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An Internatural Communication Study of Identity Within Nonprofit Animal Shelters

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AN INTERNATURAL COMMUNICATION STUDY OF IDENTITY WITHIN NONPROFIT ANIMAL SHELTERS

by

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ABSTRACT

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In a two-part study of this dissertation project, I relied on qualitative research methods to examine the stories of animal shelter employees and volunteers—stories about animal shelters, animal sheltering, and shelter animals—to analyze communication processes that shape staff-identity, organizational-identity, and organizational identification. This project was guided by the communicative constitution of organizations (CCO) approach, which frames communication as not simply something that happens within an organization, but rather argues organization happens in communication. Furthermore, contributing to internatural communication research, this project explored identity and identification from a "more-than human" perspective. Relating CCO and internatural communication to research in this dissertation provided support for how communication is not only central to animal shelter organizations, but the organizing of shelter animals, and perceptions of animal identity as an organized state.

Thus, in an exploration of identity and identification, this dissertation study explored animal shelters (Chapter Two) and shelter animals (Chapter Three) as ordered entities. The first study (Chapter Two) addressed the research question: How do non-profit animal shelter staff communicate and understand their identity in relation to the organization's identity? The first study's findings contribute to identity research at the organizational level by exploring how nonprofit animal shelter staff negotiate their identity relative to the organization's identity. This study found that more than half of participants did not align or struggled to align their individual

identity with the organization's identity, primarily due to issues of animal welfare. The second study (Chapter Three) considered the research question: How do animal identities emerge through communication? The analysis of the findings of this second study focused on communication outcomes to critically explore how communication about, with, and for animals, based on interactions with these animals, impact the welfare of shelter animals. This second study found two prevailing discourses that were created, maintained and also resisted: (1) animals need humans to communicate for them, and (2) not all animals can be saved. In the final chapter (Chapter Four), I couple the findings of both studies within this dissertation to explore the overall theoretical and practical implications. Further, I offer future research directions to extend research of how communication with, for, and about animals, shapes understanding and action.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Chapter 1

"You're an animal welfare organization. Why don't you have a vegan option?" Emma challenged. For roughly half an hour, Emma and I talked about her experiences volunteering at one of her local animal shelters. She explained how her children were her primary motivation for volunteering, as she was looking for a "meaningful volunteer experience" for them. To broaden her children's experiences, Emma enrolled them in the organization's summer camp. When she learned that the camp's prepared meals did not include a vegan option, Emma was struck by the misalignment between the organization's mission and enacted practices. Sitting across from me, she uncrossed her arms. She then raised one arm and turned her palm upwards. Matter of fact, she said, "We love them, and we eat them."

My conversation with Emma highlights the often-complicated relationship between humans and animals in general, but especially on an organizational level. What is striking about her account is the complex identity formation of and identification with the animal shelter and animals in general. This dissertation project interrogates experiences such as Emma's to demonstrate how in interactions with animals, people give meanings to and organize animals and themselves through communication. Traditionally, organizational communication research stops short of accounting for more than the human experience (Cooren et al., 2011). However, "animals are major actors" who "figure prominently in the thinking and feeling of the people being studied" (Arluke & Sanders, 1996, p. 3). Therefore, it is essential to include animals when studying organizations where animals are prominent figures.

Numerous scholars have argued that studying human and animal interactions allows humans to understand themselves (Adams, 2013; Jerolmack, 2008; Kalof & Amthor, 2010; Lerner & Kalof, 1999; Spears & Germain, 2007). Examining human and animal interactions

demonstrates “how we organize our social world” (Arluke & Sanders, 1996, p. 3). Therefore, accounting for animals in organizational communication, particularly in animal focused organizations, would help people gain a better understanding of how organizational, human, and animal identities intersect. Furthermore, a human-animal understanding of our perception of animals can be used to challenge the notions that oppress animals, so that a better understanding of animals helps animals (Freeman, 2009; Stibe, 2001; Fudge, 2002; Sanders & Arluke, 1993). Thus, this dissertation project explores identity and identification from a “more-than human” perspective. Through qualitative research methods, I examined the stories of animal shelter employees and volunteers—stories about animal shelters, animal sheltering, and shelter animals—to analyze communication processes that shape staff-identity, organizational-identity, and organizational identification.

In the rest of this chapter, I begin by providing an overview and application of the constitutive role of communication in organizational communication research as it pertains to animal shelters and shelter animals. Then, I trace the history of animal sheltering from the late 19th century, focusing on how shelter identity has changed over the past 150 years to the present-day. Finally, I describe common issues affecting animal shelters which impact identity and identification and are an impetus for this dissertation project.

Animals, Organizing and Animal Organizations

Communication is central to the organization of animals, and organization generally (Nicotera, 2020). Essentially, “organizations are constituted in and through human communication” (Cooren et al., 2011). This perspective has been termed the CCO (Communicative Constitution of Organization) approach (Nicotera, 2020). Within COO, there are three ways that communication organizes, which are represented symbolically as $O_{1,}$

organizing, O_2 *organized*, and O_3 *organizations* (Nicotera, 2020). O_1, *organizing*, is the process or the *coordinating*/*ordering* of a social collective. O_1 foregrounds agency, for example, how group members engage in decision making. Secondly, O_2, *organized*, is the structure of a social collective's arrangement, order, or formation. Finally, O_3, *organization*, represent the "entitative being" of "coordinated/ordered entities" that arise from O_1, organizing and O_2 being organized (Nicotera, 2020, p. 7).

As people organize animals through communication about animals, that communication gives shape to processes of identity and identification. With social meanings and representations of animals constantly in flux, animals are also in a perpetual state of becoming (O_1 or *organizing*). For example, dogs, cats, and rabbits are frequently becoming human. People engage in the organizing of animals as human in part by attributing human characteristics upon animals. This anthropomorphizing, can sometimes be seen in how guardians refer to "companion" animals as their "babies." Additionally, animals become *organized* structures (O_2) as reflected in discourse. For instance, cats and dogs without a permanent residence are organized as "stray" or "feral" rather than "free-roaming." Furthermore, in some cultures dogs and rabbits are organized as "delicacies" rather than "pets."

Thus, communication plays a central role in the creation of animals as "ordered entities" (or collections of animals as O_3 *organizations*) that arise from processes of *organizing* (O_1) and animals as *organized* (O_2) (Nicotera, 2020, p. 7). Likewise, communication plays a significant role in the creation of animal sheltering organizations. Thus, in an exploration of identity and identification, this dissertation study explores animal shelters (Chapter Two) and shelter animals (Chapter Three) as ordered entities.

Specifically, I examine animal shelter identity and identification among volunteers and employees (here after termed "staff") identities, organizational identities, and shelter animal identities as two related studies for this dissertation. The first study (Chapter Two) addressed the research question: How do non-profit animal shelter staff communicate and understand their identity in relation to the organization's identity? The first study's findings contribute to identity research at the organizational level by exploring how nonprofit animal shelter staff negotiate their identity relative to the organization's identity. The second study (Chapter Three) considered the research question: How do animal identities emerge through communication? The analysis of the findings of this second study focused on communication outcomes to critically explore how communication about, with, and for animals, based on interactions with these animals, impact the welfare of shelter animals. In the final chapter (Chapter Four), I couple these two dissertation study findings to explore the overall theoretical and practical implications of these studies. Further, I offer future research directions to extend research of how communication with, for, and about animals, shapes understanding and action.

Animal Shelter Organizations

Several categories of animal shelters exist, including municipally operated (run by local counties or governments, and responsible for public safety pertaining to animal control), privately owned (self-regulated) and privately owned with municipal contracts (organizations privately establish the mission but assume various responsibilities for animal control for counties or governments). In addition to these categories, animal shelters are subsequently labeled in several ways, frequently around the terms "kill" or "no-kill." In the early 1990s, the kill/no-kill terminology began to gain traction and application. These identifiers became significant alongside middle-class objections to the cruelty and mass killings of unclaimed animals in

shelters (Irvine, 2003). Prior to the 1990s, most people thought of animal shelters in a disparaging light as “pounds” (Irvine, 2003). Depending on how an animal shelter is categorized and labeled, it is viewed as either reinforcing or challenging the “no-kill movement,” which aims to end the euthanasia of healthy and adoptable animals in shelters (DeMello, 2012). These distinctions are important because each category and label shapes organizational identities, which subsequently impact how staff identify with the organization. For instance, staff who identify with no-kill organizations center their identities “upon the idea that they are fighting to save all animals; this identity also rests, in part, on making kill shelter workers the bad guys” (DeMello, 2012, p. 227).

Other identifiers include “open-admission,” which contrasts with “limited admission.” Open-admission facilities, also known as open intake, are traditionally operated by municipalities that hold animal control contracts for municipalities. Their intake approach is unrestricted by the animals’ breed, age, temperament, adoptability, health, or available organizational resources (Association of Shelter Veterinarian, 2017). However, open-admission facilities are restricted by “criteria such as municipal borders or defined hours of animal intake. Additionally, open-admission shelters may decline owner-surrendered animals if their role is strictly limited to stray animal control or certain species in accordance with their legal mandate” (Association of Shelter Veterinarian, 2017, p. 3). Alternatively, limited admission shelters are often privately run organizations and focus on admitting specific breeds or “owner” surrendered animals. They “accept animals based on self-defined criteria and mission” (Association of Shelter Veterinarian, 2017, p. 3). Finally, managed admission shelters occupy the space between limited and open admission shelters. They too focus on “owner” surrendered animals but work

with the community to schedule intakes as resources become available (Association of Shelter Veterinarian, 2017).

These terms used to categorize and label shelters are often linked to delineate the organization's identity and approach to animal work, which impact the organization's mission. For instance, privately owned animal shelters tend to also be limited admission and self-identify as no-kill facilities. Municipally run shelters are required to be open-access and are often considered as "kill" or even "high kill" shelters. Further, privately owned shelters who hold municipal contracts often operate as managed admission shelters (with various kill/no-kill policies). A historical overview of animal sheltering helps to explain how these categorizations and labels advanced the evolution of animal welfare and animal shelters identity. Tracing the history of animal shelters from their inception in 1886 to present day provides the context to understand how animal shelters became what they are today, as well as how shifts in the way animals were talked about organized these movements.

Additionally, a historical background of animal shelters also introduces the present issues that these common identifiers can cause. For instance, critics of the kill/no-kill identifiers argue:

> Most people assume that "no kill" means that no animal accepted by the organization is ever euthanized – in some cases that is true, but there are some "no kill" organizations that still euthanize "unadoptable" animals or send them to an open admission shelter for euthanasia. (The Humane Society of the United States, 2012)

In essence, tracing early efforts to care for animals (O_3, *organization*) provides a useful historical background of animal sheltering organizations (O_3, *organization*) and how their identities in processes of organizing (O_1, *organizing*) and as organized (O_2, *organized*) have changed over the course of 150 years.

Historical Origins of Nonprofit Animal Shelters

Animal sheltering as an organizing and organized entity has encountered several shifts in its identity. From animal shelter origination nearly 150 years ago, whether or not to euthanize has been central to a shelter's identity as communicated by their missions and goals. Also central to shelters' shifting identities are the identities of the very people who work and volunteer for these nonprofit organizations (NPOs). Alongside shifts in organizational identity, there were shifts of the "poundmaster identity" to shelter worker. Below, I present an overview of the historical origins of animal shelters and a timeline of how they have changed.

The U.S. animal advocacy movement arguably began in 1866 with the creation of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) by wealthy U.S. philanthropist Henry Bergh. While serving as a diplomat in Russia, Bergh purportedly witnessed a man beating a donkey. Appalled, Bergh demanded the man stop. This galvanizing experience became the catalyst for Bergh's work in animal welfare reform. Upon his return to New York, he presented the first documented lecture on animal welfare on February 8, 1866 that led to several cascading events. Bergh wrote a "Declaration of the Rights of Animals," which in turn led to the formation of ASPCA. The establishment of the ASPCA was pivotal for animal welfare because up until this point animal control services included rounding up stray animals and publicly drowning them (Winograd, 2009).

After the ASPCA was formed, New York passed a law on April 19, 1866, against animal cruelty and granted the ASPCA the governance to enforce this law. A pivotal outcome of Bergh's leadership and fortitude was the passing of a series of legislative reforms to improve the living conditions of dogs in the city "pounds." For instance, "poundmasters" were now required to provide animals with basic care (e.g., fresh food, water). Bergh also engaged in and promoted

public education pertaining to animals. For example, his survey research refuted detractors claims that stray dogs spread rabies, finding no documented cases of anyone contracting rabies from stray dogs (Winograd, 2009). Since these dogs posed little threat, Bergh advocated against rounding dogs up. He refused to have the ASPCA take responsibility for collecting and "disposing" of stray dogs, instead advocating for leaving stray dogs alone (Zawistowski, 2008).

A few years later, the first U.S. animal shelter was formed by Carolyn Earle White and the Women's SPCA of Pennsylvania in 1869 (Zawistowski, 2008). In 1874, White, along with this group, envisioned, built, and operated the City Refuge for Lost and Suffering Animals. To address the traditional and arguably horrific drowning of stray cats and dogs, White "commissioned the development of a more humane method of killing the excess animals that could not be placed into new homes. Their humane euthanasia chamber used gas to asphyxiate the animals" (p. 74). From the start, we can see how the issue of euthanasia gave shape to the organization's identity as the first "humane" shelter. On the heels of the Women's SPCA work, the International Humane Association (later renamed the American Humane Association) was founded in 1877.

However, upon Bergh's death in 1888, the impetus toward animal welfare reform and humane shelters was derailed. With hardly two decades of existence, animal sheltering would experience a shift in its basic identity as "humane" organizations. Under new leadership, the ASPCA accepted a contract to run the city pound. Beginning in 1910, the ASPCA was impounding dogs and cats on behalf of the city (Winograd, 2009; Zawistowski, 2008) with most of them being "killed in terribly inhumane ways by city shelters, including drowning (in public!), beating and shooting" (Carey, 2007). The momentum toward humane animal sheltering continued to encounter bumps in the road. Support began to wane after the AHA's original

founders passed away, and with them their vision of animal welfare, which had "permeated the nation in the years following the Civil War" (Zawistowski, 2008, p. 62).

The next step in the evolution of the animal shelter's identity began in the 1950s when the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), which did not provide animal sheltering, tried "to create 'national standards' and 'best practices'" (Winograd, 2009, p. 19). Their efforts were primarily in line with a "humane" identity. However, there was one practice, which Winograd (2009) calls "the charade 'that killing is kindness'" (p. 20), that was fraught with controversy and met with criticism. In the 1980s, the HSUS, at the direction of Phyllis Wright, Director of Animal Sheltering and Control, began media efforts that provided "acceptable pretexts for killing animals" (p. 21). One example of these efforts was a promotional document that was included in *Shelter Sense, A Publication for Animal Sheltering and Control Personnel*. Shelters were instructed to clip out the promotional document, which could then be "reproduced in quantity by your local printer for you to distribute at schools, shopping centers, libraries and other community locations" (Shelter Sense Reproducible, 1980, p. 14). The clipping read: "We are working to bring the pet population under control so that each animal might have a responsible home. But for the unwanted animals in our care now, a peaceful death is the kindest way we have to end their loneliness and suffering" (p. 14).

Wright effectively "abandoned" the HSUS "primary mission of ending the killing of companion animals in shelters and instead chose to champion a philosophy which excused killing, often promoted it, and cemented its hegemony, all of it at the expense of the animals" (Winograd, 2009, p. xviii). Decades later, the legacy of Wright's instructions have impacted how shelters engage in the identity work of negotiating, creating, presenting, sustaining, sharing,

and/or adapting their organizational identity. These “national practices” provided the discourse to defend euthanasia, which also provide refuge for those who identify as a “kill” shelter.

In the late 1980s/early 1990s the question of animal euthanasia began to shift, and with this shift, animal sheltering organizations encountered yet another path in identity formation. People began to interrogate the motives of euthanizing healthy and behaviorally sound animals and question whether it was a matter of convenience to eliminate unwanted pets (Duvin, 1989). These queries helped spark the no-kill movement within animal shelters (Zawistowski, 2008). Today’s nonprofit animal shelters were born out of these middle-class objections to the cruelty and mass killings of unclaimed animals by city pounds (Irvine, 2003). Furthermore, public relations efforts sought to make-over perceptions of shelters as “death chambers” by making them “more pleasant places for human and non-human animals” (Irvine, 2003, p. 555). In addition to the municipal shelters (which had commonly been identified as “pounds”), private shelters originated to meet the needs of growing communities. As reviewed earlier, these private shelters sometimes took on municipal work related to animal control services.

Tracing the history of animal sheltering, it is apparent how the issue of euthanasia gave shape to the organization’s identity, which was greatly influenced by the leaders of these NPOs. As this history indicates, an individual’s desire to help is part of the history and origin of animal sheltering in the U.S. and shelters played an integral role in the early history of animal advocacy and welfare. Next, I move into to the present-day issues affecting animal shelters and how the results impact identity and identification.

Issues and Threats to Identity

Presently, animal shelters provide several basic functions. They place stray animals in homes, reunite lost animals with their guardians, provide measures to protect public health from the potential dangers of animals, including bites, disease, and general nuisances (Zawistowski,

2008) and serve as an alternative to traditional veterinary medical services (Kass et al., 2001), including offering euthanasia services. In providing these primary services, organizations' staff encounter numerous stressors. They experience emotional turmoil (Morris, 2012), feelings of loss and grief (Marton et al., 2020), compassion fatigue (DeMello, 2012), and symptoms of burnout (Brown & O'Brien, 1998). Taxing situations "or work difficulties that occur on a daily basis can, because of their recurrence and because of what they mean for identity (questioned, devalued, or scorned), equally represent a major source of stress" (Berjot et al., 2013, p. 2).

