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Women and the World of Dog Rescue: A Case Study of the State of Michigan¹

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Abstract

In the wake of the considerable cultural changes and societal shifts that the United States and all advanced industrial democracies have experienced since the late 1960s and early 1970s, one can also observe a dramatic change in how humans in these societies have come to relate to nonhuman animals, dogs in particular. One of the new institutions created by this change in attitude and behavior toward dogs is the canine rescue organization, examples of which have arisen all over the United States beginning in the 1980s. While the growing scholarship on the changed dimension of the human-animal relationship attests to its social, political, and intellectual salience to our contemporary world, the work presented here constitutes the first academic research on the particularly important institution of dog rescue. This paper presents some key findings from a survey of canine rescue workers in the state of Michigan, with a concentration on the dynamics of gender within canine rescue work.

Keywords

Canine rescue, gender

Introduction

Hardly a day passes when one does not read about the centrality of pets to the lives of contemporary Americans. Dog guardians can shop for their dog at retailers ranging from Gucci to Target to specialty dog boutiques, take their dog to hotels and parties, get their dog a massage, or even have their home designed specifically to accommodate their dog. Consumer spending on pets has steadily increased over the past 20 years, reaching \$36.3 billion in 2005 and an estimated \$38.4 billion in 2006 (Sharp, 2008; Wadler & Aguirre, 2007; Grossman, 2007; Steinhauer, 2006; Levine, 2006). Increasingly, laws intended to shield animals from domestic violence are being passed, particularly to guard against situations in which male partners harm the companion animals of women involved in domestic disputes (Belluck, 2006).

Indeed, there are regular accounts of public opinion becoming increasingly sympathetic toward canines as victims—for instance, in the case of a German shepherd in Princeton who, after mauling a landscaper, received a majority of the community support (Kershaw, 2007). These are merely a few random examples that underline how vastly the position of pets and animals has changed in the United States over the past 20 plus years. Indeed, as a survey conducted in early 2006 by the Pew Research Center demonstrates, fully 85% of American dog guardians say they consider their pet to be a member of their family. Certainly, in all countries of the advanced industrial world, humans have come to relate to animals in general and dogs in particular in a profoundly new manner. To be sure, the societal spurning of “speciesism” has remained a more fringe phenomenon than the rejection of racism or sexism, but it has had a noticeable effect on how people have begun to represent, view, and treat animals (Regan, 2004; Walker, 2008a; Walker, 2008b).

All these changes point to a dynamic in which canines (and other animals) are seen as having personal agency, and, along with that agency, as increasingly deserving of a set of basic rights. In line with the move to recognize animals’ agency has been a move to rescue animals from difficult and/or abusive situations. In this paper, we focus on one particular kind of rescue organization, namely those focused on dogs, and show that such organizations—virtually all led and staffed by women—provide an important source of social capital for the people involved in them (e.g., Bahney, 2006).

Women and the New Discourse of Dogs

While women were among the main proponents of the humane treatment of animals through the 19th century (Gaarder, 2008), the proportion of women involved in animal-related professions has radically shifted over the last two decades. For instance, in 2005 women authored 85% of the books published concerning dog training and social aspects of dogs, as compared with 30% in 1970 (this is in addition to the substantial overall rise in the number of such books published, from 50 in 1970 to 287 in 2007). Similarly, according to the 2007 edition of the American Veterinary Medical Association’s *United States Pet Ownership & Demographic Sourcebook*, women have the primary responsibility for the care of their dog in 74.2% of households that include a dog (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2007).

A shift in the gender of veterinarians over the past four decades reveals a comparable trend. In 1972, women accounted for 9.4% of the veterinary school graduates in the United States. By 2002, the figure had grown to 71.5% (Commission on Professionals in Science and Technology, 2002). Lincoln

(2004) shows that the shift in gender composition of veterinarians is particularly prevalent in small-animal practice, which is also the most rapidly growing subfield in veterinary medicine.

