

14 Intimacy, animal emotion and empathy

Multispecies intimacy as slow research practice

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Part of my research into the lives of cows in the dairy industry entailed sitting in farmed animal auction yards and watching animals being sold off in rapid succession. During one of these auctions, there was a delay in between the sale of animals. I looked around. I could hear the sound of hooves on the wood ramp leading up to ring, the loud shouts of workers, the bellowing of an adult cow and a high-pitched call of a calf. The large auction ring door opened to reveal the back pens and chutes and a worker struck the cow in the face with the rod he was holding, yelling loudly. The cow refused to enter the ring; her calf was behind her on the ramp and she would not leave him behind. The intention was to sell the cow and calf separately. In order to avoid further delay, the worker herded both the cow and calf into the ring and the auctioneer made an announcement that they would be auctioned separately – the calf first, and then the cow.

The calf was a newborn, no more than a day or two old and his umbilical cord dangled from his belly. He sold immediately for \$55. Two of the workers coordinated their efforts: while one distracted the cow, the other opened the exit door just wide enough for the calf to fit through. The calf, startled, trotted through, stumbling at the threshold. The worker standing at the door smacked his rump with the rod he was holding and the calf leapt forward out the door. The door closed and the calf was gone. The cow trotted in circles in the ring and bellowed. From the pens behind the auction ring, the calf called back. After the cow sold for \$1,600, they herded her out the door, the door closed, and she was gone.

I could hear the cow and calf continue calling to each other from their separate pens in the rear holding area.

My research is full of these kinds of moments – glimpses into the lives of nonhuman animals in spaces of commodity production. As one dimension of my ethnographic fieldwork, I spent long hours in farmed animal auction yards throughout the Pacific Northwest, in the United States, bearing witness to the highly efficient sale of animals used for dairy, and the gendered commodification of the animal body in these spaces (Gillespie, 2014). Cows and calves are often sold separately from one another; spent cows collapse in the auction ring and in the holding pens behind the auction yard, unable to rise; cows, bulls and steers resist and are struck with rods, shocked with electric prods and sometimes shot (Gillespie, 2016a). As a feminist ethnographer in these spaces, I was deeply

moved by the routinized violence of the auction yard (and the dairy industry more generally), and I made a conscious effort to centre these emotional responses of grief and anger as political dimensions in my research (Gillespie, 2016b).

As I observed this commodification of life, I tried to empathize with how the animals themselves might be experiencing the geographic space of the auction yard. I began to see this process of empathizing as a certain kind of *intimacy* with those animals passing through the auctions. At times, the animals' distress was visible and obvious, like the cow and calf whose separation was vocalized before, during and after the sale. And sometimes a cow's body was so worn out, she would collapse in the holding pen, unable to rise. At other times, the embodied experience of the cows was more subtly enacted: their eyes rolled back in their heads, their mouths foamed with saliva or their bodies froze motionless in fear. Almost always, these glimpses of the animals were fleeting (hours at the auction, with some moments barely detectable) – such is the nature of the auction yard. Indeed, the process of commodifying farmed animals increasingly involves the segmentation of industries from the dairy farm, to the breeding farm, to the auction yard, to the slaughterhouse. This segmentation contributes to the literal and figurative distance of consumers from these food production processes and profoundly impacts the (in)visibility of violence (Pachirat, 2011).

What I collected for my ethnographic research was a series of narratives in the form of vignettes of the many animals I encountered. The emotions both embedded in these narratives and my response to them led me to question the role of intimacy in research. Alongside the limitations they revealed about the practicalities of doing research with and understanding nonhuman experience, I queried how intimacy might be understood as a research practice. What can a consideration of intimacy add to multispecies ethnography? How might multispecies intimacy help to theorize intimate research practice more widely?

Intimacy can be understood in a range of ways, illustrated by the diversity of understandings of intimacy in this book. In this chapter, I understand intimacy in two key ways. The first is the intimacy shared among nonhuman animals, demonstrated in the emotional bond shared between the cow and the calf in the vignette above. This bond, as well as the disruption caused by its severance under a system of commodification like the auction, highlights the importance of recognizing the role of emotion and kinship as forms of intimacy that shape lived experience. The second is in the relationship between researcher and research subject. I draw on Gruen's notion of 'entangled empathy' to define intimacy in the research process (Gruen, 2015). This kind of intimacy can be understood as empathy fostered through recognition of multispecies entanglements and their effects. Gruen argues that humans are already entangled in complex relationships of power, care and ambivalent encounter with other species and that recognizing these entanglements is a mode through which one might enact a greater ethic of care in our multispecies social worlds.