In their research on the impact of work stressors on identity threats, Berjot et al. (2013) offered a helpful overview of identity and identification, focusing on the positive and negative aspects of threats to identity. Work is an integral part of an individual's identity, "serving at least partly to define us personally and professionally" (Berjot et al., 2013, p. 1). People tend to not only define themselves based on their work (Gini, 1998), but also use their place of work in a process of identification to cope with work-related stressors and as a source of social support (Haslam et al., 2004). Identification with an organization can also have negative effects that impact identity (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993) and self-esteem (Winefield et al., 1991), and lead to burnout (Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995), posttraumatic stress disorders (Grebot & Berjot, 2010), and even suicide (Argyle, 1989; Kleespies et al., 2011).

Fortunately, there are several ways that animal shelters can mitigate these negative effects to identity. For instance, shelters can promote ideas from staff to increase staff voice (Allen & Mueller, 2013), reduce role ambiguity through carefully detailed assignments (Kresnye & Shih, 2018), and treat volunteers and employees the same (Allen & Mueller, 2013). Another way to diminish turnover resulting from burnout involves space planning. Shelters with designated euthanasia rooms that separate living animals from those who are undergoing

euthanasia have lower staff turnover rates (Rogelberg et al., 2007). Finally, researchers recommend “the formation of a support group” or interventions for animal care workers to help staff process losing animals and “make meaning out of the losses they experience” (Marton et al., 2020, p. 39-40).

In summary, animal sheltering has a long past that has been shaped by the topic of euthanasia. Although the types and number of services that shelters offer has increased over the past 150 years, providing proper care and wrestling with the ethical dilemma of euthanasia still impact these organizations and their members. As I progress with this dissertation topic, I explore how organizational, staff, and animal identities emerge from communication within animal sheltering organizations, which I begin next, by exploring how animal shelter staff communicate and understand their identity in relation to the organization’s identity.

Chapter 2

Of the more than 62,000,000 people who volunteered in 2015, only 2.9% volunteered for environmental or animal care organizations, such as animal shelters (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Given that approximately 6-8 million companion animals enter U.S. animal shelters nationwide annually (HSUS, n.d.), the low percentage of volunteers at animal care organizations is alarming. These figures tell the story of the 3,500 animal shelters and 10,000 rescue groups and animal sanctuaries in the U.S. (HSUS, n.d.) that are overburdened with issues related to sheltering and caring for stray, lost, and relinquished animals.

Some scholars argue for increased adoption to ease the burdens of "overpopulation… the ethical burden of euthanasia" and "high burn out rates" (Kresnye & Shih, 2018, p. 1). This paper argues that leveraging communication to increase volunteer and employee retention is another way to ameliorate these burdens. Animal shelter volunteer and employee (hereafter termed staff) experiences could be enhanced by identifying strategies to create a stronger shared organizational identity. Creating a shared identity facilitates the alignment of organizational values and increases group effectiveness and cohesiveness (Russo, 1998). Further, nonprofit organization (NPOs) that precisely define their goals increase the likelihood of successfully accomplishing their mission (Bradach et al., 2008). NPOs, and animal welfare NPOs specifically, would benefit from research on identity, organizational identity, and organizational identification that could enhance staff retention efforts. Further, this study extends theoretical understanding by exploring organizational identification in the context of NPOs.

Therefore, through qualitative thematic analysis of 25 interviews with staff at 17 animal shelters, this study investigates how U.S. NPO animal shelter staff use communication to understand the nonprofit's organizational identity and then organize their identities in line with

or in opposition to the organization's espoused identity and enacted practices. Guiding this study is the communicative constitution of organizations (CCO) approach. Applying the CCO approach, scholars "look *at* communication rather than *through* it to understand organization—in other words, they see communication not as reflecting or representing some deeper mechanisms, but instead as where organization lives" (Schoeneborn et al., 2019, p. 476). Communication is not simply something that happens within an organization, rather organization happens in communication. This study looks at the *organizing* of identities, whereby communication is a lens that can help researchers "understand organizational processes and actions" (Heide et al., 2018, p. 456). Applying the CCO approach to the phenomenon of identity and identification extends theoretical understanding of identity work in NPOs and allows for the detection of practical recommendations that leverage communication.

In the sections that follow, I first highlight research pertaining to perspectives on identity, organizational identity, and organizational identification, which serve as sensitizing concepts that frame this study. Next, I outline the purpose of the current study, detail the research question, and share the methodology. This is followed by a thorough report of the findings and finally, a discussion with recommendations.

Identity, Organizational Identity, and Organizational Identification

Communication shapes and reveals identities (Scott, 2020). Furthermore, "it only becomes possible to conceive and talk of an 'organizational identity' as grounded in language and as having no existence other than in discourse" (Cooren et al, 2011, p. 1159). Defining identity (I), organizational identity (OI), and organizational identification (OID) is therefore instrumental in demonstrating the constitutive role that communication plays in shaping identity.

Individual Identity

Identity has been described as the meanings people attach to themselves that are sustained via social interactions as people reflexively seek an answer to the question "Who am I?" (Cerulo, 1997). Fearon (1999) argued from a personal sense, "an identity is some distinguishing characteristic (or characteristics) that a person takes a special pride in or views as socially consequential but more-or-less unchangeable" (p. 16). Brown (2014) describes identity in a processual manner that includes individuals reflexively attaching meanings to themselves. Discourse is essential in confronting our understandings of identity. Communication is central to how we construct identities in interaction, which allows us to manage "our often multiple and fragmented identities" (Scott, 2020, p. 206). Tracy and Trethewey (2005) introduced the concept of the crystallized-self as a linguistic alternative to "speak about, understand, and experience the self in more appropriately politicized and layered ways" (p. 186). Using a crystal as a metaphor, they posit individuals have crystalized selves "depending on the various discourses through which they are constructed and constrained" (p. 186).

As a topic, identity research is profound given that identities constitute a "root construct" (Albert et al., 2000, p. 13) for a wide variety of organizational phenomena, including leadership (Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006; Hogg, 2018), conflict (Humphreys & Brown, 2008), and organizational control and power (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Tretheway, 1997). Alvesson and Willmott (2002) focused on how organizational control is accomplished via identity regulation. Trethewey (1997) drawing upon the idea of organizations as political sites (Deetz, 1992; Foucault, 1979), examined "the ways that organizational discourses create and recreate power structures that influence the way in which members' gendered identities are constructed and constrained" (p. 282). In this study, I push at these findings to offer new information on how

animal shelter staff identities are constructed and constrained. Furthermore, I extend the CCO approach into a critical realm by considering how "power relations are developed in and through our communication with others, which creates identities through which we are able to view-and act toward-ourselves, others, and the world" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019, p. 14).

Organizational Identity

Albert and Whetten (1985) originated the concept of organizational identity as the "central, distinctive and enduring aspect of an organization" (p. 266). An organization's identity is understood as "what the organization 'is' or 'stands for' or 'wants to be'" (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 231). Organizations employ numerous resources to construct and manage their identities (Cheney et al., 2014), which are formed through their communicated values to internal and external stakeholders (Aust, 2004). Additionally, organizational identity is often explicitly stated in a mission statement, commonly seen as essential in helping an organization form its identity and communicate its values (Leuthesser & Kohli, 1997).

Organizational identity research has experienced continued interest across the social sciences for decades; and there is still a significant amount of research left unexamined in the realm of communication (Desmidt & Heene, 2005; Scott, 2020). In their examination of twenty years of research on mission statements, Desmidt and Heene (2005) found that most organization mission statement data were collected via surveys and archives and the studies tended to center on 1) making conclusions about the organizations instead of the individuals, 2) on organizational leaders, and 3) on private sector organizations. While the primary focus of this present study is not on mission statements, I do consider the important role of mission statements in identity formation of organizations and organizational members. Organizations typically define who they are through value and goal statements communicated through their missions and visions. Mission

statements can serve as “powerful means of stimulating involvement” and “providing a sense of identity for the firm” (Leuthesser & Kohli, 1997, p. 65) Thus, this present study builds on past research on mission statements and extends previous research on organizational identity as communicatively constitutive by collecting data through interviews with organizational members, focusing on member experiences, and examining nonprofit organizations.

With the many different characterizations of identity reviewed above, it is no surprise that Whetten (2006) posited “the concept of organizational identity is suffering an identity crisis” (p. 220). Ultimately, what guides this research study is the theoretical understanding that organizations may be characterized by multiple identities that can be “compatible, complementary, unrelated, or even contradictory” (Albert & Whetten, 1985, p. 267-268) and that identity claims are often political acts” (He & Brown, 2013, p. 5). Organizations establish and communicate an identity because of a “desire for control, not only of employees but also of the organization’s identity, that is, how the organization is commonly represented” (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 248). These identities “refer to labels applied to persons who share or are thought to share some characteristic or characteristics, in appearance, behavioral traits, beliefs, attitudes, values. (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 16). While “organizational identity refers to the entity’s expressed interests and key points of reference that are shared by multiple internal and external organizational stakeholders,” identification “is concerned with the values that organizations align with” (Henderson et al., 2015, p. 15).

Organizational Identification

Organizational identification is described as the connection between organizational members and the organization (Larson, 2017). This attachment or connection is significant given that the question of “Who am I?” matters heavily in relation to “Who are we?” This association

is a matter of "perception of oneness with or belongingness to [a collective], where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the [collective] in which he or she is a member" (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 104). This process is constituted via discourse. As Czarniawska-Joerges (1994) explained, "both the narrator and audience formulate, edit, applaud, and refuse various elements of the ever-produced narrative" (p. 198).

Identification with an organization has a significant influence on the individuals' lives within the organization (Deetz, 1992). For instance, Zwingmann et al., (2014) found that having a shared vision is vital for employees' health. Additionally, researchers have found that organizational identification manifests as employee loyalty and reduces an individual's range of options so that the available choices affirm said identification (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985). Determining an animal shelter's values as an identity component is important given that animal shelter workers express increased loyalty to their organization (Almond & Kendall, 2000) and are "primarily motivated by a need to act on important values relating to animals" (Neumann, 2010, p. 363).

Theoretically, this paper adheres to the viewpoints of philosopher George Hegel. According to Hegel (1807), "self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another's self-consciousness" (par. 175). While we know our private selves, the privilege of knowing our public self is accessed only in another's recognition. It is through recognition with others that people navigate from "I" to "We." This study examines how the answer to "Who am I?" matters in relation to "Who is the organization?" and ultimately together "Who are we?"

Organizational Identity, Identification, and Animal Shelter NPOs

Much of what is known about the influence and importance of organizational identity comes from studies of private sector organizations (Desmidt & Heene, 2005). In this study, I

answer the call for furthering empirical investigation to “help nonprofits work through their identity-related issues” (Young, 2001, p. 140). NPOs are increasing in prevalence, making them increasingly relevant and meriting study. Additionally, animal shelters have also seen a steady annual growth since 2016 (Animal Rescue Shelters in the U.S., 2020). Furthermore, concern for animal welfare is also on the rise. Charities that spotlight issues related to the environment and animals saw an increase of 7.2% in donations (Charity Navigator, 2018).

Besides their increasing prevalence, indicated by steady growth and increased donations (Animal Rescue Shelters in the U.S., 2020; & Charity Navigator, 2018), another reason to study NPOs is because they differ from for-profit organizations in meaningful ways. For example, the culture within a nonprofit is often more community-oriented and cause-focused, as compared to for-profit organizations. NPOs tend to address problems with little financial incentive but offer personal enrichment (Bacchiega & Borzaga, 2001, 2003). More so, employees often advocate for the organization beyond their scheduled workday because they are passionate about the cause (Ruder & Riforgiate, 2019). Compared to for-profit organizations, NPO workers seem more willing to “donate work” and are more loyal to the organization (Almond & Kendall, 2000). Furthermore, workers in NPOs display stronger motivations and higher satisfaction linked to their work’s meaningfulness, despite lower pay, shortages of staff and resources, and excessive workloads (Light, 2002). As this relates to animal shelters, Neumann (2010) found that “animal welfare volunteers are primarily motivated by a need to act on important values relating to animals” (p. 363).

Identification with an organization, as expressed by members in NPOs, can also have negative effects that lead to burnout (Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995). Burnout is characterized as a general “wearing out” from occupational stressors (Miller et al., 1989). Three factors

characterize burnout: “emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishments” (Maslach & Jackson, 1996, p. 192). Finally, in addition to emotional exhaustion, burnout is also experienced physically and mentally (Pines & Aronson, 1988). At the organizational level, employee burnout leads to increased turnover intention (Choi et al., 2012). At the individual level, research has found that “the stronger the sense of professional identity, the less likely there is to be job burnout” (Chen et al. 2020, p. 6). However, it is important to note that these findings came from research that examined educational organizations, principals, and teachers specifically. When applied to animal sheltering organizations, researchers found a strong sense of identity or “calling” to animal welfare caused those individuals to burnout more quickly (Schabram & Maitlis, 2017).

In the process of strongly identifying with their work, animal care staff are likely to experience burnout (Schabram & Maitlis, 2017). This presents an interesting paradox for those involved in nonprofit work, especially in animal welfare organizations. After all, NPOs are “complex and distinctive structures of extrinsic and intrinsic incentives that serve to attract workers who are not predominantly driven by monetary remuneration” (Borzaga & Tortia, 2006, p. 226). Nonprofit animal shelters, and animal shelter work more specifically, “is set up to foster and reinforce intrinsic motivation since many if not most shelter employees are drawn first by the desire to help animals” (Weiss et al., 2015, p. 281; Marton et al., 2020). Importantly, if NPO workers are not motivated by monetary gain (Borzaga & Tortia, 2006), but an intrinsic desire to help animals (Weiss et al., 2015; Marton et al., 2020), then the very motivating factors that drive people toward animal welfare work ironically leads them toward feelings of burnout.

Another reason to examine NPOs is the workforce of for-profit and NPOs vastly differ. While a for-profit corporation is primarily comprised of paid employees and interns, NPOs

typically rely on volunteers in addition to employed members to achieve their goals. Because volunteers lack the financial incentive to participate, exploring how volunteers see themselves in relation to the organization's identity is even more relevant. The value of exploring organizational identification by shelter staff rests on the foundation that stronger organizational identification, through aligned goals and a singular mission, positively impacts the ability to retain employees and volunteers, affords an increased level of care for animals, and strengthens community relationships. According to Turner (2012), "in addition to adding to operational inefficiency, high personnel turnover rates adversely impact shelter animal well-being" (p. 895). Conversely, lower employee turnover and less time spent training new employees allows staff additional time to provide dogs with much needed regular exercise and handling (Menor-Campos et al., 2011). Increasing retention has the potential to free up limited financial resources that could go toward communal housing, which includes environmental enrichments such as toys for cats (Dantas-Divers, 2011). These additional measures of care increase animals' physical and psychological well-being, as well as adoption rates (Dantas-Divers, 2011; Menor-Campos et al., 2011).

Community relationships are also important to attend to when addressing homeless pet populations. In many communities, especially economically disadvantaged communities, shelters are often the only resource for providing basic care and management of stray and lost animals for the foreseeable future (Turner, 2012). To succeed, shelters require adequately trained staff who are equipped to properly care for and rehabilitate shelter animals, as well as screen potential adopters to ensure animals do not return to a shelter. This study's aim is not to solve each of these issues. However, this research is phronetic in that it provides an account of the "possibilities, problems, and risks we face in specific domains of social action" (Flyvbjerg, 2004,

par. 5) and contributes a “keen appreciation of power and reflexivity in producing situated knowledge to guide intelligent social action” (Kavanagh, 2015, p. 677). Thus, this study explores the following question to address and support the resolution of the issues specific to animal sheltering:

RQ: How do non-profit animal shelter staff communicate and understand their identity in relation to the organization’s identity?

In summary, the purpose of this study is to examine organizational identification by animal shelter staff. In doing so, I contribute to organizational identification research by extending a theoretical understanding of identification within NPOs and provide practical contributions that better an understanding of the issues that animal shelters encounter pertinent to identity and identification, and specifically, the regulation of identity and identification.

Methodology

To explore staff members (employees and volunteers) experiences, I relied on qualitative research methods. Qualitative approaches to studying organizational identification have continued to gain traction–especially interviews (Larson, 2017). Qualitative research privileges the collection of data in a natural setting and focuses on participants’ meanings, making it ideal to explore how participants communicate and understand identities and identify.

Qualitative methods are well suited for this study because they empower an understanding and interpretation of meanings that individuals bring to their life experiences (Tracy, 2020). Qualitative methods champion a “focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue” via “talking directly to people” in natural settings (Creswell, 2018, pp. 185-186). Epistemologically speaking, meaning is socially constructed by individuals who derive meaning through interaction (Tracy, 2020). A qualitative approach seeks

to develop meaningful stories from others' stories (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). These fundamental characteristics are in keeping with "approaches that more closely consider the interplay between communicating and organizing," which are "especially important for understanding personal identity, organizational identity, and organizational identification" (Scott, 2020, p. 220). Essentially, qualitative research explores experiences, understandings, and meanings that people have about particular phenomena. Therefore, it is best suited to explore the lived experiences of participants and answer this study's research question. In the sections that follow, I review my recruitment procedures, participant demographics, and describe my analysis process.