Lincoln's findings underline the changing gender composition of veterinary medicine when compared with other female-dominated fields in selected health professions. In a comparison of first-year student enrollment in six schools of selected health professions, Lincoln shows that veterinary medicine boasted a 71.5% female enrollment in 1999, with optometry at 55% and osteopathy at 42.2%. The gender shift in veterinary medicine also commenced much earlier than in the other two professions, with the figures at 10.1% for first-year vet school students in 1970, compared with 3.7% in optometry and 2.7% in osteopathy (Lincoln, 2004; see also Gose, 1998).

Marjorie Garber has claimed that it is dogs who make us human (Garber, 1996), while Jon Katz has argued that in a world in which divorce, instability in the workplace, and the loss of extended family and friendship networks are common, people have come to rely increasingly on dogs as their primary means of social and emotional support, often to the dogs' detriment (Katz, 2003). Thus, Garber regards the changed treatment of dogs as a testimony to the growing humaneness of our society while Katz views this massive shift in human-canine relations as testimony to deficiencies in our human institutions. Katz, however, also suggests that women have played a leading role in this shift.

The question remains open as to whether the social alienation that Katz outlines explains the predominance of women in this landscape. Emily Gaarder offers an alternative account by examining the close relationship between women and animal rights activism, a relationship that extends to the earliest antivivisection societies in the late 19th century (Gaarder, 2008; see also Donovan, 1990; Kruse, 1999; Derr, 2004). Not only is the world of animal rights activism disproportionately female, but involvement in this world helps heighten women's awareness of other political issues and offers them greater self-confidence in being active citizens. Suzanne Michel has similarly demonstrated how women's disproportionate involvement in the "environmental politics of care" has resulted in their playing a leading role in the preservation of animal wildlife (Michel, 1998). The overwhelming presence of women in the recent world of dog rescue offers a corroborating point.

In this paper, we explore some of the reasons for the predominance of women in canine rescue from within the juxtaposition of Garber's (and Gaarder's and Michel's) position that women are more involved because they are essential players in many struggles concerning rights and Katz's position that women are the most victimized members of this increasingly individualized

and fragmented society and thus in more need of new structures that offer love and community. We examine this dynamic within the context of canine rescue because it is an emerging form of human-canine relationship that has received virtually no scholarly attention.

Canine Rescue

Despite the greatly altered and—we would argue—improved nature of human-canine relationships generally, the rise of canine rescue organizations attests to the fact that not all dogs are being taken to spas for aromatherapy or treated to gifts from boutiques. Many dogs find themselves unwanted, uncared for, and abandoned by their human guardians. For these dogs, a different landscape awaits as they are “set loose” to roam as strays; picked up or relinquished to Animal Control/local shelters; or relinquished to a canine rescue organization.

Dog rescue—especially rescue organizations for particular breeds—emerged in the course of the 1980s and ’90s totally separate from, often complementary to, but also frequently in direct competition and conflict with humane societies and animal shelters. Activists in animal shelters have often perceived the breed rescuers as “elitists” who only care about the welfare of their favorite breed while neglecting the fate of other dogs in need of shelter and a home. Dog rescuers, in turn, regard shelters as ill-equipped, sometimes even uncaring, institutions that cannot provide the proper care dogs deserve. Dog rescue organizations differ from humane societies and animal shelters primarily in the sense that dogs are housed in volunteer members’ homes, taught some basic household manners (housetraining, in particular), and then placed into new families, who have generally undergone a rigorous application and review process prior to taking the dog into their home.

Like the altered discourse of dogs generally, the discourse of dog rescue is full of the language generally used in the context of abandoned or neglected human children. Dogs are “fostered” by “foster moms and dads” and “adopted” by new “forever” families hand-selected by the foster family as being a particularly good match for the dog in question. Rescue organizations typically guarantee a lifelong commitment to the dog and will generally take the dog back into the organization, even after several years, if the placement fails for any reason.

People involved in canine rescue are quite passionate about their work, and, as in much of the changed landscape involving humans and canines, women are the predominant participants in dog rescue. As an example, of the 95 officially registered golden retriever rescue organizations in the United States in

2005, only five had a male president and nine others listed as copresidents a male-female combination, most often a married couple. Similarly, of the 115 breed rescues in New England in 2005, only four organizations listed a man as their president or contact person. This general distribution was true of all but one of the rescue organizations we surveyed about dog rescue work.