This chapter contributes to two ongoing scholarly conversations. I offer a reading of intimacy that extends beyond exclusively human realms and suggests ways of thinking about intimacy in interspecies and more-than-human research

contexts. In other words, I make the case for why feminist researchers should consider nonhuman life and how this consideration might enrich scholarship on human and nonhuman social worlds. My discussion also contributes to the literature on multispecies ethnography as an emerging field dedicated to understanding the lifeworlds of a host of different species (Kirksey and Helmreich, 2010). Thus far, multispecies ethnography has not been understood through an explicitly feminist lens. I argue that intimacy as a feminist research practice enriches the field of multispecies ethnography.

In this chapter, I begin with a discussion of the first way I am defining intimacy: as the emotional bonds, ruptures and responses experienced by and among nonhuman beings. In the next section, I argue that attention to these forms of intimacy in other species is a site through which to develop intimacy in feminist research; that is, intimacy between feminist researchers and the subjects they study, whether those subjects are human or nonhuman. The complexities I explore in intimate research practice lead me, in the final section, to consider particular research practices that would foster entangled empathy, those which call for a slower form of scholarship.

Intimacy as animal emotion

In the auction yard, I saw the emotional bonds between animals. I was moved, as a witness to this intimacy, to more carefully consider the ways in which commodification processes for dairy production not only impact the lives and bodies of nonhuman animals, but also shape their social networks and their emotional and psychological experiences of commodification. For feminist scholars attuned to the political function of emotion, recognizing animals' emotional worlds (through, for instance, intimacy produced in these relationships) prompts deeply political questions about the emotional effects of human practices of production and consumption that appropriate animal life in gendered encounters of violence (Gillespie, 2014; 2016b). It is through a feminist attention to the intimacy generated in these emotional encounters witnessed between species that the embodied, emotional consequences of this violence might be better understood. Perhaps the relationship of care, connection and the trauma of separation witnessed between the cow and her calf is a window into considering, with more attentiveness and care, these nonhuman lifeworlds.

Intimacy experienced by members of other species can be understood, in part, through scholarship on animal emotion and cognition. The emotional lives of animals have prompted a fast-growing field of study in which animal behaviourists and ethologists are working to develop a rich literature on the interior lives of a range of species. Many different species (including farmed animals) experience wide-ranging emotions such as joy, love, play, grief, anxiety, embarrassment, fear and empathy (Bekoff, 2000, 2007; Hatkoff, 2009; King, 2013). As humans learn more about the emotional lifeworlds of other species, it is becoming increasingly acknowledged that humans are not the only species that experiences complex emotions and cognition, or develops relationships of

intimacy. While intimacy and emotion are not synonymous (intimacy can take forms other than emotion; and emotional response does not require intimacy between two beings), I focus here on the importance of emotion to understanding intimacy in other species to highlight the particular kinds of emotional intimacy I saw enacted among many of the animals I observed. Detailing how emotion is and can be understood in other species is important in order to understand this particular form of intimacy.

Thus, a consideration of intimacy in other species necessitates: (1) an acknowledgement of these varied emotional and cognitive experiences and intimacies in nonhuman animals in the first place, and (2) a critical approach to what this might demand in terms of challenging or transforming the ways in which humans engage in relationships of harm with nonhuman animals. This acknowledgement and critical reflection is a way to highlight the implications of emotional intimacy produced and experienced between members of other species. But it also requires a more inclusively multispecies, less anthropocentric understanding of emotion and intimacy.

Indeed, the risk of attributing what are seen as human characteristics to non-human lifeforms is often a primary objection to the consideration of animal emotion as a legitimate focus for research. Common concerns about anthropomorphism range from perspectives reflecting ideas about human exceptionalism (in which humans are seen as exceptional and completely unique in experiencing emotions and intellect) to concerns about not representing animals' experiences adequately by projecting human ideas onto what is being observed. Yet using human experiences need not mean disregarding the experience of nonhuman animals. Bekoff (2000, p.867) defines anthropomorphism as 'using human terms to explain animals' emotions or feelings [which enables] humans [to] make other animals' worlds accessible to themselves.' This accessibility is important as a mode of understanding nonhuman experiences, and Bekoff (p.867) reminds us that 'anthropomorphic language does not have to discount the animal's point of view'.