Recruitment Procedures

Participants who were at least 18 years old, lived in the U.S., and have current, recent (within the last year) or extensive (for more than 3 years) experience workings as a volunteer or employee of an animal shelter were invited to participate in qualitative interviews to discuss their experiences. A primary goal was to recruit individuals who are 'information rich' in terms of providing data to best understand how staff self-identify, how they identify their respective organization, and how they engage in identification with said organization. Thus, after gaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (see Appendix A), I recruited participants by sharing a call (see Appendix B) on three private Facebook groups, one public forum, an Animals and Society Institute's newsletter, and with friends, and colleagues. Two of the Facebook groups offered volunteers a place to ask questions, share stories and pictures, and interact with other volunteers and shelter employees. The third group described itself as a "forum for companion animal welfare professionals working in Adoptions and/or Shelter Operations." Similarly, the public forum was a "community for animal shelter/rescue employees and volunteers."

I incorporated multiple recruitment channels to capture data across various types of shelters and locations. My recruiting efforts provided a rich, contextualized understanding of staff identification. Furthermore, gathering data in this way allowed me to apply a thick description of the phenomena and its contextual meanings more fully. I furthered my recruiting efforts by engaging in snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a sampling method in which a participant provides the researcher the name of another potential participant. The referred participant then provides the name of yet another potential interviewee. The idea is that like a rolling snowball, a study's sample will grow (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Proponents of snowball sampling argue for its usefulness in sampling hard to reach populations (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018), a way to examine social networks (Browne, 2005), and to prevent the sample from skewing by diversifying participant experiences (Tracy, 2020).

Critics of snowball sampling argue that this method lacks generalizability (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018). However, "the intent is not to generalize to a population, but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon," which is best achieved by using purposeful sampling such as snowball sampling (Creswell, 2005, p. 206). Essentially, recruiting from various sources and using snowball sampling provided a means to "generate a unique type of social knowledge" (Noy, 2008, p. 327). Further still, "due to the diversity of perspectives gathered, this knowledge would be particularly valuable for an in-depth and contextualized exploration of a central phenomenon," whereby the diversity of a sample is defined as "a measure of the range of viewpoints that have been gathered on a central phenomenon" (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018, p. 3). I was able to "roll" five small snowballs, which further diversified the sample.

Participants

I interviewed 25 staff members across 17 animal shelters, located in eight states throughout the U.S. (see Appendix D Table D.1). The mean age of the participants was 39.3, with a range of 18-69, and a median age of 33.5. Most of the participants were female (84%; *n = 21*), which mirrors the underrepresentation of men in animal rescue work. According to recent estimations, animal rescue workforces consist of anywhere between 64% (Animal Shelter Worker, 2021) to 85% women (Roy, 2018). Employees held roles within their respective shelters such as humane educator, animal care technician, adoption counselor, kennel assistant, and small animal manager. Volunteers held a wide range of careers, representing a diverse group of professions such as event planners, lawyers, case managers for the homeless, professors, veterinary technicians, and in human resources, recruiting, and agritourism. Participants worked at animal shelter facilities that shelter dogs, cats, reptiles, and rodents, as well provided care for wildlife animals including birds. Finally, participants worked in animal sheltering for a range of four months to 15 years and on average four years and five months. To ensure anonymity, I assigned each participant a pseudonym. Pseudonyms were selected from the top 21 female and top four male baby names of 2019, as according to the U.S. Social Security Administration's rankings.

Data Collection Procedures

I gathered participants' stories via interviews from November 2020 to March 2021. Interviews were conducted over the phone or via a virtual meeting platform (Zoom, Teams, Messenger), per the participant's preference. Interviews were the ideal method for data collection because they provided the most efficient way for participants to share and reflect on their stories. More so, because I used a moderately scheduled interview, I was able to probe further to gain a

more nuanced understanding of participant's experiences. A moderately scheduled interview is a flexible yet planned approach to interviews (Stewart & Cash, 2018). It begins with an interview guide, which is a carefully structured outline of relevant topics and subtopics to focus on during each interview (Stewart & Cash, 2018). Next, a moderately scheduled interview transforms the topics and subtopics from the interview guide and develops major questions and possible probing questions. Unlike a highly standardized schedule, a moderately scheduled interview allows for a degree of freedom to probe and adapt (Stewart & Cash, 2018). I began each interview by reiterating the purpose of the study, assuring participants that their involvement was voluntary, and providing them an opportunity to ask any questions. The interviews then progressed into three phases.

The first phase consisted of questions related to the participant's experience being a volunteer or employee at an animal shelter. For instance, participants were asked to share the story of when and how they got involved in working with animal shelters and what attracted them to the particular organization for which they were presently working. Next, the interviews moved into questions about the organization. These questions included, "What are some words that you would use to define the organization?" and "What services does the organization provide?" The final phase explored the participant's experiences and interactions with shelter animals. The series of questions ended with a clearinghouse questions that asked participants if there was anything else that they felt I should know to best account for their experience working for an animal shelter.

In addition to the questions shared above, there were others that explored organizational identity and organizational identification more directly (for full list of questions see Appendix C). These included: "When you think about the organization's mission, what about the mission

do you agree or disagree with?", "How often do you share that you work at an animal shelter?" and "Do you identify as an animal lover?" If participants responded "yes," I followed up with a probe: "In what ways do you enact that you are an animal lover?" With these questions, I hoped to gain an understanding of the potential impact the organization's mission had on participants, how important their role in animal sheltering was in their overall interactions with others, and whether identifying as an "animal lover" is a common identity amongst animal shelter staff and how various participants communicated this identity.

I also asked questions that related to values. For instance, "Do you feel that your individual values are the same as your organizations? Please explain." Exploring participant/organization value alignment is useful for several reasons. Primarily, shared identity through alignment of values reduces conflict and increases effective communication (Privman at el., 2013). A recent study on group effectiveness found that many of the challenges reported by the study's participants were due to what the authors called "susceptibility factors," which included conflicting goals (Privman at el., 2013, p. 45). Furthermore, animal shelter workers express increased loyalty to their organization (Almond & Kendall, 2000) and are "primarily motivated by a need to act on important values relating to animals" (Neumann, 2010, p. 363).

I used a high performing, low-cost AI (artificial intelligence) transcriber to capture interviews. The quality of this AI transcriber in terms of its ability to record and transcribe each interview was generally high. However, there were times when connection issues garbled the conversations, which exacerbated the transcribing process. In these situations, I listened to each interview, which averaged 48 minutes in duration, and relied on the notes I had taken during the interview to make corrections where warranted. Reliving the interview in this way allowed me to fully immerse myself in the data. This process resulted in 337 pages of data consisting of 297

single-spaced, typewritten pages of transcribed interviews and 43 pages of hand-written and typed analytical memos recorded during and after each interview.

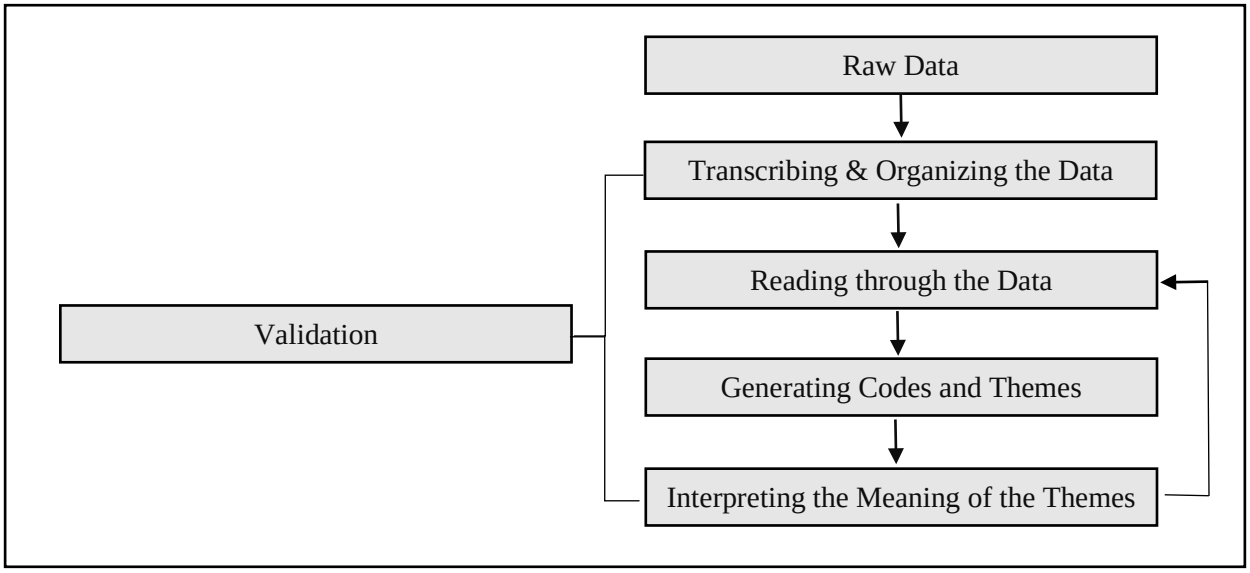
Methods of Analysis

I engaged in a qualitative thematic analysis of the collected data. Qualitative thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data," whereby data is organized and described in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6). It is an ideal mode of analysis because it helps researchers detect the common codes, terms, ideologies, and discourses present in the data. Thematic analysis is often conflated with content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). However, it differs from content analysis in that the themes identified in a thematic analysis do not tend to be quantified (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

There are several advantages of employing thematic analysis. One advantage is its flexibility. Researchers can take an inductive (or data-driven) approach or a deductive (theory-driven) approach. Thematic analysis is "essentially independent of theory and epistemology and can be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 78). Another advantage is its ability to "highlight similarities and differences across the data set" (p. 97). Because this study is chiefly concerned with how interviews inform identity work across several animal shelters, it invites thematic analysis as a research technique.

To analyze the data, I employed Baumgartner and Pahl-Wostl's (2013) four steps of data analysis, which is a simplified version of the steps of qualitative data analysis steps outlined by Creswell (2009): (1) transcribing and organizing the data, (2) reading through the data, (3) generating codes and themes, and (4) interpreting the meaning of the themes (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Steps of Qualitative Data Analysis



After transcribing each interview, I began reading the transcriptions and my analytical memos. As I did so, I continued to reflect upon and record my initial reactions to the data. In an iterative process (Tracy, 2020), I switched back and forth between reading the data with the sensitizing concepts in mind and allowing for categories to emerge organically. This coding process gave shape to a list of potential categories that were labeled with a code, some of which used *in vivo* terms. For example, some early codes included: “always been,” felt responsible, and compassionate, of which “always been” was *in vivo* language. After arriving at a category, I engaged in a qualitative process of factoring (Miles et al., 2020), in which I further condensed the data by making a smaller number of categories form a larger number of categories. For example, the codes pained, “huge hearts,” and “heartbroken” were condensed into resilient. This process is in keeping with a form of clustering that happens via the constant comparative method, wherein particular instances are subsumed or clustered into general categories (Miles et al., 2020). Finally, in keeping with qualitative research’s phronetic and interpretive nature, I began making interpretations of the themes. Specifically, I gleaned meaning in comparison to

existing theories and findings on OI and OID research (Creswell, 2009, p. 200). In total, I identified 39 second-level themes (termed codes) that I factored into 10 first-level themes (termed themes).

Themes and Findings

Results of this study are organized around three overarching categories (termed categories) that directly relate to the research question, which asks, "How do non-profit animal shelter staff communicate and understand their identity in relation to the organization's identity?" Essentially, I share how participants examine "Who am I?" "Who is the organization?", and "Who are we?" The first organizing theme presents findings related to staff identities ("Who am I?"). It contains four themes: animal lovers, resilient, responsible, and rescue minded, which were factored from 18 codes. The second organizing theme relates to the animal shelters' identities (who is the organization?). This theme consisted of three themes that describe the various organizations identities as benevolent, compassionate but challenged, and complex. These three themes were factored from 13 codes. Finally, in the last organizing theme, I explored how staff identified with their organization (who are we?). This organizing category consists of three themes, factored from eight codes including: aligned, struggling to align, and misaligned.

Staff Identity

Defining identity as the distinct characteristics of a person (Ashforth et al., 2010), including their beliefs, attitudes, values (Fearon, 1999), I found participants communicated their identity ("Who am I?") in various ways. Their primary self-descriptions, which are represented by four themes, include: animal lovers, resilient, responsible, and rescue minded.

Animal Lovers: "I feel like all of my life is examples."

The primary reason why participants got involved working in animal sheltering was because they had a general love for animals, followed by a desire to spend time with animals. Frequent responses included terms like "I've always been in love with animals," with specific identification of being a "dog lover." Scarlett stressed that she is "absolutely" an animal lover and would "probably say animal advocate, as well." Similarly, Penelope explained her identity as an animal advocate and vegan in the following way:

> The reason I'm vegan is because I love animals, and because of ethical reasons so I feel like that, that sort of touches almost every decision I make or everything I buy or, like, obviously has an effect on a lot of different decisions that I make or a lot of ways that I live my life, but also I'm totally the kind of person who will you know like I feed the birds and I, if I have seen animal when I'm outside I have to squat down and make little kissy noises at it and see if I can get its attention and I'm just always watching for animals and paying attention and, if somebody says their cat got out, I go outside and try to help them find that cat and. So, I don't, I don't know. I feel like I can't, I'm not doing a good job of like giving you examples because I feel like all of my life is examples.

Participant's identities as animal lovers and advocates were well known among their friends, family, and neighbors. Mia explained how she talks about her work "pretty frequently" and how people reach out to her if they have or need information because "they know I'm a big advocate of animal welfare."

Three participant's identities as animal lovers were guided by beliefs that there is a relationship between the treatment of animals and the treatment of people. Accordingly, Isabella stated, "Don't treat animals any differently than you would treat people." Additionally, Liam

applied this sentiment sharing, “The way people treat people is going to be the way we treat animals, most of the time.”

Each participant was asked if they identified as an animal lover, and they all answered “yes” or “yeah.” The only exception to this was one participant, Ella, who made the following careful distinction:

> Admittedly, I am very much a people and animal lover. I post photos of animals because I know that that’s what people like. So, it’s kind of funny to say that because it’s also because I get the happiest responses when I post animals. I’m a strongly viewed person, but I tend to avoid, other things, because I know that people enjoy the animals. But I would say for me, I would say it’s hard because I don't necessarily.

Although an outlier, Ella’s experience demonstrates that people who work in animal sheltering don’t necessarily have to identify as an “animal lover.”

Resilient: “Some days your heart is just fucking broken.”

This theme is characterized by several codes, including pained, “passionate,” “emotional labor,” and “heartbroken.” Notably, “heart” was a common term used among participants. Charlotte used it to explain how staff have “huge hearts.” Several participants held the sentiment that animal sheltering work was “heartbreaking” but not without its own reward. As Amelia explained, despite that her job was “traumatic,” it “was the best.” There was a general sentiment that faced with difficulties, participants rose to the occasion, thus showcasing their resilient spirts. In the following example, Layla negotiates her emotions only to arrive at the conclusion that pain is inevitable and, somehow, she must cope. She sates:

> There’s gonna be euthanasia and there’s going to be painful stuff and I’m going to have to deal with that. And there's tons of joy and happiness that comes with spending time

> with them but there's also going to be some really hard stuff, and I have to be able to handle that, in a way that lets me function daily and still keep going back. Some days your heart is just fucking broken. When you see a dog being walked to that room where it happens. And you just have to move on but sometimes I just loose it. There's nothing you can do.

Ava, similarly, communicated how emotionally difficult animal sheltering work can be to perform and a need to cope.

> There is a lot of hard work and there are hard aspects but like it's, you get pretty like used to the swing of things pretty quickly. I don't want to say you become like desensitized, but you kind of do kind of like you can't fall in love with every single every single animal like it's just not sustainable. And those are the kind of people who are not gonna make it in animal welfare long term like the ones that are you know crying over every single animal that either, you know, has, like, you know, it's euthanized or that they've gone to a new home. Like, crying over that. It's like that, that's a good thing!

However, this commitment toward being "able to handle it" comes at a cost. Evelyn explained how most people she's worked with are "so passionate." As she sees it, the passion and resilient nature are so strong that staff are not "there for the money" but because they have "a strong connection to the mission. They are willing to do whatever it takes to help those animals even put their mental health and sanity at risk, which leads to burnout." This sense of resiliency was also evident in the stories of participants who are best described as being rescued minded, which I describe next.

Rescue Minded: "We Want to Make Sure that the Animal Gets the Best Home for the Animal"

Early into my data collection a pattern emerged of how people distinguished their values and goals regarding animal sheltering. Many of the participants placed emphasis on finding each

animal a perfect home, saving lives, and euthanizing only when an animal is suffering from an irreparable medical or behavioral condition. These values gave shape to the staff as rescue-minded theme.

Of the various goals that participants shared, the most common was a desire to find each animal a "perfect home." Charlotte's main role in her organization was making sure adopter's homes were safe and "what they should be." She was focused on trying to get as many dogs into good homes as possible. Liam, who explicitly stated his goals aligned with the organization's shared how his organization is

> …gonna take as best care as we can of these animals, until you know, we adopt them out, but we want to make sure that the animal gets the best home for the animal. And that, you, if [an adopter's] schedule is very sporadic, or whatever, that [adopters] aren't going home with an animal that might be a little bit more work, because we love that animal. We want to make sure that the animal gets the amount of time and energy and love in a certain way that it needs to be happy and healthy in life.