Data Collection and Method

In conducting our analysis of dog rescue workers, we used a mixed approach, incorporating both survey and interview methods. The survey instrument was administered online, using proprietary polling software developed at the University of Michigan. Survey respondents were solicited by the following method: using petfinder.com (a sort of “one-stop shopping” site for people interested in placing or adopting a rescued animal), we gathered the names of all the rescue organizations listed as operating in Michigan (411). We then eliminated any organization that was not primarily focused on dogs (217, or 53%, remained). We then eliminated any organization that did not have any dogs for adoption as of May 15, 2007; that did not have e-mail contact information or that were all-breed rescue groups that had fewer than 10 dogs listed.² We then sent the survey information via e-mail to 105 contact e-mail addresses. We asked the contact people to forward our e-mail to the volunteers from their respective rescue group. We received 283 completed surveys. Thirty-seven additional people started the survey but did not finish it and thus were excluded from the analysis. Twenty-eight completed surveys were omitted from final analysis because the respondents did not answer 20% or more of the survey questions even though they completed the survey itself. Thus, statistical analysis is based on 255 respondents. Our respondents worked with 79 different rescue groups, and of those, 64 were rescue groups included in the original solicitation e-mail. This yields a 61% response rate from at least one person affiliated with a group that received a solicitation. Fourteen percent of the rescue organizations represented by our respondents did not receive a solicitation e-mail directly from us, and 11 respondents reported that they did not work for a specific organization and thus must have received the solicitation from a source other than us.

Table 1 below provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of our survey respondents. Differences in the overall totals for these categories arise because participants had the option to write in their own answers to some of these questions. These write-in answers are not included in this table.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of survey respondents.

| Demographic category | N (Relative frequency) | Total* |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|
| <i>Sex</i> | | 255 |
| Female | 235 (92%) | |
| Male | 20 (8%) | |
| <i>Sexual orientation</i> | | 251 (98%) |
| Heterosexual | 241 (96%) | |
| Gay/Lesbian | 6 (2%) | |
| Bisexual | 4 (2%) | |
| <i>Age</i> | | 255 |
| 18-35 | 63 (25%) | |
| 36-55 | 127 (50%) | |
| 56-75 | 64 (25%) | |
| Over 75 | 1 (>1%) | |
| <i>Education level</i> | | 246 (96%) |
| High school or equiv. | 19 (8%) | |
| Some college | 47 (19%) | |
| Associate's degree | 25 (10%) | |
| Bachelor's degree | 78 (32%) | |
| Postbachelor/professional degree | 77 (31%) | |
| <i>Employment</i> | | 219 (86%) |
| Full-time | 152 (69%) | |
| Part-time | 32 (15%) | |
| Work in the home | 15 (7%) | |
| Retired | 20 (9%) | |
| <i>Household income</i> | | 255 |
| \$0-50,000 | 72 (28%) | |
| \$50,001-100,000 | 117 (46%) | |
| Over \$100,001 | 66 (26%) | |
| <i>Children in the home</i> | | 254 (99%) |
| No | 206 (81%) | |
| Yes | 48 (19%) | |
| <i>Type of community</i> | | 254 (99%) |
| Urban | 74 (29%) | |
| Suburban | 92 (36%) | |
| Small town/rural | 88 (35%) | |

Table 1. (cont.)

| Demographic category | N (Relative frequency) | Total* |
|---|------------------------|-----------|
| <i>Marital status</i> | | 251 (98%) |
| Married or living with partner, never divorced | 125 (50%) | |
| Married or living with partner, previously divorced | 48 (19%) | |
| Single | 71 (28%) | |
| Widowed | 7 (3%) | |

* Differences in the totals arise because of respondents who entered their own category for the question or who did not answer the question. Some categories used in our statistical model were collapsed for the purposes of this table.

Our primary goal was to sample people who worked in canine rescue in some capacity rather than to sample canine rescue organizations per se. For this reason, we included those respondents who were not affiliated with a specific rescue organization. Their inclusion introduces an additional variable into the sample that we did not control for; given our general research interests, however, we do not have reason to suspect that they had significant bearing one way or another on our analysis. Indeed, removing them from the survey questions did not change our quantitative analysis.

