs. In this sense, the application to animal welfare is obvious and urgent, especially in the gender bias perpetrated from male-dominant society into the society of dogs. Female dogs are relatively oppressed as a class compared with male dogs; male dogs who discharge their sexual urges on other male dogs or on humans rather than females are disproportionately subject to physical punishment; and female dogs are intentionally subjected to real and ever-looming threats of canine rape. The parallels to human societies under feminist and queer theories are clear, especially within analogous human spaces in which straight, white, and/or male dominance is the norm (cf. McKittrick 2006).

More specifically and in terms of the peer-reviewed literature on animal welfare, the observations from this research could be used to inform knowledge about animal suffering, play, the 'trans-species urban politics,' and thus feminist//sexual//transspecies geographies, and they can continue the conversation that rests at the

broader interface of cultural treatment of animals and animal well-being (Booth 2016; Dawkins 1980; Graham and Glover 2014; Held and Špinka 2011; Holmberg 2013; Ohl and Van der Staay 2012). While the reasons for raising awareness of animal mistreatment are clear, it is unclear whether or not these interventions analogize outward to human women and girls regarding the ways in which they become subjected to hegemonic masculinities in public spaces (Lendrum 2017; cf. De Craene 2017). For example, there is overwhelming evidence documenting the existence of rape cultures among humans (Johnson and Johnson 2017; Phipps et al. 2017), yet it is unclear in what direct ways the 'rape culture' of dogs analogizes to the rape cultures constructed by male humans. Though obviously human and canine rapes represent vastly different categories of violence, they both share similar systemic roots such that 'dog rape culture' can serve as a proxy that informs the problem of rape culture in humans (cf. Ko and Ko 2017). I therefore posit that recognizing the urban dog park as a conceptual model for (dog and human) rape-condoning spaces that perpetuate and amplify rape culture is a fitting interpretation of this study.

Metaphorically, however, we are now better positioned to answer the question, 'What specific and thematic lessons can be learned from dog parks that have the potential to further equity, diversity, inclusion, and peaceful coexistence and improve human-animal spaces?' The answer is that the lessons from this study can be taken as heuristics that contribute to different ways of conceptualizing and interrupting masculinist hegemonies. For example, in dealing with dog rape/humping, though all forms of human physical assault (including against non-human animals) are still violence against the vulnerable and cannot be condoned, the administration of an electric shock at the first signs of rape-like behavior within my observations always elicited a rapid cessation of an ongoing dog rape/humping. By (nonviolent) analogy, by publicly or otherwise openly and suddenly yelling (NB: which was also effective at stopping dog rape/humping incidents) at males when they begin to make sexual advances on females (and other males in certain non-homosocial contexts), and by making firm and repeated stands against rape culture in society, activism, and media, human males may be metaphorically 'shocked' out of regarding sexual violence, sexual harassment, and rape culture as normative, which may decrease rape rates and disrupt rape culture and emancipate rape-condoning spaces.

It is also not politically feasible to leash men, yank their leashes when they 'misbehave,' or strike men with leashes (or other objects) in an attempt to help them desist from sexual aggression and other predatory behaviors (as previously, this human behavior as directed at dogs, though a sadly common anthropocentric mistreatment of animals, is not ethically warranted on dogs). The reining in or 'leashing' of men in society, however, can again be understood pragmatically on a metaphorical level with clear parallels to dog training 'pedagogical' methodologies. By properly educating human men (and re-educating them, when necessary) to respect women (both human and canine), denounce rape culture, refuse to rape or



stand by while sexual assault occurs, de-masculinize spaces, and espouse feminist ideals – say through mandatory diversity and harassment training, bystander training, rape culture awareness training, and so on, in any institutions that can adopt them (e.g. workplaces, university campuses, and government agencies) – human men could be ‘leashed’ by a culture that refuses to victimize women, perpetuate rape culture, or permit rape-condoning spaces (cf. Adams [1990] 2010, 68, 81–84).

Gender relations between dogs and their human companions can also be improved, particularly by focusing upon training male dog companions to seek more gender-balanced ways of intervening and interacting with their dogs, especially in the presence of human children (cf. McLaren and Parusel 2015). Certainly, just as the behavior of dogs improves through dog training and obedience instruction, human men could benefit likewise from being socialized not to rape, not to abuse women (or dogs) and to become active bystanders in public and private spaces. Again, this would have the immediate effect of disrupting hegemonically masculinized and/or rape-condoning spaces and thus making them more inclusive and safe.

## Conclusion

It is my hope that this article will contribute to the longstanding tradition in social psychology and symbolic interactionism as it intersects with queer and feminist concerns relevant to studies of human geography. Observational studies of animalism in urban public life may become instrumental to understanding and eventually disrupting constructed cultures of hegemonic masculinities and reorganizing public spaces in ways that diminish problematic themes related to gender. They may also hold potential keys to disrupt oppressive and unequal socially constructed systems, and they can liberate dogs (and other family pets) from animalized and gendered oppression while ungendering the spaces in which the current socially constructed systems dominate.

How female and (queer) male dogs are treated – by both human males and females – could provide insights into a wide range of treatment modalities that serve as helpful heuristics in understanding human social constructions and the spaces in which they play out. I anticipate further advances, additional directions, and multiple overlapping discourses in research directed toward these socially important areas in social psychology, feminist thought, and animalism.

Or they may not. In the latter case cross-species engagements, routines, and performances in urban life provide didactic opportunities to reflect upon our own behaviors and the spaces in which we perform them, in line with considerations put forth by McGreevy and Probyn-Rapsey (2017). Continuing to increase this body of knowledge can have immediate, practical effects on both human and animal well-being, improve the quality and inclusiveness of public spaces, and open the door to direct and effective activist campaigns to improve the relationships between dogs and humans and to turn oppressive spaces into emancipatory ones.

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