Layla also identified strongly as someone who is "concerned about animal welfare" and found herself upset with the little to no adoption screening her organization employed. "You could be a total asshole and adopt an animal that same day," she shared.

Rescue minded participants were also focused on saving lives. For instance, to prevent euthanasia, Abigail would like to see her organization expand their program so that animals who are sick and need temporary placement are "able to get out into a home, rather than stay at the shelter." Finally, these rescue-minded participants agreed with euthanizing only when an animal is suffering from an irreparable medical or behavioral condition. For instance, choking back tears, Chloe posits, "Cats with FIV should not be euthanized just because it's costly."

Philosophically, the rescue minded approach is reminiscent of virtue. Another way that participants embodied a recue-minded approach was more utilitarian, whereby their focus was on what they thought would do the most amount of good for the most of amount of people and animals. Participants referred to this as a "people-focused" approach. As such, participants organized each other into two camps of shelter workers: those with a rescue mentality and those who were people focused. The people-focused approach is characterized by lax adoption processes, a concern for simplifying the adoption process for adopters, and euthanizing an animal if it means saving other animals. Within the people focused approach, participants privileged the human in the human and animal interaction of animal sheltering. As Ava explained, "there is no animal welfare without human welfare." This approach is also characterized by participants by as "being open minded with people." According to Ella, who identified as "very people focused," there are "those types of people" who have a "stereotypical quote unquote rescue mentality." Those with a rescue mentality are "less about the community" and focus more on "creating restrictions" during the adoption process "where adopters have to jump through hoops to be good enough." In essence, those who are people-focused give people "the benefit of the doubt" by making adoption processes easier.

Ava's experience is noteworthy because she initially identified as having a rescue-minded approach to shelter work but after volunteering at her organization for a few months she shifted to being people focused. She explained how "when she started" volunteering at the organization, she struggled with the reality that the shelter euthanizes animals, and that the adoption process was lax. As she shared, "something that I didn't have at the start, but I do have now and bring to [animal sheltering work] is just how open minded I am." She then furthered asserted how she is now "very open minded with people." In contrast to the rescue-minded

mentality, she “learned” many things including to believe that “most any home is better than no home,” thus emphasizing her people-focused mentality.

Responsible: “I felt the need to give.”

Another common distinguisher in how the staff identity centered around feeling a need or responsibility to primarily help shelter animals, but also shelter staff. This theme was factored by codes such as “I felt responsible,” “I needed to” and “could make a difference.” This was exemplified by Amelia who, despite having a “really cool” corporate job was motivated to work in animal sheltering because she “didn't feel like I was making the world a better place.” Volunteering allowed her to make a difference. The more she volunteered the more she had “an internal drive to go more often.”

Key to these “I feel responsible” responses is the word “I.” Participants often shared experiences and sentiments of feeling like they were virtually isolated in terms of who else would care about the welfare of the shelter animals, and furthermore, care for them properly. Crestfallen, several participants shared a sentiment of “if not me then who?” Scarlett exemplifies this, “like if I could put, like, 1000 more me’s in [the organization], I would know that animals would be cared for properly.” Sophia, who began animal sheltering work after visiting India and seeing how “the street dogs” were seen as “nuisances,” shared a similar feeling. “I knew I had to save one. This dog would not have a chance otherwise” She reasoned, if not her, then no one.

As Abigail understands it, “there’s something that touches me, and I feel responsibility to respond to that vulnerability.” Similarly, Elizabeth shared how she felt shelter animals “should have people who you know took care of them, even if I guess they couldn't find someone who would take them home, like at least volunteering could help that.” Luna explained that her desire to volunteer is the same regardless of the organization; she is motivated to help the employees.

“My job as a volunteer is to help employees. The employees are there doing that physical and emotional labor all the time,” she explains. She further clarified, “So, in terms of helping, I think of it more as trying to help the staff, than it is trying to help who the organization is helping.”

Finally, two participant’s deep sense of responsibility to help shelter animals moved them to conclude that it was their fault when an animal died. Their identity as being personally responsible for the animals they interacted with was so strong that they blamed themselves when situations arose that negatively impacted the animal’s welfare, despite that the actions were out of their control. Emma recounted the following story:

> I'm pretty sure we killed our first foster cat. Like we didn't really know what we were doing and what to expect. And our first foster was like older, like a super sweet cat but you could just feel like you could feel that he was in pain. And he was like you can't, you could like hold him but not really and eventually ended up biting us. And then we had to bring him back. I wonder if we could have done something different. I don't know if he ever made it out of, like, kitty quarantine jail.

The “kitty quarantine jail” that Emma is referring to is the isolation that cats endure after biting a person to ensure the cat doesn’t have rabies. Like Emma, Penelope shared a similar strong sense of responsibility toward doing the right thing for the animals under her care. Sadly, she too shared a story of how she felt like she killed an animal. After noticing what looked like signs of ringworm on a cat who she bonded with, she alerted the proper staff members. When she returned a week later, she asked her “favorite staff member” about the cat. Penelope explained how this staff member “had to tell me that he was euthanized because he had ringworm, and I started bawling because I was the one who pointed it out.” Although she realized “that if I hadn't seen it somebody else would have, but it just felt like I killed that cat, and it was awful,” she was

so saddened by this story that years later she cried as she retold the story. As the examples in this category illustrate, staff are motivated by a seemingly intrinsic sense of responsibility to help, which is characterized by an "if not me, then who" mentality, and a depth of responsibility so strong that they lived with the belief that they were accountable for an animal's death.

The Organization's Identity

In addition to personal identities, the interviews illustrated several themes that addressed "who is the organization?" to explain the organization's identity. Throughout this category, participants communicated several "central, distinctive and enduring aspects" of their respective organizations (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Participants described their respective organizations in the following ways listed by frequency: as a beneficent life-saving organization, compassionate but challenged by limited resources, and complex.

Beneficent: "Helping" and "Serving"

When asked if they knew the organization's mission, only six participants confidently answered "yes." In part, this might have happened because participants interpreted the question as though I was asking for the mission statement. They thought they needed to supply a word for word mission statement. However, through a follow-up probe, I was able to elicit a response from an additional seven participants regarding their interpretation of the organization's mission. According to these participants, organizational missions were centered around a belief in helping "pets and their people" ($n = 5$), "serving and protecting animals" ($n = 5$) and being "no-kill" ($n = 3$).

What is evident in each of these responses is a focus on helping animals. Avery described her organization and its mission as "dedicated, passionate, their goal is to get them adopted." Furthermore, six participants identified the organization first in terms of whether it was kill/no-

kill, thus indicating the importance of this identifier. For example, Amelia focused on her organization's no-kill identity as she asserted, her organization is "committed to ending the killing of shelter animals."

Compassionate but Challenged: "Slow Moving, Well-intended."

Participants primarily (*n = 15*) ascribed a positive valance to the organizations. Common descriptors included "caring." "compassionate," "passionate," "great," "awesome," "exceptional," "good," "spectacular," "nice," "great," and "flexible." These adjectives are in line with the benevolent, life-saving identity reviewed above. However, observations did arise that pointed to the organization's limitations. There was a common sentiment that these shelters are doing their best but challenged by limited resources and money. Avery specifically addressed retention and financial resources in the following example:

> I just really wish that there was a way to make the job easier on the people that work there, and I really feel like being able to maintain reliable staff like more staff or having the funds to hire more staff. Whatever the issue is, like I just like I feel like if there was more people on board, during the day, it'd be so much easier.

Layla described the organization she worked at in a similar manner, sharing that organization is "slow-moving, well-intended, frustrating, under-funded, under-staffed." Further, Layla hinted at a possible solution to address these challenges explaining,

> There are certain groups of volunteers who clearly have a lot to offer. And have proven they're valuable. [If the organization] would include them, and respect them, there's so much that can be done there. But they [the organization] have to want to do it and sometimes I'm not sure that they do because it's just easier not to.

Given Layla's experience, internal challenges are part of the organization's identity because the organization can't seem to recognize the talent it has. Based on participants' experiences, it is difficult to overcoming these challenges because animal shelters are complex entities with multiple and fragmented identities.

Complex: It's difficult to "Stick to the Mission."

Finally, the participants indicated that animal shelters are complex structures whose multiple identities are obscured and fragmented. In two instances, participants revealed stories of how the organizations' presented image and mission differed from the reality of their daily practices. In Oliver's experience, the animal shelter presented themselves as, "you know, helping animals and helping people in general." A dubious Oliver further shared, "I'm not necessarily 100% sure that their main goal was fully helping animals." At the crux of his uncertainty was what he felt was entirely too much emphasis on the organization's image as evidenced by teams of public relations employees and reliance on volunteers to raise funds. He described the shelter as a "corporate run facility that doesn't necessarily only worry about the animals. I felt it was not what you would think. I think of people who want to help animals, whereas a corporation is there to take money." Oliver's view of what an animal shelter ought to be is troubled by the complex reality that shelters need money, which often comes from savvy public relations strategies.

Luna cautiously shared,

> I like the idea of like, I appreciate the idea of like, a list of strategies that you can give to the shelters to help improve like volunteer experience. I think I'm also cognizant of the fact that there are financial and labor costs related to that.

She is hopeful that any list of recommendations would account for the costs and "labor that goes into [said] recommendations."

In two additional instances, participants shared complications that arose specifically from their organizations' multiple and often conflicting identities. Harper elucidated this as she explained how her organization's "mission statement is different from the mission." Harper's story is an excellent example of how despite the "best intentions," when "there's too many people involved with too many opinions" it's difficult to "stick to the mission." Multiple beliefs and goals produced multiple missions, fragmenting and complicating the organization's identity.

Finally, Scarlett likened animal shelters to group homes. She explained, "I would like compare [the shelter] to maybe some group homes for children. Like, it's, it's a mirror of the bad things in our world, but on a different level." Group homes and animal shelters both fulfill a societal need, however, as Scarlett sees it, they are "negative places." In both cases, the institutions provide the basics of care, but simultaneously denies the "kids" and the "animals" their freedom. "It is horrible either way, because if they're in a shelter they're stuck in a cage, but they're getting fed," she contended.

Organizational Identification

Identifying individual and organizational identities provides an important basis to understand the ways participants were able to identify with the organizations. To fully address the research question, I examined the data for processes of identification, whereby staff identification with an organization is understood as the connection between organizational members and the organization (Larson, 2017), as members and organizations engage in dialogue to "formulate, edit, applaud, and refuse" elements of their respective characteristics (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994, p. 198). My examination revealed the tensions between individual and organizational goals and values that presented both identification barriers and affirmations. In total, three themes emerged that capture participants' experiences communicating who they

are in relation to the organization. In essence, this category reviews findings regarding "who are we?" The three themes are aligned, struggling to align, and misaligned and were factored from eight codes.

Identities Are Aligned: "Yes. Yes, Even Though."

Ten participants felt that their individual values and/or goals were the same as their organizations'. Of these 10 participants, eight explicitly answered "yes" when asked if their individual goals and values regarding animal sheltering were the same as the organizations'. Ella not only responded "yes," she insisted "the shelter set my values. "I, 100%, am the person I am today because of the organization." She explained further, "I always appreciated animals but my values and feelings towards animals *and* people is because of them." She explained how it is important to have aligned values and identify with the organization, explaining that

> You know, the people who have that mentality that every person who surrenders an animal is an awful human being, they just don't last [at her shelter]. And it's not healthy for them to be there, like that's not a healthy place to be. If you can't assume people are good, that is definitely, probably one of the main consistencies I found is that the people that have the hardest time are those types of people.

In the process of identifying with the shelter, she engages in a bit of in-group/out-group dichotomous thinking to solidify her membership as being on the right side of what it takes to "last" in the organization.

Within this theme, two participants answered "yes" with an "even though" declaration, and thus shared how their identities aligned despite the organization's shortcomings and decision to euthanize. Below is Liam's response, which provides a clear example of this "yes, even though" pattern of identification:

> Yes, I do. I think even when, you know, even if the shelter messes up sometimes. I feel like the overarching goals, and emotions and passions and purposes, are the same. And I have not felt that way in other places, in my other job at nonprofits.

Similarly, Noah agreed that his goals and values aligned with that of the animal shelter's "even though they euthanize unplaceable, sick, and behaviorally challenged animals." These stories illustrate how members can and do change their values to align with the organizations'. These stories also show how members bolster their beliefs through transcendence, or rationalizing inconsistencies by focusing on the higher level of good that the shelters are accomplishing. Finally, Liam's and Noah's experiences indicate that members can align with an organization despite the incongruencies in values and goals.

Struggling to Align. "Yes and No."

Seven staff members struggled to fully align their identity to that of the organizations. This theme is characterized by codes such as "yes, but no" and "yes and no." This theme is categorically distinct from the theme above because participants did not answer yes or no; rather they used communication to compartmentalize their thoughts into two bins—a "yes" bin and a "no" bin. This theme captures the struggle that participants engaged in as they internalized the question of whether they agreed with the values and goals communicated and enacted by the organization. For example, Harper explained, "I struggle with some things, so I would say yes and no, and I know I wasn't the only one to feel this way." She then recounted how each time someone called or visited the shelter with a pregnant cat she was instructed to tell them that they "should abort the kittens." This was hard for her to do because in her role as a humane educator she was "in the business of teaching compassion and empathy for all life at a no-kill shelter." Harper explained that "she felt like a hypocrite" each time she had one of the conversations.

However, putting feelings of hypocrisy aside, she also admitted that she admired many aspects of the organization including that, as cageless shelter, they were trying change the ways animals are seen, and change the stigma of animal shelters.

Similarly, Penelope discussed how there was enough of an "overlap" between her values and goals and the organizations values and goals. However, she still wrestled with some of the assumptions she held about animal sheltering organizations. As she explained,

> I guess because it was my first experience, I wasn't really sure what it would be like. I assumed everybody would love animals and I assumed everybody would want the best for them. It made me irritated to know that [the shelter] would serve animal products at their fundraisers. And so, I was like this is an animal shelter, and that does not seem right. It just felt yucky to me, or I was like, this is a, an organization that's all about saving animals and you're serving animals. Like, that's not okay. I don't like it. So that was maybe something that kind of, I guess I had an opinion about and it surprised me when that didn't match up. And I also got frustrated sometimes when so like, like I said they didn't euthanize for time or space. If an animal was adoptable, they brought him in and they committed to finding that animal a home. But they would euthanize for certain medical conditions.

As she explained in a previous example, some of these medical conditions included ringworm.

Ava also answered in a "yes, but no" manner. There were several times during the interview when she vacillated between defining herself in terms of the organization and rejecting major aspects of the organization's daily practices. For instance, when she talks to other people about her work in animal sheltering, she leads with the name of the organization, as opposed to her title ("I work at name of organization" and not "I am an animal care technician"), which

provides support for her identifying with the organization. However, other instances indicate that she ultimately struggles to fully align with the organization. For one, she "sees animals as individuals" whereas the shelter "looks at them like a lump of animals." Ava exists in a space between the two—battling to reaffirm her new identity within her present organization, which euthanizes, and distancing herself from her past identity working for a no-kill organization. At one point in the interview, she referred to her prior organization as "not quite as open minded. They're very, 'let's save every single animal,'" which she seemingly now rationalized was not feasible.

Participants used communication to grapple with whether they supported the organization enough to align with the organization. Emily's experience is a bit different because she hesitated to answer "yes" because as she admits, she strongly disagrees with euthanizing animals and doesn't know enough about the shelter's policy to respond one way or the other.

> You know, I definitely agree with, you know, all of the work that they do. And I think they're doing a really great job with that. My last pair of foster kittens, they were kind of semi-feral when I got them. And I was, you know, that was kind of a good thing for me to see that [the organization] doesn't just kind of like skip over it or you know not concern themselves so much [with cats] that might be feral. Also, I know that they also like, for younger cats in particular, they will ask for foster for cats that just needs to get used to being around people. And I think those are really good things. I strongly disagree with euthanizing animals, and frankly I don't know that much right now about their policies for euthanizing but I ethically for me I think that no kill is the way to go.

Prevalent in this theme was a desire for participants to fully identify with the organization; yet they were not able to rationalize away those parts of the organization that

caused them consternation. These findings indicate for some members a misalignment in various aspects of the organization prevented them from fully aligning.

Identities Are Misaligned: "No."

Five participants explicitly stated their values did not align with their organization's values and goals. Of these five, two participants indicated that their values were higher than the organization's, one participant shared that the organization's values were higher than the participant's individual values, and the final two participants simply answered "no" without any further explanation. All five participants explained that this misalignment was due to matters of animal welfare. Layla, maintained her values were higher than the organization's and shared:

> It makes me sound like an asshole, like I'm better than everybody, which I don't mean. But I am so concerned about animals' welfare and I think people, historically, this continues today they don't understand that like just because they're not humans, that they don't think and feel. And when they're when they're treated like property and objects and just sort of dismissed that drives me crazy.

What is particularly noteworthy about Layla's experience is that she tried desperately to be recognized by her organization.

> The thing that I always think about is why won't [the organization] let me in, like, why? I have so much to offer this organization, but they won't let me in. Because I'm sort of on the other team, this delineation between volunteers and staff. It's such a waste of really valuable talent. And there's so much that can be done, if you would just listen to us. I mean, the volunteers spend hours and hours with, with these animals in a way that the staff can't because they have other shit to do. So, we see things, we notice things, we

have thoughts and ideas because of that time that we spend with them. Great things would happen if you would listen to what we have to say as a result of our experience.