The response rate from individuals at different rescues was between 1 and 15, with 15 volunteers responding at each of two organizations. The median response for all organizations was 5 and the mode was 1. Cross-tab analysis did not show any significant effects of group affiliation and thus group affiliation was not included as a potential variable in our analysis, even though there was variability in the number of respondents from specific rescue groups.

Our sample was a sample of convenience rather than strictly a random sample and in this sense our results are only valid for this particular sample. At the same time, our own experience in rescue work, our ad hoc discussions with people who did not take our survey but who are involved in rescue work in a variety of capacities, and our face-to-face interviews, in which we were able to ask more detailed questions, all point to at least some degree of generalization that is captured in our data, particularly concerning the overwhelming number of women relative to men who are involved in this kind of work.

Given how our survey was distributed, we have no way of knowing anything about people who decided not to take the survey or why they made the decision not to take it, and it is certainly possible that there is some kind of response bias represented in the data. Our concern with protecting the

anonymity of our respondents and the nature of rescue organizations, with their regularly shifting and often undocumented volunteer base, made it infeasible to compare responses to rescue organizations' lists of their volunteers. Again, our various ethnographic experiences suggest to us that the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents are fairly representative, but our findings should nonetheless be read with the potential for response bias in mind.

Following the close of the survey, we proceeded to the interview stage of the project. Of our 283 respondents, 211 indicated on the survey that they would be willing to be interviewed. Of these 211, we selected all respondents who identified themselves as having been a president or vice president of rescue organizations (24). Then we randomly selected 36 additional respondents to be interviewed. We contacted these 60 people approximately two weeks after the close of our survey and asked if they were still interested in being interviewed.

Forty-four people responded affirmatively. We did not recontact anyone who did not respond to our earlier messages. Three people contacted us asking to be interviewed, so we included them as well. In total, we assigned 47 interviews to three interviewers (or a combination of interviewers). Of the original 47, nine people did not respond to requests to set up the interview, and one person did not appear for her interview. In the end, we interviewed a total of 37 people, which amounts to 13% of our original survey respondents. The interview data were analyzed using basic discourse analytic techniques. We used the freely distributed software package, TAMS (Text Analysis Markup System) to code and analyze our qualitative data. Table 2 below illustrates the characteristics of the people we contacted for interviews and those we actually interviewed.

The survey instrument consisted of 3 parts and contained 93 different questions. The first part concerned largely personal demographic and belief questions; the second part concerned questions related to the respondents as dog owners; and the third part concerned questions about canine rescue, generally, and the rescue organization the respondent worked with, specifically.

The survey provided both categorical data, which were analyzed using chi-square analyses, and Likert scale data (7-point scale), which were analyzed using either independent samples t-tests or analysis of variance. In the current paper, we report on two primary sets of survey results. First, we report on the responses to the survey based on the sex of the respondent, showing specific differences in the ways in which male and female respondents approached some questions. Second, we report on differences in the ways respondents answered questions concerning the involvement of women in rescue work as a

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the respondents we contacted for interviews and of those we actually interviewed.

| Demographic category | Contacted | Actually interviewed (percentage of those contacted) |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|---|
| <i>Sex</i> | | |
| Female | 56 | 36 (64%) |
| Male | 4 | 1 (25%) |
| <i>Age</i> | | |
| 18-35 | 9 | 5 (55%) |
| 36-55 | 27 | 18 (67%) |
| 56-75 | 24 | 14 (58%) |
| <i>Education level</i> | | |
| High school or equiv. | 5 | 2 (40%) |
| Some college | 12 | 6 (50%) |
| Associate's degree | 6 | 2 (33%) |
| Bachelor's degree | 20 | 14 (70%) |
| Postbachelor/professional degree | 15 | 11 (73%) |
| Other | 2 | 2 (100%) |
| <i>Employment</i> | | |
| Full-time | 32 | 19 (59%) |
| Part-time | 8 | 8 (100%) |
| Work in the home | 3 | 1 (33%) |
| Retired | 5 | 2 (40%) |
| Other | 12 | 7 (58%) |
| <i>Leadership</i> | | |
| Yes | 26 | 16 (62%) |
| No | 34 | 21 (62%) |
| <i>Household income</i> | | |
| \$0-50,000 | 18 | 10 (56%) |
| \$50,001-100,000 | 23 | 16 (70%) |
| Over \$100,001 | 17 | 11 (65%) |