Understanding the point of view of other species involves a certain level of anthropomorphism and careful, indeed critical, reflection on feminist questions of how to represent authentically the perspective of another, especially when more usual methods (interviews or focus groups, for instance) are less available to the researcher. Being able to talk to, or read the words of another human being (even through a translator, or in translation), in order to try to understand another's perspective is not a method easily available in multispecies research. Instead, researchers must rely on observation, witnessing, bodily encounters and measurements, or interviews with human caretakers: all methods that multispecies ethnographers engage to gather knowledge about nonhuman lifeworlds. I argue, though, that a recognition of animal emotion as a form of nonhuman intimacy informs practical research considerations, opening space for particular forms of intimacy as a research practice.

Gruen (2015, p.24) argues '[t]hat we experience the world from a human perspective doesn't mean that we can't work to see things from the perspectives

of nonhumans, and . . . empathy is a skill that helps us in doing this'. While research across species poses particular kinds of challenges, it also produces new possibilities for how feminist researchers and multispecies ethnographers might think about the role of intimacy, or empathetic relationships, in formulating new modes of knowledge-making. If, for instance, multispecies encounters enable building knowledge about other species through empathetic understanding and response, this might offer new insights into how intimacy is centred as a practice in feminist research. With this in mind, I turn to a second way of understanding intimacy: intimacy as empathetic research practice.

Intimacy as research practice

That other animals have complex emotional experiences of the world, and that these are impacted often and intensively by human actions, are insights that inform intimate research practice. But how might researchers develop this way of seeing? And how might researchers do so when so much of academic scholarship is dedicated both to discounting the role of emotion in scholarly research, and to reinforcing anthropocentric notions of human exceptionalism in terms of whose lives count as lives and whose emotional inner worlds are legitimate? I suggest that Gruen's (2015) framework of entangled empathy is a way of defining intimacy in feminist research practice in order to centre intimacy itself, as well as nonhuman lifeworlds, in feminist scholarship.

As a mode of defining intimacy in research practice, entangled empathy is articulated by Gruen (2015, p.3) as 'a type of caring perception focused on attending to another's experience of wellbeing. An experiential process involving a blend of emotion and cognition in which we recognize we are in relationships with others and are called upon to be responsive and responsible in these relationships by attending to another's needs, interests, desires, vulnerabilities, hopes and sensitivities.' I argue that engaging in this kind of empathy as caring perception as a research practice brings a level of intimacy into research that allows for greater attention to the lived experiences of those whom feminist researchers and multispecies ethnographers study.

As I have outlined above, an acknowledgement of animal emotion – manifest as a kind of intimacy between members of other species – is an important step in developing this kind of empathy as intimate research practice. But it is just that – a step; indeed, as Gruen (pp.51–52) writes:

I think of empathy as a process. Although the process may not be linear, we can think of the various parts of the process as going something like this: The wellbeing of another grabs the empathizer's attention; then the empathizer reflectively imagines himself in the position of the other; and then he makes a judgment about how the conditions that the other finds herself in contribute to her state of mind or wellbeing. The empathizer will then carefully assess the situation and figure out what information is pertinent to empathize effectively with the being in question.

This sort of empathy doesn't separate emotion and cognition and will tend to lead to action because what draws our attention in the first place is another's experiential wellbeing. Once our perception starts the process, we will want to pay critical attention to the broader conditions that impact the wellbeing or flourishing of those with whom we are empathizing. This requires us to attend to things we might not have otherwise. Empathy of this sort requires gaining perspective and usually motivates the empathizer to act ethically.

I would like to suggest that incorporating this kind of empathy into research practice can generate more nuanced insights about the wellbeing and experiences of others (whether they are human or nonhuman). In the case of the cow and the calf, I was prompted to an empathetic response by the intimacy and trauma that was readily visible in their attachment to and separation from each other. In Gruen's formulation, this encounter grabbed my attention. I then tried to imagine myself in their position, letting myself try to feel what that experience might be like. Next, I tried to take a step back and look at the structural conditions that produced these embodied particularities for the cow and calf – conditions of domestication, commodification, and use – and then, I refocused on their physical and emotional states. I considered then, and in subsequent reflection on this encounter, what I might be missing.

This attention meant that I likely missed other things in the moments surrounding this encounter – focused so intently as I was on the cow and the calf themselves. For instance, I was not as attentive to how the other human spectators and buyers were responding to what was happening in the ring. I was not as attentive to the next few animals who passed through the ring, focused as I was on listening to the calls between the cow and calf that echoed forward from the back of the auction yard as they tried to communicate from their now-separate pens.