In one breath Layla is elevating her values as higher than that of the organizations, and fully admitting that she does not align herself with them. In the next, she is pleading for entry, recognition, and acceptance. Ultimately, however, Layla cannot attend to the basics of identification, ("Who are we?") because she does not believe that she is a part of the "we." Being denied this identification further denies a sense of safety and affiliation (Pratt & Freeman, 2000, p. 215).

Discussion

This study asked the research question, "How do non-profit animal shelter staff communicate and understand their identity in relation to the organization's identity?" To answer this question, I focused on the ways that animals shelter staff communicate and understand their individual identity in relation to the organization's identity; "Who am I?" matters in relation to "Who is the organization?" and ultimately together "Who are we?". It is through communication and recognition with others that people navigate from "I" to "We." The stories indicate that staff are primarily animal loving individuals with a resilient nature that was tested by compassion fatigue and heartbreak. Furthermore, they possess a desire to primarily help animals but also people, and their community. Participant's desire to help was undoubtably driven by their responsible nature. Organizations were found to be beneficent life-saving organization that are doing their best but challenged by limited resources. These limited resources as well as logistics and personal structures further highlighted the complex nature of these organizations. As participants reflected on who they, as individuals, were together with the organization identification splintered. Some participants resolutely aligned their identity to the organizations.

Other participants were irresolute, reluctant to fully align identities. Finally, a smaller portion of participants firmly rejected an alignment of identities.

I discovered that shelter workers use communication to assert, grapple with, or denounce their identification with the organization's values and goals. In this process of identity work, I found support for four major claims which will be discussed in further detail below. The first two claims make theoretical contributions: (1) organizational identity is communicated via enacted practice, thus supporting CCO research that argues organization happens in communication; (2) shelter staff identify with the animals and animal welfare over identifying with the organizations, emphasizing animals as the prevailing organized entity and the mission of animal welfare. The final two claims offer practical implications for animal sheltering organizations: (3) issues relating to animal welfare is the greatest barrier to organizational identification, and (4) animal shelters need to be more aware of the ways they are sanctioning who can identify with them. These practical contributions highlight the role that organizations have in regulating identities, how individuals resist that regulation and eventual outcomes of these communicative processes.

Theoretical Contributions

The first theoretical contribution is that organizational identity is communicated by enacted practices. When asked about the mission of the organization, something interesting happened. Nearly half of the participants interpreted the question as though I was asking for the mission statement. Not only did this misunderstanding provide support for the possibility that organizational members conflate an organization's mission with its mission statement, but it also allowed me to inadvertently measure the effect of a mission statement on identity formation.

As reviewed earlier, 19 participants admitted they did not know the mission, and several of them offered to "look it up." However, being unaware of the organization's mission statement

did not prevent participants from describing the organization's identity. Nor did it prevent them from identifying with the organization. Charlotte provides support for this conclusion. She contended that she didn't need to know the organization's mission. "I know what the organization is aiming for. And I know my part in it. Like, all I really need to know is that I'm doing the right thing. Then you don't have to know the mission. You're doing it." This indicates that organizational identity within these animal shelters is primarily communicated through discursive practices and interactions rather than through mission statements. The organization of these animal shelters' identities occurred in communication through a shared understanding of an organization's essence. This finding provides theoretical support for CCO research that posits organization happens in communication. Via discursive and enacted practices, staff communicatively structure "who we are" (Nicotera, 2020, p. 3). Staff were aware that a mission statement existed but did not rely on it to understand or give shape to the organization, supporting the premise that communication is not just something that happens within an organization, rather organization happens in communication.

The reality that staff did not know the organization's mission provides support for the second claim in this category: shelter staff identify with the animals and animal welfare over identifying with the organizations. In fact, the primary reason staff members chose to work at their shelter was arbitrary, such as proximity. For 18 of the 25 participants, their guiding motivation to work in animal sheltering was their love for animals, their desire to be among animals, and their need to help shelter animals specifically.

Further supporting this conclusion, most participants ($n = 15$) either struggled to or did not identify with the organization. For example, Charlotte agreed with the organization's no-kill commitment. However, she struggled with a particular situation that made her so upset she

questioned whether to stay or "move on to someplace else." She asked herself, "Well, if I leave, who am I really hurting?" Charlotte absolves her decision to maintain membership in the organization so that she can continue to help the animals. For her, as was the case with many other participants, the commitment and identification was not to the organization per se, it was with the animals within the organization.

Finally, this finding is further evidenced by the sense of individualized responsibility that shelter staff bring to their role within in shelter work. Within this "If not me, then who?" resolve the communication emphasis is not on working with the *organization* but about the *organizing* of the mission of animal welfare. Evelyn exemplified this as she explained the reasons why people work in animal shelters. "We all know that it is because there is a strong connection to the mission, and many workers in the animal welfare setting are willing to do whatever it takes to help animals," she stressed.

This finding shed light on the conflicting research regarding high levels of identification and burnout. Prior research in the educational sector found a person's stronger senses of professional identity lessens their likelihood of experiencing burnout (Chen et al., 2020). In contrast, when applied to animal shelter workers, Schabram and Maitlis (2017) found the opposite to be true. It appears that those in NPOs, such as animal shelters, organize their identity's differently than other nonprofit and for-profit organizations. Thus, future studies of for-profit organizations that are also engaged in animal welfare in comparison to non-profit counterparts could produce significant insight into whether for-profit organizations organize their identities in similar ways as their nonprofit counterparts. Might there be different motivations for organizing? If it is found that there is a difference, future research could compare for profit and nonprofit animal welfare organizations for any possible strategies or differences in

communication they employ to counter detriments to staff's emotional, mental, and physical well-being.

Practical Contributions and Recommendations

Practically, issues relating to animal welfare were the greatest barrier to organizational identification. Misalignment in perspectives on animal welfare between staff and the organization in which they hold/held membership. Staff are not able to attend to the basics of identification, ("Who are we?") because they do not accept that they ("Who am I?) are a part of the "we." In particular, participants had ethical concerns including disagreements over the issue of euthanasia, and that the organization was not vegan. Participants also had moral objections to the level of care shelter animals received, including proper vetting. Previous research has shown that shelters with designated euthanasia rooms that separate living animals from those who are undergoing euthanasia have lower staff turnover rates (Rogelberg et al., 2007). Finally, researchers recommend "the formation of a support group" or interventions for animal care workers to help staff process losing animals and "make meaning out of the losses they experience" (Marton et al., 2020, p. 39–40).

The misalignment in identity due to animal welfare issues also impacted employment. Tracy and Tretheway (2005) found that "employees are asked to work on their very selves as part and parcel of their jobs" (p. 172). According to the findings of this present study, volunteers were asked to work on themselves *before* they are hired as an employee. Three participants started volunteering with their respective organizations to get their foot in the door to gain employment. Each of these participants shared stories of how they felt an almost obvious tension that their individual views on animal welfare prevented them from being employed. Their organizations essentially incited members to enact a particular identity, including accepting that

the organization euthanizes, being open-minded to conversation-based adoptions, and limiting their emotional reactions.

Of these three, the only participant who was eventually employed at their organization was the one who admitted they changed their views on euthanasia and adoption protocols. As Ava explained, it took several interviews and the organization eventually accepting that she was "open-minded" before they hired her. She explained that "in the beginning, I was like, ah no. I don't believe in euthanasia. And they were like, this girl's not going to do well here." It was during her "time as volunteer" that she "started to address a bit more of it." She reasoned, "some animals are just not going to have a high quality of life and it's better to just kind of let them go out with some dignity." She also shared, "I am a very emotional person and you can't be quite as emotional as I am to like be able to do that part of the job." She went on to explain, "So yeah, so that was the kind of the reason why I like I didn't get hired a few times. And then, but then they met me and realized that I was open minded and ended up getting into the people." In this, we see strong discourse of organizational power and control at work and how managing individual identities is important in forming and aligning organizational identity and identification.

In reviewing the question of fit, Tracy and Tretheway (2005) reasoned "if people cannot align their identity with the organization, they should (and often do) leave" (p. 178). This begs two questions. First, is it possible that for some members it is not a matter of "cannot" but that they simply "will not" re-align their identity and values? Taking the stance to not realign their values with an organization's might be particularly problematic for NPOs given that they rely heavily on volunteer membership and a workforce that is motivated by intrinsic desires to help and not by monetary gain (Borzaga & Tortia, 2006; Marton et al., 2020; Weiss & Zawistowski, 2015). People might be more willing to leave a low paying job or volunteer opportunity if there

is a misalignment in how individual and organizational identities fit, making retention via aligned identities all the more important for NPOs.

However, as is the case with any struggle over control, some members resist or rebel against the identities they feel the organization bestows upon them. Communicative discourses make certain identities possible *and* allow for resistance. This was the case for Noah who "always wanted to work" for his organization. He recalled that while he "was interviewing for an adoption counselor position, they mentioned euthanizing was part of the job. Maybe they could register that that wasn't okay with me. So, I wanted to work there but I didn't end up ever working there." He eventually left the organization to pursue another career. Animal sheltering organizations find themselves in a precarious position. They are burdened by issues of high populations of animals entering the shelter, the ethical burden of euthanasia, and subsequent high burn out rates (Kresnye & Shih, 2018), which are tackled by dedicated and passionate people. However, they are not in the position to offer other incentives such as increased pay or promotions to increase retention. What they do have at their disposal, however, is communication. Specifically, they can leverage transparent communication. It serves no goal to mask behind labels like "nearly no-kill" or make concessions for who the organization is. There is little to gain from training staff who will leave once they learn who the organization "really is" as was the case with Oliver, Harper, and others. For instance, if the shelter's goal is on public relations and fundraising, they should leverage communication and be explicit in communicating this identity so that better, longer-lasting alignment is possible. After all, several participants continued to hold membership in their organization despite their lack of full identification with said organization. The data showed one reason they stayed was because they had the support of

like-minded staff members. Participants rationalize incongruences between their identity and the organization through communication to create a space they can live and participate within.

Another way for shelters to increase retention by leveraging communication is to regularly communicate with staff. Through communication, these organizations can become aware of who their staff is to better be able to help them. This study provides a foundational understanding of how staff identify; they are animal lovers who tend to embody and enact a rescue-mentality that centers on a sense of responsibility to find animals their perfect home. Based on this understanding of staff member's individual identity ("Who am I?") shelters can better move forward with identifying strategies to answer, "Who are we?" For example, in communicating with staff, shelters could learn how often staff need a break from the heartbreak they experience. Shelters would be better served if they gave staff the "break" their hearts need. As the findings indicated, staff are committed to the point of being drained emotionally and physically. In at least three cases, participants switched job roles from working directly with shelter animals as caregivers and animal managers because the work was so physically and emotionally grueling. They simply "just couldn't do it any longer" (Avery). To support committed staff and increase retention, shelters should routinely communicate with staff and diversify their job duties. There is no need to strip staff of their emotional commitments to animals. Instead, the organization would be better served to leverage that passion to increase retention.

Afterall, "organizations play a prominent role in both creating identity choices and sanctioning certain identities as more prestigious or desirable" (Larson & Gill, 2017, p. 94). However, the second question that Tracy and Trethewey's (2005) statement begs is what might an organization gain from a member exiting the organization? In other words, why should

disillusioned members be encouraged to leave? Based on the findings of this present study, I also propose that in addition to presenting a desirable identity and protecting themselves (Cheney & Christensen, 2001), NPOs such as animal shelters could be working to protect staff. Based on participant responses, animal shelters are aware that their members are animal loving, compassionate, intrinsically motived, responsible, and rescue-minded individuals. As demonstrated, organizations play a role in allowing their members to identify with the organization and to move from temporary (volunteer) to full-time positions. In their attempts "to 'fix' identities in particular ways that favor some interests over others" (Tracy & Tretheway, 2005, p. 171) organizations might resign that it is better to lose some members and alienate others, as was the case with Layla and Liam. It would thus behoove organizations to recognize the power they hold in granting members identification.

Specifically, organizations would benefit from an internal review of whether and/or how they are purposefully exercising their power to prevent or grant membership. Recognizing this power has the potential to raise awareness—is the organization unwittingly expelling members by not allowing them to move from "I" to "we"?—and prevent turnover that taxes resources. Combining this recognition of power with the earlier recommendation for transparent communication of the organization's identity, has the potential to prevent a misalignment in values that leads to emotional and resource drains.

It is surprising to find that animal shelters, which are NPOs that rely heavily on volunteer involvement and committed employees who are not financially motivated, would regulate identities and identification. These regulatory behaviors might be purpose-driven (as evidenced by the findings that a misalignment in perspective on animal welfare was the single greatest barrier to identification with the organization) or perhaps the organizations are not aware of the

power they hold in initiating some members and alienating others. In summary, those organizations that are interested in retaining staff should (1) recognize the power that their communication has in both initiating and expelling members and (2) reflect on whether they are unwittingly communicatively pushing staff away by sanctioning their identities. Communication can be used to leverage identity formation to increase retention and prevent burnout.

Conclusion

In this study, I examined how animal shelter staff used communication to understand the organization's identity and then organize their individual identity in line with or in opposition to the organization's identity. This examination extends research on organizational identity as communicatively communicated, and theoretical understanding by exploring organizational identification in the contexts of NPOs. I was motivated to conduct this research to offer shelter's practical recommendations that leverage communication to enhance staff experiences. I found that staff used communication as they aligned, struggled to align, or misaligned their identity to that of the organization's. For those participants who grappled with identifying with the organization's identity, it was evident that to fully adopt the organization's mission as their own, they had to be comfortable with issues they initially did not accept (primarily, euthanasia).

This study is subject to some limitations. First, this study occurred over a period of time during which a global pandemic did not allow me to confirm some of my observations through direct observation. However, the results of this study gathered from 25 information rich interviews provided over 300 pages of data from which several meaningful contributions emerged. Second, it is uncertain whether the stories shared by participants in this study represent the stories of shelter staff universally. However, the sampling procedures worked to diversify experiences. Furthermore, the findings of this study provide a base of comparison for future

research into animal shelter staff identity work. Finally, my data collection focused on shelter staff experiences and did not include the stories of community members, such as people who adopted animals or interacted with the shelters in other meaningful ways. In addition to the future research mentioned above, understanding identity and identification within in animal sheltering from the perspective of the community could provide a more holistic account of this phenomena.

Chapter 3

For several months I recorded stories that animal shelter employees and volunteers shared about animals. I listened as people who tirelessly worked to help animals in some capacity shared their experiences interacting with animals—stories that involved people communicating about, with, and for animals. Sometime later, Avery's story stands out amongst the others. Avery shared how a "customer needed to euthanize her dog, but she couldn't be in the room" where the procedure would take place. Avery "sat on the ground with this dog" who she "had just met." Then signaling the importance of names, Avery admitted, "I don't remember the dog's name, but she was a black German Shepherd, and I just sat with her head in my lap and cried and cried while the injection was being readied." Avery had taken the place of the "customer" and lovingly she told the dog, "Your mom loves you very much. It's okay. I love you too."

Avery's story is a beautiful example of multi-species communication. It is also a fascinating case of how humans organize identities in complex and often contradictory ways. For example. Avery refers to the dog's guardian as both a "customer" and "mom" and therefore organizes the dog as both commodity and child. As this example shows, discourse allows for the distinct organizing of human and animal identities. As such, an examination of communication such as Avery's is crucial in discerning the complexity of multi-species communication and helps highlight communication as constitutive.

This study analyzed stories such as Avery's to understand how communication about, with, and for animals within the context of animal sheltering organizes meaning and identities. Specifically, I studied how animal identities were created, reified, and contested through internatural communication. Internatural communication is the study of "the construction of meaning and the constitution of our world through interaction" that occurs through the

"exchange of intentional energy between humans and other animals" (Plec, 2013, p. 6). This study analyzed the outcomes of internatural communication within animal shelters and explored the impacts the discourse has on shelter animals. Animal shelters offered the ideal setting for my analysis because they are a unique domain wherein animals and humans intentionally interact in an organizational setting. Furthermore, as the nearly 350 pages of data produced from this study indicate, there are many stories to be told about animals and humans in animal shelters. Looking at these stores—stories we are told and stories we tell—about shelter animals, their identities and identity work come into focus. Exploring stories from animal shelters allowed me access to a wealth of data concerning the nuance of human and animal interactions in identity creation, maintenance, and resistance.

To investigate, I used qualitative interviewing methods to gather stories from 25 animal shelter employees and volunteers (termed staff for the remainder of this chapter). From these stories, I explored how communication organizes animals through discourse. Discourse has materiality as seen in the numerous examples of how humans quite literally use "physical attempts to order the earth, matter, bodies" (Rogers, 1998, p. 254) to the point that the "Colorado River can be turned off completely" to meet the needs and standards of humans (p. 252). The analysis is grounded in a critical approach that "conceives of organizations as dynamic sites of control and resistance" (Mumby, 2008, p. 1) and "language as a type of power" (Tracy, 2020, p. 53). I examined the language used in staff stories to better understand how discourse has a bearing on animal identity, and the subsequent welfare and treatment of animals, while also identifying practices of power and resistance. These stories tell tales about shelter animals, through which "their contemporary conditions and treatment can be seen more clearly" (Merskin, 2018, p. 26).