function of other independent variables (such as income level, leadership roles, etc.). Both of these analyses are supplemented through comments drawn from our face-to-face interviews concerning the place of women in rescue work. We assume statistical significance when p is at or below .05; however, we also report

on trends in the data where p is between .06 and .1. While not statistically significant by our criteria, statistical trends nonetheless indicate moderate evidence against the null hypothesis and are included for this reason. Statistically significant results are marked throughout with an asterisk to indicate this difference.

Respondent Sex and Survey Responses

Two hundred thirty-five of our respondents defined themselves as female, 20 as male. This fact alone supported our initial hypothesis, our reading of the relevant literature, and our own informal and anecdotal observations that women assume a preponderant presence in virtually all aspects of dog rescue work. We modeled sex as an independent variable using an independent samples t-test on all of our noncategorical survey data. In cases where a Levene's Test of Equality of Variance indicated unequal variances, we used a t-test in which equal variances were not assumed and when the Levene Test indicated equal variances, we used the Student's t-test.

Women were more likely than men to agree with the idea that animals have the same basic rights as people and were also more likely to agree that they regularly chose to spend time with their dog rather than their spouse or significant other. Women were also more likely to agree that their friends with dogs spent as much time with their dogs as they (the respondents) did with theirs. Overall, then, this set of questions suggests that women see themselves as spending more time with their dogs and preferring to spend time with their dogs than did the male respondents, as illustrated in Table 3.

Whereas we found no statistically significant differences between men and women in terms of the benefits they derive from rescue work, we did find fascinating (and statistically meaningful) differences as to how women and men assess the costs of being involved in dog rescue, as seen in Table 4 below.

Women consistently gauged their involvement with rescue to have greater costs to their lives than did men. Female respondents were more likely to agree with the statement "I do not have enough time for other things I want to do" than were male respondents. Similarly, women were more likely than men to agree that rescue work impinged on their ability to get their paid work completed and that they spent too much time on the computer as a result of their rescue work.

Perhaps the most interesting responses that highlighted perceived gender differences pertained to a set of questions that featured putative reasons why women might be more involved in rescue work than men. These results are shown in Table 5.

Table 3. Relative agreement, by sex of respondent, with the statements “Animals have the same basic rights as people”; “I would rather spend time with my dog than my spouse/significant other”; “I have friends who spend as much time with their dogs as I do with mine.” Agreement was based on a 7-point Likert Scale.

| | Mean | Standard dev. | Mean difference | t | Sig. |
|--|------|---------------|-----------------|-------|------|
| Basic rights for animals (N) | | | 1.01 | 2.166 | .04* |
| Female (229) | 5.26 | 1.638 | | | |
| Male (20) | 4.25 | 2.023 | | | |
| Spend time with dog rather than spouse | | | .68 | 1.878 | .07 |
| Female (224) | 4.0 | 1.508 | | | |
| Male (20) | 3.32 | 1.600 | | | |
| Friends who spend time with dogs | | | .65 | 1.909 | .06 |
| Female (226) | 4.35 | 1.460 | | | |
| Male (20) | 3.7 | 1.559 | | | |

Table 4. Relative agreement, by sex of respondent, with the following costs of rescue work: “I don’t have enough time for other things I want to do”; “I can’t get my paid work done”; “I spend too much time on the computer.” Agreement was based on a 7-point Likert Scale.