The systematic nature of the animals moving through the auction yard also posed an ethnographic challenge in terms of what I might be missing. I didn't see the cow and calf interact before arriving at the auction, nor did I see them, or know what happened to them, after they left the auction yard with their respective buyers. This is a problem related to the fractured and alienated lives of animals in commodity production, which is exacerbated by the geography of food industry practices. For instance, the segmentation of cows on dairy farms and bulls on semen-producing farms, and the removal of calves from cows shortly after birth enact routine forms of separation in animals' social networks and segmentation in the commodity circuit. Auction yards, in particular, operate on a spatial logic that severs these intimate bonds. The economic efficiency of the auction yard also renders the intimate worlds of the animals an abstraction, focusing instead on their reproductive and productive capabilities for commodity production and not the emotional interior effects of this thorough and routine commodification.

Thus, a space like the auction yard (much like other spaces of commodification in the dairy industry) poses a problem in terms of developing intimate research with cows used for dairy because of their thorough conceptualization as commodities and as living property. As I said above, at times, their physical or

emotional pain was easily visible to me (as an observer attentive to their embodied responses). But the kinds of intimacies that are developed and known over time were difficult to access in ethnographic research where access to these animals' lives was almost always fleeting. And so the resulting intimate accounts of animals in my research were contingent, partial and incomplete. Sometimes I was witnessing just a moment in the lives of these animals as they passed through the auction pen. How to learn something meaningful about the animal in that moment requires prior knowledge of what animals go through in dairy production, such as extensive research on the process of dairy production, the gendered dimensions of the appropriation of animal bodies, and the process of sending spent animals to slaughter. This research and knowledge helped to fill out these short vignettes in a way that connected the animals' lives and experiences, and their emotional bonds with each other, to the broader economic logics governing animal bodies in the dairy industry more generally. And it also meant that the individual story – the moment in which the cow and calf were separated – became a lens through which to understand their suffering, as well as a way to perhaps understand the plight of other singular beings labouring and dying for food production in a sort of composite – albeit, incomplete – picture.

This incompleteness is, of course, part of any ethnographic account. Visweswaran (1994, p.1) writes, '[e]thnography, like fiction, no matter its pretense to present a self-contained narrative or cultural whole, remains incomplete and detached from the realms to which it points'. Ethnography always tells a particular story, from a particular perspective, representing particular kinds of entanglements between researcher and informant. Developing intimate research practice through empathy might be one way of creating a fuller picture, even (or maybe especially) in sites where glimpses into the lives of those who are being studied are fractured and fleeting. Of course, this kind of research, and the thinking and writing it prompts, takes time. Responding to and processing the emotional toll wrought by empathizing with those who are subjects of violence takes time. *Intimacy* takes time.

Can we rush intimacy? For slower research practices

My partner and I first met Saoirse, a small one-and-a-half-year-old beagle, in the anteroom outside of her kennel in the biomedical research laboratory where she was living. Her tail was completely tucked up under her in a canine expression of fear and submission, and she crouched low with her head down. Her forehead was wrinkled as she surveyed us warily from across the room. Her eyes were bloodshot, locked on us, watching. Her body was tense and quivering. The staff person who had introduced us left us in the room with her, and we sat there and waited patiently for her to come to us. She skirted the edges of the room and winced each time we moved. Finally, she crept up to me slowly and sniffed my hand. After a while of letting her explore and get closer to me, she let me pet her head and her ears. She had a tattoo in one ear with an alphanumeric identification combination and her belly was shaved from her recent spay surgery.

When we brought Saoirse home, she vomited in the car and she shook at every new noise, smell and sight, her body erupting into shivers. She had never been outdoors and the sensory experience of being outside the lab was a wholly overwhelming experience. She was like a ragdoll for days, sitting and shaking wherever we put her. It took weeks for her to relax in our home and bond with us. Going outside was almost too much for her at first. She would make it a few steps outside and then run back. Quickly, though, she learned to love running along through the grass, nose to the ground, taking in all the smells of the outdoors. Gradually, her personality came out and she became playful and active. She burrows under blankets to sleep and snores loudly, relaxing fully in her moments of rest. More than two years later, she is a different dog than the one we first met in the research lab. Occasionally, the traces of her time in the lab come out: when we go to the vet; when she encounters new people; when flashes of light streak across the ceiling from the early morning sun. But our shared life together has transformed the way she moves through and experiences the world around her. And it has transformed me, too.

Why intimacy as a research practice? Gruen (2015, p.25) explains in clear terms: 'harm . . . matters, but it does so in the context of a *particular* life. The abstract perspective allows us to overlook what is important from the other's point of view, and it also obscures the unique capacities that other animals possess and might be valued in themselves. Too often in this abstraction, we substitute our own judgements of what is beneficial for other animals for what may in fact promote their wellbeing.' Intimacy through empathy allows for attention to particularity. It allows for an attention to the *particular life* and its embodied experience of the structural conditions with which so many feminist researchers and multispecies ethnographers are concerned.