Communicative Constitution of Organization and Transhuman Communication

I grounded my analysis in the communicative constitution of organization (CCO) approach as discussed by Nicotera (2020), which posits that it is through communication that meaning is constructed. As such, communication "is the means by which organizations are established, composed, designed, and sustained" (Cooren et al., 2011, p. 2). In addition to being fundamentally communicative, organizing is also a "power-laden process" (Zoller & Ban, 2020, p. 229). Through the lens of CCO, I argue that internatural communication facilitates distinct animal identities. Stories involving internatural communication grant animals' subjectivity as agents in constructing their identities. While these animals do not have control over their fates, they still influence their treatment. It is up to the dominant human group to hear animals and recognize their subjectivity.

CCO is not without its critiques. For instance, Rogers (1998) argues that constitutive approaches to communication "position the natural world as something that is passive and malleable in relation to human beings" (p. 244). He argues that so much emphasis is placed on the organizing forces of communication that it renders the natural world docile. However, he also recognizes the positive impacts that constitutive approaches have had on communication research, for example, exposing essentialist claims regarding constructs and systems of power such as the essential "nature" of women that are used to justify patriarchy (p. 245). Essentially, if the "nature" of a women is socially constructed then an alternative construct of women that defies patriarchy is also possible.

Thus, Rogers (1998) proposes a "transhuman dialogue," which comes from an examination of constitutive theories for whether the communication challenges deterministic and essentialist thinking and includes "nonessentialized, nonhuman voices" (p. 244). A transhuman

dialogue advocates for the "need to incorporate dialog with nature, where nature 'counts' as a participant and not merely object in the construction of both symbolic and material reality" (Schutten & Rogers, 2011, p. 263). Alas, a transhuman approach simultaneously recognizes the need to account for nature as influential in human communication and acknowledges the role of discourse in constituting human social realities. This study answers Rogers' (1998) call, and in doing so it extends research grounded in the CCO approach by looking beyond the human and into the more-than human to account for how nature acts back and upon organizing forces. Thus, in addition to CCO, this study is grounded in the transhuman, materialist theory of communication that "encourages alternative ways of listening to natural entities" (Cooren et al., 2011, p. 262) and animals in particular.

Exploring organizational communication research generally, and this study specifically, via the transhuman approach is crucial to accomplish two objectives. First, this study extends CCO research to encompass non-human elements. Cooren et al. (2011) called for CCO scholarship to be "as inclusive as possible about what we mean by (organizational) communication" (p. 3). In this call they specifically refer to non-human forces. Referencing Latour (2005), they posit, "values, knowledges, or ideologies should not be understood as only carried out by human agents, but also by nonhuman ones, pieces of furniture, and technologies" (pp. 3–4). As such, this study aptly examines animals as an organizing force who create meaning in animal sheltering work.

Secondly, applying a transhuman lens for this study ensures that the CCO approach is pushed to challenge the organizing of nature as submissive and question binaries such as "subject/object" or "social/natural." In naming, we sometimes "create, value, and call for" the "separation and control of the natural world" (Rogers, 1998, p. 248). By considering the "with"

in how staff communicate about, with, and for animals, this study purposefully brings nonhuman agents into the fold of communication studies and accounts for an animal's "broader relevance in order to change ways of reading and writing about as well as living with animals for the better" (McHugh, 2012, p. 31). Afterall, "animals are major actors" who "figure prominently in the thinking and feeling of the people being studied" (Arluke & Sanders, 1996, p. 3). Thus, a transhuman theory provides the natural theoretical underpinnings for this study on how internatural communication occurs, organizes, and inherently situates animals as agents in meaning making processes of identity.

Communication Research on Identity Work Pertaining to Animals

This study contributes to the small handful of communication research that has explored how animals are involved in the process of identity construction. Adams (2013) propositions that animals function as media-agencies that humans use to "speak" to other humans and ultimately communicate aspects of their human identity. For example, Adams shared his observations of how a dog with a John Kerry/John Edwards bumper sticker stuck to its fur served as a "vehicle that transported 'the owner's political message' down alley ways, sidewalks, and other dog-friendly places" (p. 17). Similarly, Jyrinki (2012) found that pets are used to construct their guardians' identities in various ways personally, socially, and emotionally. For instance, Jyrinki found that pet guardians "talked about pets as representations of their owners" and had a "desire to show off pets as status symbols" (p. 117).

While these studies are helpful in developing an understanding of how animals intersect with identity work, neither Adams (2013) nor Jyrinki (2012) included animals as interlocutors or co-creators of meaning. Instead, these studies present animals as vehicles or tools that are used by humans to convey some human agenda—human identities. This present study extends prior

research by exploring the impact that animals, not just as passive containers but as reciprocal meaning makers, have on organizational communication and in organizing communication. With limited research on how animals impact identity work, animals' level of influence on identity work is not yet known. It is important to continue this line of research because how animal shelter staff and animals interact in communication has consequential bearings on how animals are organized. This organizing has implications for the treatment of animals, eventual adoption, and whether animals are euthanized. To best discover how communication organizes, I relied on storytelling as an effective way to identify and understand this organizing.

Importance of Storytelling

Stories give shape to experiences and are highly effective because "all people have the innate ability (and impulse) to narrate their experiences" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019, p. 223). It is important to understand animal shelter staff stories because "it is through such stories that we make sense of the world…it is through such stories that we produce identities" (Lawler, 2002, p. 239). As such, communication discourses enable some identities, reinforce others, but also empower communicators to resist and disrupt. Tracy (2013) explains that through stories, people reveal aspects of themselves as they provide "accounts—or rationales, explanations, and justifications, for their actions and opinions" (p. 132). In addition to sharing information about themselves, people also engage in the ordering of other organizational members, including shelter animals.

Furthermore, from a critical perspective, it is vital to understand stories animal shelter staff retell because staff are often the only community resource for companion animal care. As such, they are visible stakeholders with tremendous power to support or oppose animal sheltering work issues, especially those that impact animal welfare. After all, as Rothfels (2002) posits

> Who controls that representation and to what ends it will be used will be of profound importance in coming years. As arguments over global climate change, disappearing and disfigured frogs, razed rainforests, hunting rights, fishing stocks, and the precedence of human needs continue to build. (p. xi).

Disagreements over euthanasia because of over-population (Winograd, 2009; Kass et al., 2001) and behavioral reasons (Kass et al., 2001) are additional arguments for a better understanding of how communication organizes and represents animal voices.

Therefore, this study analyzed staff stories to understand staff experiences in context and the ways these stories illuminate power in controlling and creating discourses that organize animals. Participants shared numerous stories demonstrating how they recognized shelter animals' agency—stories where they shared how the animals were aware and reacting to their circumstance in emotional ways. I employed a critical paradigm to interrogate social and political structures occurring through internatural communication, which shape and hold power over the lives of individuals (Tracy, 2020) and animals. More specifically, I was interested to discover how depictions of animals, based on interactions with these animals, shape and hold power over the identities of shelter animals. I used critical discourse analysis to assess how staff create, reinforce, or resist inequalities through the words they use as they talk about, with and for animals. Thus, I asked the following research question: how do animal identities emerge from communication? Next, I detail the methodological choices related to this study, present the findings, and discuss these findings by drawing on transhuman, materialist theory and applying a critical approach.

Methodology

To answer the research question, I gathered information via interviews from participants who have personal experience working in animal shelters. This study capitalized on the many advantages of interviewing, including that interviewing is "useful when participants cannot be directly observed" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 188). In some situations, gaining access to observe participants in the field might have been possible; however, interviewing allowed me to collect stories that spanned 15 years from 25 participants across eight U.S. states. It would not have been feasible for me to collect this data in any other way than interviewing. Interviews were also ideal for this study because, unlike online surveys and questionnaires, they allow researchers to engage with participants and "record information (such as a respondent's manner and nonverbal actions) that might be lost" otherwise (Reinard, 2001, p. 238).

Charmaz (2016) shared several concerns critics have of interviewing. Including that "interviewers may lack knowledge of their participants' worlds," that interview "reliance on talk limits or obscures attention to context," and that interviews are "predicated on unearned trust" (p. 44–45). I counter that my role as the researcher refutes each of these critiques. Specifically, my six years of experience as a volunteer for three different animal shelters grant me an "intimate familiarity with the participants' world" (p. 44), including the terminology. Furthermore, given this familiarity, I empathized with the silences between talk that occurred when participants shared stories of "losing" animals. Having also experienced this loss, I knew that silence. Finally, throughout the interviews I leaned on my animal shelter volunteer experience to establish trust and build rapport with participants. By sharing my personal experiences, I was able to contextualize and confirm participants' experiences. In the sections that follow, I share my data

collection procedures, participant demographics and other relevant information, and methods of analysis.

Data Collection Procedures

I recruited twenty-five participants by sharing an invitation to participate (see Appendix B) on several social media platforms, including three private Facebook groups, and one Reddit subreddit forum. Social media recruiting was appropriate for this study because it allowed me to cast a wide net to gather participants across the U.S. from several different shelters, which helped to diversify experiences. I targeted these sites particularly because their members consisted of volunteers and shelter employees working in animal sheltering and operations. Additionally, a copy of the study's recruitment script was shared in an Animal and Society Institute's newsletter and with the researcher's colleagues to increase and further diversify participants.

Eligibility constraints required participants to have recent (within a year), current, and/or extensive (over three years) experience working at an organization that provides animal sheltering. I recruited participants by sending them a message or email outlining the purpose of the study, requesting their voluntary participation, and asking them to respond if they were willing and able to participate. In yet another attempt to diversify and increase the study's pool of participants, I relied on snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a purposeful sampling method that prevents the sample from skewing by diversifying participant experiences (Tracy, 2020). Essentially, the sample "expands in size as the researcher asks study participants to recommend other participants" (Tracy, 2020, p. 86). Through snowball sampling, seven additional participants were recruited from 18 primary participants.

Moderately scheduled interview questions were used to elicit experiences that participants had working with shelter animals. For example, I asked, "Can you please share a

memorable experience working with an animal?" and "How would you describe the community of animals that your organization helps?" Other questions were designed to generate information regarding the welfare of the shelter animals. These included questions such as, "In regard to adoption, does the shelter provide any counseling, education, or screening prior to adoption?" and "What strategies do you and others in your organization use to encourage adoption of the shelter animals?" (See Appendix C for full interview protocol).

Interviews were recorded and ranged from 19 to 93 minutes and lasted an average of 48 minutes. Recordings were transcribed using a high performing, low-cost AI (artificial intelligence) transcriber. Although the quality of this AI transcriber in terms of its ability to transcribe each interview was generally high, there were times when connection issues garbled the conversations. In these cases, I manually transcribed the interviews. This process resulted in 297 pages of single-spaced, typewritten pages of transcribed interviews. I then relied on word-processing programs, including Excel, to organize and sort the data. Transcripts were supplemented with 43 pages of hand-written and typed analytical memos recorded during and after each interview.

Participants

In total, 25 animal shelter employees and volunteers participated in the study. Participants' mean age was 39.3, with a range of 18-69, and a median age of 33.5. Eighty-four percent of the participants were female (n = 21). These figures mirror the underrepresentation of men in animal rescue work. Recent demographic information estimates animal rescue workforces consist of anywhere between 64% (Animal Shelter Worker Demographics, 2021) to 85% women (Roy, 2018). I spoke with 17 volunteers and eight employees. Finally, participants

worked in animal sheltering for a range of four months to 15 years and on average four years and five months.

Employees (n = 8) held roles within their respective shelters such as humane educator, animal care technician, adoption counselor, kennel assistant, and small animal manager. Volunteers (n = 17) worked professionally as event planners, lawyers, case managers for the homeless, professors, veterinary technicians, and in human resources, recruiting, and agritourism. In total, participants shared experiences working at 17 different shelters, from eight states within the U.S. These facilities sheltered dogs, cats, reptiles, and rodents, as well provided care for wildlife animals including birds. Pseudonyms are used throughout this study to protect participants' identity.

Methods of Analysis

I manually coded the data thematically. Qualitative thematic analysis allowed me to engage in "identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Further, grounded by a critical paradigm, critical discourse analysis (CDA) was used to produce insights into how discourses reproduced or resisted inequalities. A core tenet of CDA is the idea that power is established and reinforced through discourse, and as such, discourse is a site of power. Pioneered by Norman Fairclough (2013), CDA emphasizes various "social wrongs," examining the semiotic and material reasons why these social wrongs came to be part of existing social realities. CDA is fruitful for examining interviews because it is used to examine "the social 'story' at play in the investigation" and "why that person is relating that particular tale" (Williamson et al. 2018, p. 469). In essence, CDA allows for the examination of how the social phenomena of animal sheltering is discursively formed. If the goal is to change social realities for the better, then purely normative or moral critiques, while necessary, are not

enough (Sayer, 2003; Fairclough, 2013). Understanding how these social realities came into existence through discourse enables those passionate about animal welfare to make positive changes.

A few scholars have used CDA to explore the welfare and treatment of animals (Freeman, 2009; Milstein, 2013; Stibe, 2001). CDA is ideal for such explorations because it exposes embedded ideologies, which influence the perceptions and action we have for and toward others (Stibe, 2001). Discourses "contain hidden ideological assumptions that make animal oppression seem 'inevitable, natural, and benign'" (Stibe, 2001, p. 158). The social construction of animals both reflects and creates culture. It exists in the "constant interaction and exchange of information in society" (Stibe, 2001, p. 147). These social constructions are reinforced through everyday discourse (Stibe, 2001), they are broadcasted via news stories (Freeman, 2009), and occur in organized spaces such as zoos (Milstein, 2013).

CDA provides a methodology for detecting discourses, which "contain hidden ideological assumptions" that naturalize or normalize behaviors and attitudes (Stibe, 2001, p. 158). Leveraging CDA, this study challenges essentialist thinking while also recognizing that ordering things does not render them passive. Below, I review the findings of my analyses.

Findings

This study focused on the research question: How do animal identities emerge from communication? Coupling thematic analysis with CDA, my analysis resulted in four themes, which exposed two discourses. The four themes are organized as: (1) talk about animals, (2) talk with animals, (3) talk for animals, and (4) animals become through talk about, with, and for. Talk *about* animals dominated the discourse (n = 142). The two discourses are: (1) animals need humans to communicate for them and (2) you can't save every animal. Participants talked *about*

shelter animals in terms of their behavioral traits (*n* = 36), their inherent nature (*n* = 33), their physical traits (*n* = 21), their emotional states (*n* = 19), their level of care (*n* = 19), and their location (*n* = 14). Talk *with* animals followed (*n* = 69) and included instances of nonverbal and verbal exchanges and interactions between shelter staff and animals. Finally, talk *for* animals occurred least frequently (*n* = 16) and was characterized by instances were staff spoke on behalf of shelter animals.

Participants struggled to negotiate how to identify animals (made evident by the contradictory words they used to describe shelter animals). An analysis of these themes exposed several discourses or ways of construing aspects of the world, which concern how identity impact welfare. Participants created, reinforced, and resisted discourse that animals are voiceless, and that some animals are not worth saving. These discourses are explored further in the discussion section of this paper after the findings below.

Talk About: The Descriptions

The first theme involved talk *about* animals which occurred when staff members described animals. As such, talk about was operationalized to include instances when animals were the subject of talk or talk concerning/regarding animals in a descriptive manner. For instance, “the dog is massive.” In this example, the dog, who is the subject of talk, is talked about in an illustrative way. Talk about was characterized by adjectives that described states and traits. Participants described the shelter animals most in terms of their behavior, which were positively valanced (*n* = 21) and negatively valanced (*n* = 15). Positive behavioral descriptions included “sweet,” “friendly,” “loving” and “caring.” For instance, Camila insisted that “all of [the shelter animals] are friendly.” Negative behavioral descriptions included “aggressive,” “jumpy,” and “rude.” For example, Ella shared, “if we [the organization] had a pit bull type dog

who was rude, and so let's say they were very jumpy or very mouthy, we would euthanize." As this example illustrates, negative behavioral descriptions were often coupled with descriptions of whether or not the animal was adoptable, which is included in the second most popular way staff categorically described animals.

Secondly, participants talked about shelter animals in terms of animals' inherent nature, or the root of what animals "are." Participants talked about animals as "family" and/or owned (*n* = 22), being adoptable/unadoptable (*n* = 17), as "intrinsic beings" (*n* = 2), and "not human" (*n* = 1). Emily provided a classic example of how animals were described as family. She stated, "animals are family, and there's no way around that, like, I've always loved my animals as family." Within this second category of how staff talked about animals, I found participants vacillated between essentializing animals along the animal is object construct and recognizing animals as being part of a family. Mia shared a memorable experience working alongside a shelter animal. She explained how divorce couples will often surrender an animal because the "dog owners are too stubborn to let the other one have it. So, nobody gets it. So, then the dog suffers because they won't have a parent." The dog figuratively moves from "it" status to "they" status, from having a parent, to having an owner.

Participants are arguably unaware of their objectifying language. We can see how evident this is in another example. As Ava described the community of animals that her shelter helps, she likened them to existing on "a spectrum of like least to most adoptable." Within this spectrum are what she called the "medium adoptable ones." These medium adoptable animals "always find homes but they're not the ones that are like immediately flying off the shelves." It might not have been her express goal to liken shelter animals to commodified goods that one can take "off the shelf," but none the less, this is what she has metaphorically done.