| | Mean | Standard dev. | Mean difference | t | Sig. |
|-------------------------------|------|---------------|-----------------|-------|-------|
| Not enough time (N) | | | .82 | 2.147 | .04* |
| Female (227) | 2.77 | 1.989 | | | |
| Male (20) | 1.95 | 1.605 | | | |
| Paid work not getting done | | | .55 | 4.613 | .000* |
| Female (226) | 1.65 | 1.448 | | | |
| Male (20) | 1.10 | .308 | | | |
| Too much time on the computer | | | .73 | 2.661 | .01* |
| Female (227) | 2.33 | 1.868 | | | |
| Male (20) | 1.60 | 1.095 | | | |

Table 5. Relative agreement, by sex of respondent, with the following statements concerning why more women than men are involved in rescue work: “Women have more time”; “Women have fewer responsibilities”; “Women are more caring and nurturing”; “Women are more willing to deal with problems.” Agreement was based on a 7-point Likert Scale.

| | Mean | Standard Dev. | Mean difference | t | Sig. |
|-------------------------------|------|---------------|-----------------|-------|-------|
| More time (N) | | | -1.08 | 2.910 | .004* |
| Female (232) | 2.22 | 1.586 | | | |
| Male (20) | 3.30 | 1.750 | | | |
| Fewer responsibilities | | | -1.02 | 2.485 | .02* |
| Female (230) | 1.43 | .972 | | | |
| Male (20) | 2.45 | 1.820 | | | |
| Caring and Nurturing | | | 1.36 | 3.534 | .000* |
| Female (232) | 5.41 | 1.625 | | | |
| Male (20) | 4.05 | 1.932 | | | |
| Animal well-being | | | 1.28 | 3.285 | .001* |
| Female (231) | 5.08 | 1.656 | | | |
| Male (20) | 3.80 | 1.824 | | | |
| Willing to deal with problems | | | 1.21 | 2.756 | .006* |
| Female (232) | 4.71 | 1.877 | | | |
| Male (20) | 3.50 | 1.906 | | | |

Men were more likely to agree that more women were involved in rescue because they had more time and fewer responsibilities, whereas women were more likely to agree that more women were involved because women are more caring and nurturing, more interested in animal well-being, and more willing to deal with problems.

An interpretation of this set of responses leads us to the conclusion that—at least in this instance—women had a more essentialist interpretation of the reasons for women being more involved in dog rescue than did the men, whereas the reasons men gave were purely instrumental and technical. To the female respondents, the more important reasons for women's involvement with rescue were their perception of women as essentially more connected to matters of animal well-being. All of these bespeak the fronting of innate characteristics that have conventionally been ascribed to women as opposed to men.

These findings were amply corroborated by our interviews. The most frequent responses given by women interviewees, mentioned by 81% of our interviewees, as to the reasons for women's overwhelming presence in dog rescue, were their sentimental, loving, sensitive, maternal, and emotional nature. Other answers varied from women being more talented at multitasking to women's role in society as "the givers." Nineteen (51%) of our interviewees argued that women are more prone to volunteer in general. If, in fact, this is the case, and if therefore dog rescue contributes directly to an increase of women's activities in public life, then the growth of such organizations over the past two or three decades might indeed be beneficial far beyond the millions of dogs it has helped, particularly in terms of the social capital involved.

Our interviewees voiced belief in other conventional gender traits as well. Thus, one person argued that the emotional involvement of women in dog rescue also leads to lots of infighting and "cattiness" and that if men were involved, there would be less of both, and work in rescue would be more productive. Ten (27%) others said that men would not want to deal with all the drama that accompanies many aspects of dog rescue and thus stay away. A majority (68%) believed that much of such drama was caused—essentially—by women being women and that a greater presence of men might reduce such behavior. Men's presence in dog rescue, while appreciated, was also subject to a traditional perception of gender roles: for instance, 41% of our interviewees argued that men's contribution was helpful in various "manly" activities such as lifting or driving. Only one respondent stated flat out that men's involvement in rescue would not be helpful at all.