This level of attention was highlighted at first by the particular animals I encountered in the auction yards I visited, but adopting Saoirse while I was in the midst of my fieldwork on the dairy industry added another layer to thinking about intimacy and particularity. Meeting Saoirse, and the subsequent years sharing a home with her (and now two other beagles out of the biomedical research lab), has provided insights about intimacy in research that I did not expect: namely, that intimate research informed by entangled empathy is a way to access depth and moments of knowledge-making in fleeting or transient research sites. But more than that, it has highlighted the fact that this kind of intimacy is also more fully developed over time.

Empathizing with the cow and calf in the auction yard revealed a way to develop intimacy in my research practice in a place where intimacy was difficult to foster – it allowed for a focus on the *particular* life. The auction yard and its commodifying logic creates a level of fundamental abstraction from the singular animal, or the pair of animals in relationship with one another. An animal's singularity is typically visibly noted in the auction yard only insofar as it defines her commodity-producing potential. Empathy as a form of intimate research practice in this space can be a way to resist and better understand this logic of commodification, as well as the actual being it impacts.

I have not written an ethnography of my experience living in a relationship of mutual care with Saoirse, but if I did, it would involve a level of detail that was difficult – if not impossible – in the constraints of my ethnography of the dairy industry. Of course, we are always going to know someone (human or nonhuman) we live with much better than research subjects in a research site. But this experience illustrates the ways in which intimacy itself is an important mode of building knowledges about other species' lifeworlds. Our emotional states are intertwined – if I am anxious, she begins to show her own anxiety: forehead wrinkled, hyperactively running around the house and she whines. If she is anxious, and showing her anxiety in her embodiment, I can feel my own anxiety start to surface. I've grown to know her subtle bodily responses to the world around her in a way I didn't notice at first – how the way she sleeps reveals her level of relaxation, how minor differences in how she holds her tail betray her mood, or how the smell of her breath changes when she is afraid.

These details that we have learned about each other makes it possible for me to read external stimuli and the impacts of broader social and political economic relations more carefully and in a more nuanced way. In other words, seeing her in the lab, living with her in the aftermath of leaving the lab, and seeing her recuperation, I have been attentive to her place as a living being purposefully bred for, commodified and appropriated by, the biomedical research industry. As in the auction yard, I relied on empathy as a way to develop intimacy and knowledge about a nonhuman life. What Saoirse has highlighted especially is the exciting potential of intimacy developed over time in the research process. What I thought I knew about Saoirse after a few hours with her was soon eclipsed by what I thought I knew after a few days with her, then after a few weeks, followed by months, and then even now, by what I think I know about her after years together. What kind of intimacy as a form of knowledge-making will be possible after the course of a shared lifetime?

Intimacy as a form of research practice takes time. And when researchers are constrained in any number of ways (by limited access to the spaces that research subjects inhabit, by rushing to publish or produce to compete on the job market, and by time-consuming administrative and other under-recognized service to the university), time is hard to come by. This approach to thinking about intimacy – that it takes time, both as a research practice and as a form of sociality – aligns with the recent manifesto, 'For Slow Scholarship' (Mountz, et al., 2015). In it, Mountz et al. (2015, p.3) argue for a distinctly feminist approach to slow scholarship – scholarship that develops an ethic of care as it more intentionally takes 'time to think, write, read, research, analyse, edit, and collaborate'. This call for a more caring, slowed-down mode of scholarship is necessary for intimate research practice: for the time spent actively researching; for the time it takes to think and read more in response to what we've seen; for the time it takes to have a revelation that perhaps our approach was flawed and we need to go back to researching; and for the time it takes to write and process, perhaps before we even think about publishing. Taking time is one way we develop intimacy, and the challenges of multispecies ethnography emphasize the need for research which is attuned to

intimacy and which takes the time to explore new ways of knowing, feeling and writing our scholarship.

By way of conclusion, these experiences of multispecies encounter with the cow and calf, and later with Saoirse, inform the need for research that is attuned to the intimate emotional worlds of nonhuman life. These experiences also show the importance of research that is attuned to empathy as a form of intimacy in feminist research and multispecies ethnography. And finally, the particularities of intimacy and how it is experienced and fostered as research practice prompt synergies with feminist geographers' call for slow scholarship. My hope is that the practice of intimacy through empathy might be fostered as a research praxis which simultaneously recognizes its incompleteness and contingencies and prompts transformative explorations of creative new ways of knowing how we are intimately entangled with others.

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