Evelyn provides a third example of language shifts in talking about animals. Her organization has a "98% live outcome rate," which is impressive given they are an open-intake shelter and "do not have a choice of what animals to take in." Her shelter must take in "an animal no matter what." She explained, "Any animal coming in the door has a live outcome meaning it is returned to its owner, or it is adopted. The animal stays at the shelter no matter what as long as it takes to find a home." Again, we see this pattern of wavering between organizing animals as property and entities deserving of a home.

In addition to being talked about in terms of whether they were family or property, participants also talked about animals as adoptable and unadoptable. Adoptable animals were those animals who were "friendly," healthy, and not shy. Unadoptable animals were also termed "at risk animals" (Liam), and "the animals that aren't ready for adoption" (Ava). According to Chloe, "animals that aren't adoptable usually have been abused or neglected." However, stories of unadoptable animals also included one tale of a kitten who "was too needy and wanted interaction" (Abigail).

Participants admitted that so-called adoptable animals should be provided resources, such as time and attention, over animals they talked about as un-adoptable. Reluctantly, Layla shared, "It's such a terrible thing to say, but realistically, you got to get the animals out of there that you can get out of there." Ella was less reluctant but held a similar sentiment as Layla's. She reasoned:

> If an animal is so stressed that their behavior shows severe fear aggression, I can't imagine being alive with that personality, that type of burden. And so, looking at, you know, mentally, is their quality of life good enough to have a good life? Mentally be able to have a good life?

In this talk about animals, Ella has signaled that some personality types are beyond repair. Alternatively, Aria stated, “I believe that every animal has a chance to be adopted in some capacity, and it just, you have to work with [that animal].” Emily, flat out rejected the term “unadoptable,” explaining that that term was such a horrible way to “condemn an animal.”

Descriptions based on physicality were also common. Animals were “massive,” “skinny,” “beautiful,” and “cuddly.” Abigail referred to the neonate kittens she helped as “so little and so fragile.” Physical descriptors were followed by talk of animals in terms of their emotional states. Animals were described as “scared,” “nervous,” and “confused” in response to or due to “abuse” and “trauma.” Talk about animals in terms of their emotional states was also characterized by whether animals “have emotions.” Layla, described animals in the following way: “just because they’re animals doesn’t mean they can’t think and feel.” Ella’s ordering of animals was less consistent as she wavered between stating it was a “fact that animals have emotions and can communicate” but also that “[animals] don't have the ability to be vindictive and they don't have the ability to have certain emotions that humans have.” In Ella’s description, she orders animals to emphasize that they have feelings but are *still* animals.

Level of care was the next prevalent description pertaining to talk about animals. Within this category, animals were resoundingly described as “needing a second chance,” “needing more time,” being “leftovers,” as “helpless,” or “challenging” due to special needs or behavioral issues. Amelia shared that the animals she encounters are “angels who need a second chance, the leftovers who are close to being killed.” Charlotte described how the animals she interacted with in her organization are transported from states from the southern part of the U.S. that are known for high-kill rates; “animals that are at the end of the row there.” Luna described the community of animals that she interacts with as needing more time. Her shelter “makes an assessment about

what animals are adoptable versus unadoptable… too quickly." Similarly, Aria reasoned that the animals in her shelter need more than the "24 hours" that her shelter gives animals before determining their fate. Often several of these categorical ways of describing animals combined in one statement. For instance, Sophia described shelter animals that she interacted with as having "different personalities. Loving, cuddly, fun, sometimes sick" and need extra care.

Finally, participants ordered animals according to the space and place they occupy in the world, which influenced how participants descriptively organized animals. Descriptors included "wild," "feral," "stray" and "street dogs." In these instances, the organizing of identities through discourse provides sense-making into why specific bodies occupy specific places (Sepúlveda & Plec, 2021). For instance, Camila explained, how her organization sometimes takes in cats that they determine are "feral." They then, "TNR [trap, neuter, return] them, and then let them [go] back to where they were so they know their area." Ordering cat identities as feral further organizes them according to the space and place they should occupy, which, in their best interest, is not in a shelter awaiting adoption or, worse, awaiting euthanasia.

Ordering by space and place was sometimes contextualized and coupled with other descriptions. For instance, according to Sophia, the "street dogs from India" are considered a "nuisance." Furthermore, animals were talked about in terms of deserving a home. Participants primarily asserted each animal has a "perfect home," a few shared the sentiment that "most any home is better than no home," and others admitted that some animals cannot be placed in a home.

Finally, while talking about animals, participants often communicated their identity as an animal lover. Specifically, they shared stories of how they demonstrated their love for animals by talking about animals on various social media platforms including TikTok, Facebook, and

Instagram. Participants explained how they regularly posted pictures of shelter animals that were available for adoption and included a short bio describing the animal. In these cases, participants used talk about animals to manage their individual identities as animal lovers via impression management. Under the principles of impression management, people go about trying to project a positive image of themselves, and others (Gass & Seiter, 2011).

In summary, in talking about animals, participants described them in terms of their behaviors, inherent nature, physicality, emotional states, level of care, and location. As participants talked about animals, participants engaged in contradictory organizing of animals, including as property and a family member or unadoptable and adoptable. Additionally, participants ordered animals by the space and place they occupy in the physical world. Finally, talking about animals was one way that participants enact their love for animals and used that talk as impression management to be seen as an animal lover.

Talk With: Animal Talk

There were numerous instances of participants sharing stories of shelter animals wherein both the participants and animals used nonverbal and verbal communication to communicate *with* each other. As such, both of these modes of communication provide the framework for how talk with was operationalized and thus sorted in this study. However, before I discuss how individuals talk with animals, it is necessary to share some information on animals' agency. I found that through verbal and nonverbal communication, animals often impacted the depictions of themselves. Whether these shelter animals (and animals more generally) are operating from some basic instinct or whether they are responding because they are conscious of their agency is a contentious topic. According to primatologist and ethologist Frans de Waal (2016), "self

agency[1] is part of every action that an animal—any animal—undertakes" (p. 241). Supporting this claim is an abundance of research demonstrating how dogs, apes, dolphins, parrots, and other animals possess self-awareness, metacognition[2], and theory of mind[3] (DeMello, 2012; Waal, 2016). For instance, chimpanzees react to being deceived, which requires them to have theory of mind (Plooij, 2000). Finally, there is an argument backed by research that dogs and cats "have a sense of self" because they are able to "empathize," and "understand and react to the needs of the human partner" to "take on the role of the other—a key component of selfhood" (DeMello, 2012, p. 372).

Considering both human and animal agency, classic elements of nonverbal communication were evident in facial expressions (such as dogs smiling at humans and humans smiling at dogs), gestures/body language (wagging tails, jumping up to "say hi"), proxemics (humans and animals sitting near, moving toward each other), haptics (humans cuddling animals, animals spooning humans) and chronemics (how staff used and responded to time pressures). Furthermore, the transmission model of communication and the interaction model of communication offer an additional guide for how the data within this theme were organized.

The transmission model provides an understanding of communication as a linear process and emphasizes *action* or "the transmission of a message from a source to a receiver" (Baran, 2012, p. 4). Within this model, communication is merely transferred to a recipient. Alternatively, the interaction model is "a process in which two parties intermingle" that focuses on communication as a collaborative and reciprocal process (Sepúlveda, 2020, p. 4). Applying these two communication modes and two models, I sorted the data understanding that talk *with*

[1] Agency is described as "awareness that [an animal] controls its own actions" (Waal, 2016, p. 240)
[2] Metacognition refers to the ability "of an animal to think about its own thoughts" (DeMello, 2012, p. 371)
[3] Theory of mind refers to "the ability to attribute mental states to others, such as knowledge, intentions, and beliefs" (Waal, 2016, p. 322).

included those interactions wherein animals were talked to (transmission model); however, communication with animals also occurred when humans and animals engaged in meaningful exchanges (interaction model). Accordingly, communication, as it is examined in this study, accounts for the human and nonhuman, the verbal and nonverbal, and the mere transmission of a message as well as reciprocal meaning making.

Nonverbal Communication

Time, space, and touch factored heavily in communication with animals, particularly as elements of nonverbal communication (chronemics, proxemics, and haptics, respectively). Time, in particular, was also used to order or organize which animals should be prioritized to receive shelter resources. These occurrences embody the transmission model of communication, as the animals are talked to; some animals were "told" they deserved time, some were "told" they did not. For example, some animals were told they were valuable, and time was used to communicate that love and care. Participants spoke of spending "extra time with" the animals (Avery), of maximizing their "time to give as much joy to the animal as possible" (Oliver), and of giving "an hour of time in the pen to just run around a *be a dog* for a little bit" (Scarlett).

Alternatively, some animals were also told they were not valued. Ella thought that some animals should be spared time in favor of euthanasia. She contended, when faced with:

> The choice to keep this one dog who is going to take two months to find a home, or you could house 20 animals in that time. I absolutely do feel that you should look at whether or not euthanasia is the option for that one dog.

William expressed a similar concern about how time should be used and argued, "there's a right way to spend that time."

The interactive model of communication was also evident in nonverbal communication with animals. For instance, Layla "smiles at dogs" she encounters during her walks outside who have communicated they want "to say 'hi.'" Some instances of nonverbal communication included an overlap of nonverbal communication. Penelope exemplified this in the following example.

> If it seemed like there was a kitty that was really nervous or scared, I brought them into the socializing room, and they started to warm up to me and like me and sat on my lap. I would sit there with them for a half an hour and just let them sleep in my lap.

In this example, both Penelope and the animals rely on nonverbal communication (including proxemics, haptics, and chronemics to communicate with each other a willingness to build, earn, and accept trust based on mutual "like."

Instances of chronemic communication was also evidenced by how staff used and responded to time pressures. Overwhelmingly, participants communicated their use of by time by engaging in purposeful exchanges with animals. As Oliver explained, "figuring out what that specific dog wanted to play with the most, building up that friendship with certain ones" was important to him. So that "I saw them, they saw me. There was an excitement for both of us. And I had an understanding of, you know, 'hey this one wants to play tug of war.'" According to the staff interviewed, not only did they think time should be taken with animals to learn their unique preferences but, as Avery offered, "learning the dogs personalities" was a way to "help them." In addition to nonverbal communication, multi-species communication also included verbal communication.

Verbal Communication

Verbal communication was evident when staff audibly read aloud to the animals, made "kissy noises," and spoke directly to the animals. Verbally talking with animals was a common way that participants expressed their identity as animal lovers, which occurred via the transmission model of communication. For example, Penelope explained her love for animals in the following way: "if I see an animal when I'm outside, I have to squat down and make little kissy noises at animals to get their attention." In a second example of how participants verbally communicated with animals, participants described merely transmitting a message. For instance, Scarlett shared how she vocally apologizes to euthanized animals. "I pet their head, and I say, 'I'm sorry sweetie,' or 'I'm so sorry honey.'

As was the case with nonverbal communication, participants also described interacting with animals in a reciprocal fashion, which is illustrative of the interactive model of communication. For example, Avery emotionally revealed that she has "sat many a time in many a surrendered dog's kennel with them and cried with them." Avery's statement includes nonverbal communication of proxemics but is made more nuanced by the addition of verbal utterances (cries) by both her and the animals as they communicate sorrow to each other. Similarly, Emily shared that she enacts her identity as an animal lover partly through "talking with a tone of voice, a soft or warm tone of voice, and auditory interactions with them."

Shelter animals also verbally expressed themselves to shelter staff and other shelter animals. Animals barked, meowed, hissed, and growled. Stories of growling animals were contextualized by the situation. For instance, Scarlett shared the story of Eva, a dog who was in a shelter environment that Scarlett described as "very negative." Eva "was in a cage, aggressive.

She shredded her newspaper, growled, barked." According to Scarlett, Eva wasn't simply barking. She was communicating in response to her situation.

Another interesting finding that emerged in terms of communication with animals was not necessarily communication with animals but instead a critique that not enough time was spent interacting with (talking with) animals. Finally, in communicating with animals, participants communicated their love for animals. Layla expressed this desire to communicate with animals: "I would much rather spend time with animals. I am just naturally drawn to them. You know, if I see someone walking down the street, I don't make eye contact with the person, I go right for the animal."

In summary, there were numerous instances when participants shared stories wherein a notable pattern emerged of shelter staff and shelter animals us verbal and nonverbal communication to communicate with each other, both as a transmitted message and an interactive message. Additionally, I found participants expressed their identity as animal lovers by communicating *with* animals. I move next to how participants talked for animals.

Transmission transaction

Talk For: The Because

In addition to talking about and with, participants talked *for* animals. This category of internatural communication was characterized by participant's inclination to make interpretations (based on "talk" that occurred between the shelter animal and staff member) of shelter animal's verbal and nonverbal communication and then speak on the animal's behalf. Participants were motivated to talk for an animal to contextualize the animal's verbal and nonverbal communication. For example, Emma shared a story of a cat she was fostering. "This cat, which was such a diva, and would sit on your neck and it was obviously going to be a lap cat. It was

like, ‘I need rose gold and gold glitter balls and my own castle’” she amused. Evident in this example is how Emma, after interpreting the cat’s nonverbal communication (which included proxemics and haptics), spoke as a translator on behalf of the cat and the cat’s need for the finer things in life. *Because* of what the cat suggested in her nonverbal communication, Emma was motivated to decipher a supposition from the perspective of the cat.

Oliver provided another example of how staff interpreted interactions with animals, and in doing so, communicated for animals. He explained that the trails where he walked the shelter dogs would crisscross. When the dogs saw one another, “one would be barking at the other one. It was like, ‘hey, I want to play’ or ‘I want to come with.’” Oliver offered a translation of what the dogs were “saying” based on a *because* logic, which offered meaning to the situation. *Because* the dogs saw each other they barked, meant the dogs were playful/wanted to play.

Participants also relied on past interactions with animals to speak on the animal’s behalf, particularly to potential adopters. Isabella exemplified this: “I love telling like potential adopters those things, you know like, yeah, this dog likes maybe tennis balls, or how this cat there’s a sweet spot behind his ear.” Similarly, “learning” an animal’s personality, as detailed above, allows participants to communicate the animal’s needs to potential adopters. Avery explained, “If I noticed that this cat keeps tripping over his water bowl, I can make sure that the people that apply for this cat get a ceramic bowl for the cat so that they’re not frustrated.”

In summary, participants were motivated by (1) a desire to talk for an animal to contextualize the animal’s verbal and nonverbal communication and (2) based on previous exchanges with animals to speak on the animal’s behalf. In addition to verbal and nonverbal communication, multi-species communication was transmitted and interactive. In the fourth and

final theme, I examine the systematic way that participants combined communication about, with, and for animals.

Talking About → To Talking With → To Talking For: Animals Become Through Communication

This fourth and final theme captures the emergent pattern of how participants combined talk about, talk with, and talk for animals. I found that during a systematic combination of internatural communication, participants played a role in empathetically interpreting communication about, with, and for animals, so that they organized and assigned a meaning of who the animal "really is." Additionally, this theme captures the nuance of how participants communicated for animals. While talking for animals happened less frequently than talk about and with animals, the communication pattern occurred in a systematic manner.

Participant's stories often began with them talking about animals, which then progressed into them talking with animals, and then to them talking for animals. This happened in the span of a few sentences, but also in the span of just one sentence. For instance, Avery explained, "Troubled dogs or dogs that need work, the dogs that as soon as you let them out, they're trying to bite at your face, they don't know what gentle means."

In the first part of the sentence, "Troubled dogs or dogs that need work," Avery is describing dogs, and in doing so is talking about animals. The mid part of the sentence, "the dogs that as soon as you let them out, they're trying to bite at your face," contains an example of how the dog communicates back in response to the situation. Finally, in the last portion of the sentence, "they don't know what gentle means," we see how Avery makes an interpretation of what the dogs are communicating. In this, and other similar examples, the participants construe meaning from their interpretations of the animal's behaviors as support for their initial

observation. Accordingly, the dog tried to bite a face *because* they don't know the meaning of gentle.

Looking for the "because" allows humans to empathize and in doing so speak for the animal. For instance, an animal wasn't merely "scared" (talk about). They were "cowering in the corner of a cage" (animal talking with), because they were reacting to a "loud, foreign place" (talk on behalf). Participant's stories, such as these, illustrate how often animals are not passive. Animals were not merely occupying a space. In telling animals' stories, participants give voice to animals. Not because animals are voiceless, but because multi-species communication (and communication generally) requires translation (interpretation), which takes time and effort.

Story after story, participants spoke of how an animal's true nature was made possible through the communication of love. Communication constructs identities and enables shelter animals to become who they "really are." As Chloe explained, animals "just need more love to come around." This sentiment was also expressed by Aria who insisted that the animals at her shelter are well cared for.

> Our staff and volunteers, they do a really great job of giving extra love like I had mentioned…But just *that extra love and compassion that the volunteers gave I think really rubs off, if you will, on the dogs. They feel* it. Yeah, they definitely feel, I mean just to see the transformation for when a dog comes into the shelter, whether it's a stray whether it's a surrender. And then even a week later, how much they've blossomed into *who they, who the dog really is*. I mean there was one dog, a few weeks ago, no one could even get him out of his kennel, and I went in there and he took to me really well and I got him out of his kennel, and we were running around outside the yard together, and he was wagging his tail, and then he was a completely different dog after that.

In communicating love this dog "blossomed" into "who the dog really is."