A traditional view of "masculinity" constituted the most prevalent reason behind our interviewees' explanation of the low presence of men in rescue. Eighty-nine percent of our interviewees used some version of traditional masculinity to explain the low presence of men in rescue. Five interviewees noted that since dogs are perceived as "cute," men tend not to associate themselves with them in the same ways that women do, primarily because men do not want to be much associated with signifiers like "cute." When men associate themselves with dogs, it will be for hunting, police training, or other "manly" purposes, but not rescue. Twelve interviewees noted the lack of competitiveness in rescue as a reason for men's low involvement. If there were more competition in rescue, or if it looked less like "doing laundry," then maybe more men would be involved. Ten others stated that men simply had "better things to do" than get involved in rescue. Moreover, interviewees also addressed the importance of money. Men were described by 43% of our interviewees as more "money-driven" than women and more concerned with being involved in matters related to property-owning.

Virtually all married interviewees or those in a mixed-sex relationship, however, seemed to believe that although men tended to stay away from being involved in dog rescue, they were very supportive of their wives' and partners' engagement with rescue, even though they at times bemoaned the great amount of time exacted by rescue work. Interviewees noted that those men who were actually actively involved in rescue were superb foster parents and, perhaps tellingly, were characterized as being more "feminine" types of men. Our only male interviewee seemed to attribute the preponderance of women and the paucity of men in dog rescue to women's greater work ethic. He also opined that men were actually more sensitive than women and could not handle giving up the dogs they fostered; men would rather keep the dogs than surrender them because they were more emotionally attached to them than were women.

Other Independent Variables and Responses to Why Women are more Involved

In addition to comparing how female and male respondents answered the survey questions, we examined a wide variety of other independent variables, for instance education level, marital status, political affiliation, religious affiliation, income level, type of employment, etc. We briefly report on significant differences among these various categories in response to the set of questions we asked concerning women's involvement in rescue work. The set of statements respondents reacted to is provided in the Appendix. For the most part, there were few main effects and no interactions among factors.

Respondents in the 36-45 age group were more likely than other age groups to agree that women are involved in this endeavor because "women are more interested in looking good by doing good" (Sample mean=2.05, $F[7,250]=3.198$, $p<.005$. Post hoc pairwise Games-Howell comparisons favored the 36-45 age group, $p<.01$); because "women are more willing to deal with problems" (Sample mean= 4.61, $F[7,250]=2.263$, $p<.038$. Post hoc pairwise Games-Howell comparisons favored the 36-45 age group, $p<.04$); and lastly, there was a trend for the statement that women participate in dog rescue because such work is more likely to give them emotional and social support. (Sample mean= 4.7, $F[7,247]=1.956$, $p<.07$. Post hoc pairwise Games-Howell comparisons favored the 36-45 age group, $p<.05$).

In terms of income levels, two trends are worthy of mention: first, the higher the respondent's income level, the more likely it is that she agreed with the statement that women are more involved in rescue work because it is less valued than other types of volunteer work (Sample mean=2.98; $F[4,251]=2.074$,

p<.047. Post hoc pairwise Games-Howell comparisons favored those earning \$200,001 or more, p<.05). Second, the lower the respondent's income, the less likely it is that she agreed with the statement that "more women are involved in rescue because they have fewer responsibilities" (Sample mean=2.98; F[4,249]=2.293, p<.028. Post hoc pairwise Games-Howell comparisons favored those earning \$30,000 or less, p<.05).

In terms of education, those with bachelor's degrees agreed more strongly than respondents in other educational groups that women are active in dog rescue because they derive emotional and social support from such work (Sample mean=4.7; F[6,240]=7.69, p<.02. Post hoc pairwise Games-Howell comparisons favored the bachelor's degree group, p<.03). Education is also significant in gauging women to be better rescue workers than men (Sample mean=3.45; F[6,247]=2.168, p<.038. Post hoc pairwise Games-Howell comparisons again favored the bachelor's group, p<.04).

As to the marital status of our respondents, the only instance where we discovered any statistical significance relating to the set of questions pertaining to why women are involved in dog rescue was the issue of women being more caring and nurturing. For this item, respondents who were currently married and never divorced differed from all other groups in expressing less agreement with the statement that women are involved in dog rescue because they are more caring and nurturing (Sample mean=3.57; F[5,252]=2.744, p<.043. Post hoc pairwise Games-Howell comparisons favored those in the married, never divorced group, p<.05).

The number of years someone was involved with rescue demonstrated main effects with two items of our battery of questions as to why women are involved in rescue. First, people involved in rescue for longer periods were more likely to agree that women make better rescue workers than men (Sample mean=3.44; F[4,243]=3.789, p<.005. Post hoc pairwise Games-Howell comparisons favored those who'd been involved with rescue for 8-10 years, p<.03). Second, people who'd been involved for longer periods of time were more likely to agree that women are more caring and nurturing (Sample mean=3.7=57; F[4,244]=4.664, p<.001. Post hoc pairwise Games-Howell comparisons favored those who'd been involved with rescue for 8-10 years, p<.01). Finally, in terms of the apparent role of leadership within rescue organizations, people who had been leaders (35% of survey participants) were more likely to agree with the statement that more women are involved in rescue work because rescue work is less valued than other types of volunteer work (p<.001).

Discussion

While a variety of demographic factors account for the range of responses we received, the sex of the respondent was frequently associated with that range, and male and female respondents showed some specific differences in how they interpret both the work of canine rescue and the reasons for the high overall involvement of women. Beyond that, our study demonstrates for the first time the overwhelming place of women in the canine rescue world in Michigan. Women dominate all its facets, from its leaders to its foot soldiers. They do so—on the whole—with verve, enthusiasm, commitment, and with the perception that the benefits of this activity far outweigh its costs. Our study also reveals that these women—far from being social misfits and/or loners in search of a meaningful involvement that might fulfill their otherwise empty lives—are leading active lives, are married or partnered, and are, by all measures, typical citizens. They are citizens who happen to love dogs, on whose behalf they assume many tasks and obligations, which they do not, as a rule, experience as burdensome.

Our study also reveals that most of our respondents view their activity in dog rescue as a form of creating and fostering social capital, which they treasure. While the form of this capital is clearly more of the “bonding” rather than the “bridging” kind, meaning that it reinforces already existing ties to like-minded people rather than opening new ones to people with different values, it is nonetheless a clear means toward a social involvement that bespeaks civic commitment.

In other words, our study seems to bear out the positive reasons for women's involvement in the world of dog rescue that we associated with Marjorie Garber's view of human involvement with dogs, rather than the negative ones expounded by Katz, who characterizes dog rescue as a crutch compensating for women's lack of social contacts. Our study also corroborates Gaarder's findings pertaining to the benefits that women derive from their activism on behalf of animal rights. If indeed there is a clear relationship between the way people regard and treat animals—dogs, in this case—and the way they view and treat humans, as many studies in different disciplines have demonstrated, then it might not be too far-fetched to argue that these women's passionate commitment to dog rescue might indeed be a humanizing and civilizing force in our society (see also Nibert, 1994; Vitulli, 2006).

Our data also reveal that an overwhelming majority of our respondents are well aware of the preponderance of women in the world of dog rescue. Perhaps one of our most interesting findings featured the different reasons that men and women offered for this phenomenon. Whereas the former saw this largely as a function of women having more time and being less taxed in their work

lives than men, the latter reasoned much more emphatically that women's more caring and nurturing nature furnished a much greater compatibility with the world of dog rescue than men's allegedly more aloof emotional inclination and psychological constitution.

While our data come from only from one US state, we are reasonably certain that our findings would not be too different on a nationwide scale. Indeed, many of the traits defining our subjects are also prevalent among dog guardians in the United States well beyond the specific world of dog rescue, and we hope that our study inspires future studies on the many aspects of canine rescue, and of other dog-related activities such as canine performance events, left unexplored in this work.

Notes

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2. We eliminated these groups because we wanted to balance all-breed and breed-specific rescue groups to whom we sent the solicitation e-mail.

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Appendix

Statements respondents were asked to rate on a seven-point "disagree-agree" scale

- Rescue work is less valued than other types of volunteer work
- Women have more time
- Women have fewer responsibilities
- Women are more caring and nurturing
- Women are more interested in animal well-being
- Women are more interested in looking good by doing good
- Women are more alienated from other people
- Women are more willing to deal with problems
- Women are more likely to get emotional/social support from rescue work
- Women have less power and control in other parts of their lives
- Women seem to be better rescue workers than men
- Women seem to care more about their companion animals than men