As these examples illustrate, communication has the power to order identities. Looking for the "because" and "true nature" of the animal allows humans to empathize and in doing so speak for the animal. However, in the process of ordering, participants reify common truisms about who is the ideal shelter animal. These ideals are in-line with the adoptable animal identity. As such, shelter animals need to meet the ideal construction – particularly through becoming who they "really are" – to become adoptable. However, this becomes problematic for the animal when shelters deny the animal time and resources to become that version of the ideal construction. I further discuss this finding, and the findings reviewed in the previous three themes next.

Discussion

In this study, I asked, how do animal identities emerge from communication? I found that shelter staff constructed meaning via talk about, with, and for shelter animals throughout the stories they shared working with shelter animals. It is through these stories that people revealed aspects of themselves as they rationalize, explain, and justify their actions, attitudes, and beliefs (Tracy, 2013, p. 132). Findings demonstrated that participants organized animal identities often in conflicting ways. For example, animals are family/animals are owned, there is a perfect home for every animal/any home is better than no home, and animals have emotions/animals aren't self-aware. These identities gave shape to a discourse that not all animals can and should be saved. Finally, I found that as participants systematically combined talk about, with, and for animals that they took on the role of empathetically interpreting this communication, so that they organized and assigned a meaning of who the animal "really is."

In a further discussion of these findings, presented below, I explore the resulting discourses regarding shelter animals that are created, maintain, and challenged. Specifically, the two discourses that surfaced are: (1) animals need humans to communicate for them and (2) you can't save every animal. The ensuing findings discussion is filtered by an understanding that communication is a social practice, through which power is exercised (Fairclough, 2013). As such, discourses emerging from how staff reproduce or resist inequalities through internatural communication are situated and discussed around how communication organizes the identities and the subsequent treatment of shelter animals.

Animals Need Humans to Speak for Them

In talking *about* and *with* animals, participants also simultaneously talk *for* animals. Based on the data collected, participants step into the role of translator to protect an animal's identity. These efforts to communicate are based on a desire for shared understanding. "Communication is a concept looser and less material than language or speech, one that lends itself to strange catholicities of blurring" (Peters, 1999, p. 243). What these stories show is that communication does not rely on a shared language. Instead, it is based on a desire for empathetic understanding. As such, communication with other animals is interpretive and "understanding comes as much from a lived or embodied world of common practices" as it does "from symbol-manipulating capacities" (Peters, 1999, p. 244).

However, efforts to communicate about, with and for animals begs the question, do these animals require a translator for their identities to emerge? Or read more critically, are participants placing themselves in the role of translator so that they can protect and control animal identity and to what ends? In the process of translating for animals, participants sometimes reinforce harmful discourses, such as which animals are adoptable, which are not

adoptable, which should be saved, and which should not be saved. This conflict gives way to a tension, whereby participant's altruistic motivations for speaking about, with, and for animals are sullied by a propensity to reify negative truisms about animals.

The interpretations that staff make are important because it is through communication (of love) that participants realize whether animals can become the ideal companion. As the example above illustrates, the dog's transformation was based on the ideal image that Aria and other participants have of shelter animals. Participant's actions, however altruistic, might be maintaining the common thinking that animals are voiceless. In fact, this is a common mantra for several animal welfare organizations. This rhetoric becomes problematic because it places humans in the role of speaking for animals, thus impacting animals in negative ways (Rothfels, 2002). Of all the transformation stories that participants shared about rehabilitating "unadoptable" animals, only one transformation was deemed unsuccessful. These odds are seemingly favorable and provide support for the power of communication of love. However, the reality is an animal was deemed unworthy of more time, resources, and a home.

Creating, Maintaining, and Resisting the "You Can't Save Them All" Discourse

In participants' quest to construct meaning as they interact with shelter animals, some participants reinforce the idea that animals are objects, have characteristics that make a human-animal bond impossible, and do not possess self-awareness. Each of these views were used to rationalize why some animals are unadoptable and form the basis of the "you can't save them all" discourse.

Animal identities were formed in congruence with existing societal tendencies toward objectification, whereby animals (living beings) are viewed as objects (Adams, 2016). Participants reified objectification by referring to animals as property. Findings revealed

numerous instances of participants using language such as “owner” to denote property status upon shelter animals. In some instances, participants wavered between referring to animals as part of the family and as property that were “flying off the shelf.” These instances are reminiscent of strategized subordination. According to Deetz (1998), “Strategized subordination happens as members actively subordinate themselves to obtain money, security, meaning, or identity” (p. 164). Participants discursively policed their own attempts to resist an “animals as owned” frame. This delineation between animals as owned and animals as family members works to organize or categorize animals as objects. Further, this language liberates humans from a sense of ethical responsibility toward, reassuring humans that “companion” animals are still animals, and animals are still “owned.” This is exemplified in following statement made by Ella: “Animals have emotions and can communicate, but they are still an animal. They are not human. They don’t have the ability to be vindictive and they don’t have the ability to have certain emotions that humans have.”

Participants also created and upheld the idea that some animals lack the ideal characteristics to form a human-animal bond. Findings showed how the adoptable animal was low-cost, low maintenance, not shy, nor aggressive. The unadoptable animal, also termed “at risk animals” (Liam), and “the animals that aren’t ready for adoption” (Ava) were the inverse of adoptable animals. Unadoptable animals were mouthy, shy, required more time to address behavioral issues, sick, jumpy, and rude. This dichotomous organizing of identities perpetuates the unadoptable animal identity that forms the basis of the “you can’t save them all” discourse.

Within this “you can’t save them all” organizing, participant’s rationalized that behavior concerns or shortcomings and medical issues were acceptable reasons for euthanizing animals. Staff reinforced the ideology that animals must measure up to some invisible truth of what is an

adoptable animal. As Mia reasoned, "*if* an animal that comes in and they're adoptable, they're going to be there until they're adopted." There is so much power in that "if"—if the animal aligns with the adoptable identity as constructed and controlled by the dominate parties their life is spared. The implication of this findings is that if it is through communication of love that animals become, sadly some animals are not given the time to become (as expressed by Aria and Luna). Accepting the "can't save them all" discourse has become a way of life for several participants, the outcomes of which are detrimental to shelter animals. After all, a way of life for staff, means the end of life for some shelter animals.

In addition to creating the identities that some animals are property, and some animals are unadoptable, findings also demonstrate how participants engage in denying animals self-awareness and theory of mind. Not only does this contradict research (DeMello, 2012; & Waal, 2016), it reinforces inequalities. In the story that Avery shared earlier about animals not knowing any better, she simultaneously acknowledged shelter animals as interlocuters *and* denies them self-awareness. Ella's earlier story about animals that are "so stressed that their behavior shows sever fear aggression," is another example of this discursive work. By stressing that she couldn't be "alive with that personality, that type of burden," Ella is empathizing with the animal (a pattern found in communicating with, about, and for animals) and also signaling that mental illness is a barrier to a quality life. If she had a similar "personality" as the dogs, she couldn't image being alive. She signals that some personality types are beyond repair. She is perpetuating the unadoptable animal identity and giving credence to the you can't save them all discourse.

Competing identity constructions of adoptable/unadoptable, family member/property, and self-aware/unknowing serve as powerful discourse that ultimately reinforces specific material consequences. In maintaining the animal is unadoptable, an object, and lacks theory of mind

constructions, staff stop short of fully acknowledging the reality that animals are living and feeling beings. Reducing animals to an object status allows participants to rationalize the dissonance caused by their conflicting beliefs and attitudes, especially regarding euthanasia. After all, objects "do not speak, objects do not feel, and objects have no needs. Objects exist only to serve the needs of others" (Kheel, 1993, p. 260).

These discourses illustrate how humans do not merely classify animals in a cognitive world; they physically place animals in a physical world. Both these organizing processes, made material by communication, hold power over the lives of shelter animals. As a micro-practice, words hold power to reproduce dominance. They also provide opportunities to resist taken-for granted understandings of the world, so that new identities of animals can emerge. For example, empathizing while communicating about, with, and for animals can enhance a desire to foster a shared meaning to help animals, regardless of the animals' situation or disposition. Individuals, particularly those working directly with animals, could benefit themselves and animals by checking themselves to be aware of whether they are reifying harmful discourses.

The language participants used reified power structures that put humans above animals and ordered animals in a hierarchy of desirability; however, some participants also pushed back against what they saw as a fundamental falsehood that some animals are unadoptable. Participants continually resisted the belief that "nothing can be done" for so-called unadoptable animals and insisted that there is a home for every animal. One participant, Isabella, went so far as to admit, "What I learned from my experience is that every animal is adoptable," implying that she had to unlearn the dominate discourse that some animals are unadoptable. Harper agreed, and argued, "a friendly healthy kitten doesn't need the resources that a cat with FIV does. [The organization] should be spending their time and resources and expertise finding the

“unadoptables” homes. Participants even resisted the idea that illness should prevent adoption, and ultimately lead to euthanasia. Emily suggested foster hospice as a way to challenge the discourse that not all animals can be saved. She explained, “if [the animal] is very old and they’re not well enough to live in a house, that doesn't mean they're not adoptable because there are places for them, and people to make sure they’re as healthy” as possible.

In summary, a critical discourse analysis of the findings revealed several competing ways of construing animals, which capture the tensions between power and resistance (Mumby, 2008). These tensions emerge from the internatural communication—expressed by meaningful interactions between shelter animals and staff—in which identities are formed. The belief that certain animals are not worthy of life competes with the sentiment that all animals are worthy of love and time. The belief that animals are family competes with the animals as being commoditized and owned. These discourses then have a direct impact on the lives of shelter animals. Notably, whether animals align with the adoptable animal identity (not shy, not aggressive, low-cost, low maintenance) determines whether they are given time, whether they are communicated with and for, and whether they live.

Implications

Considering the findings and discussion, this study offers several theoretical and practical implications. First, this study extends organizational CCO research on identity and identification by considering how animals impact identity work. Similar to the contributions of Kopaneva (2019), this study’s contribution is partly heuristic as it explored “how multiple actors co-construct organizational system of meaning” (p. 141). A second theoretical contribution provides support for internatural communication. I found staff communicate about, with, and for animals in a systematic manner and through that communication staff indicate that animals can become

their “true selves.” This finding provides a basis for a theoretical understanding of how internatural communication in animal sheltering occurs. Finally, this study provides a practical synthesis of shelter animal identities and the resulting discourses that confirm, or resist these identities, which prove helpful for those interested in challenging multi-species communication for the betterment of animals.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study is subject to some limitations. First, this study occurred during a global pandemic that prevented me from confirming some of my observations via fieldwork. Unfortunately, I was not able to witness participants as they communicated directly with animals. However, the results of this study gathered from 25 information rich interviews captured 15 years of exchanges between humans and animals. Feasibly speaking, I could not capture this wealth of data through fieldwork. Admittedly, the findings of this study would be enhanced by observations, which opens the door for future research. The “deliberate combined use of multiple approaches” might “permit greater appreciation for the multifaceted and interconnected ways in which identities are worked on and identification enacted, and this may have the potential to encourage more broad-ranging theorizing and richer empirical research” (Brown, 2017, p. 300). Second, it is uncertain whether the stories shared by participants in this study represent the stories of shelter staff universally. The sampling procedures worked to diversify experiences. However, exploring a greater number of employee and volunteer experiences from underrepresented areas of the U.S., specifically southern states that have high “kill” rates, could provide a richer and more contextualized understanding of identity work and answer whether identity work is regional impacted. Furthermore, the findings of this study provide a base of comparison for future research into how animals impact identity work. Finally,

my data collection focused on shelter staff stories of communication about, with, and for animals and did not include the stories of community members, such as people who adopted animals or interacted with the shelters in other meaningful ways. This presents yet another opportunity for future research, wherein questions such as, “How do staff, community members, and shelter animals co-construct meaning,” could extend understanding of how communication shapes identity and understanding of animals. In addition to the future research that incorporates fieldwork, exploring how community members engage in internatural communication with shelter animals could provide a more holistic account of this phenomena.

Conclusion

In this study, I explored how animal identities emerge from communication. This study explored how in communication (1) about, (2) with, (3) for, and (4) through a combination of communication, about, with, and for that animal identities were created, reified, and contested through internatural communication. I examined the language used in staff stories to better understand how discourse has a bearing on animal identity, and subsequent welfare and treatment and identify practices of power and resistance. In found that participant’s quest to co-construct meaning with shelter animals that some participants reinforce the ideas that animals are objects, they have characteristics that make a human-animal bound impossible, and they do not possess self-awareness. These ideas shape and enforce the discourses that (1) animals need humans to communicate for them and (2) you can’t save every animal.

Organizing is a fundamentally communicative and powerful process. Animals do not have direct control over their fates. Empathetic humans need to not only hear animals, but they also need to recognize animals’ subjectivity “to change ways of reading and writing about as well as living with animals for the better” (McHugh, 2012, p. 31). Understanding how these

social realities came into existence through discourse enables those passionate about animal welfare to make positive changes. Competing identity constructions of adoptable/unadoptable, family member/property, and self-aware/unknowing serve to reify powerful discourses that ultimately reinforces specific material consequences and offer participant's a rationalization for why some animals are unadoptable, which leads to them being euthanized. Finally, participants also resisted the myth of the unadoptable animal by insisting that specific shelters have specific resources to help so-called unadoptable animals. Furthermore, participants insisted that there is a home for every animal. Resisting the dominate discourse that some animals cannot be saved gives the most vulnerable of animals a fighting chance against euthanasia.

Chapter 4

Referencing Nietzsche, Rogers (1998) posited there is a "fundamental falsehood that the world is characterized as *being* instead of *becoming*" (p. 251). Through communication—words that express attitudes—the world is in a perpetual state of becoming. This dissertation communicatively explored how discourse is fundamental in how humans perceive individual, organizational, and animal identities. Considering the power of discourse, this dissertation was grounded in the communicative constitution of organization (CCO) approach that argues that organizations are communicatively constituted (Cooren et al., 2011; Nicotera, 2020). Per the CCO, communication organizes in three ways, which are represented symbolically as O_1, *organizing*, O_2 *organized*, and O_3 *organizations* (Nicotera, 2020). O_1, *organizing*, is the process or the *coordinating*/*ordering* of a social collective. O_1 foregrounds agency, for example how group members engage in decision making. Secondly, O_2, *organized*, is the structure of a social collective's arrangement, order, or formation. Finally, O_3, *organization*, represent the "entitative being" of "coordinated/ordered entities" that arise from O_1, organizing and O_2 being organized (Nicotera, 2020, p. 7). In addition to exploring CCO, this project addressed Cooren et al. (2011) call to examine organizing beyond human factors by incorporating internatural communication. Internatural communication includes "the exchange of intentional energy between humans and other animals as well as communication among animals and other forms of life" (Plec, 2013, p. 6).

Relating CCO and internatural communication to research in this dissertation provided support for how communication is not only central to animal shelter organizations (O_3), but the organizing of shelter animals (O_1) and perceptions of animal identity as an organized state (O_2). As staff organized animals through communication about, with, and for animals, that

communication gave shape to processes of individual, organizational, and animal identity and identification.

Organizing Of Shelters, Staff, And Animals

In the section below, I review the organizing of shelters, staff, and animals, focusing on the CCO approach and O_1, *organizing*, O_2 *organized*, and O_3 *organizations*.

Organizing Shelters

Communication plays a significant role in the creation of animal sheltering as organizations (O_3) that are organized (O_2) through discourse usually in terms of whether they are "kill" or "no-kill," with many animal shelters moving toward adopting the "no-kill" credo (O_1). The movement toward "no-kill" originated nearly 150 years ago and yet, competing discourses regarding that movement continue to organize meanings. Examining the history of animal sheltering (Chapter One) provided an important basis to explore current discourses of staff working at animal shelters. From Bergh challenging the common practice of rounding up and drowning or shooting cats and dogs, to Phyliss Wright's promoting "acceptable pretexts for killing animals" (Winograd, 2009, p. 21), to today's movements toward a "no-kill" nation, sheltering has always been a site of control and resistance.

Organizing Identities

The first study of this project (Chapter Two) sought to answer the following research question: "How do non-profit animal shelter staff communicate and understand their identity in relation to the organization's identity?" What emerged from an analysis of the data was a complex formation of characteristics that participants generally embodied. Staff organized themselves primarily as animal loving individuals with a resilient nature, and a desire to help animals, people, and the community that was guided by their responsible nature (O_2).

Participants further organized animal shelters as beneficent life-saving organization, which despite challenges and the inherent complexity of sheltering work, who are doing their best (O_2). As participants reflected on who they are in comparison to the organization, identification splintered. Some participants resolutely aligned their identity to the organizations (*n = 10*), other participants were reluctant to fully align identities (*n = 7*), and a smaller portion (*n = 5*) of participants firmly rejected an alignment of identities. Clear in how participants organized themselves and the organization is the principle that organizational identity is communicated via enacted practice, and therefore in a perpetual process of organizing (O_1).

Organizing Animals

With social meanings and representations of animals constantly in flux, animals are also in a perpetual state of becoming (O_1 or *organizing*). The primary example of O_1, *organizing*, within the data was how shelter animals are continual developing into "adoptable" animals or "unadoptable" animals. Anthropomorphism was another way that participants continued organizing animals. Dogs, cats, rabbits, and other "pets" are frequently becoming human as people steadily attribute what are commonly considered human characteristics upon animals. For example, using the term "diva" to describe how a kitten's personality came into light.

Additionally, animals are *organized* structures (O_2). This project found that shelter animals were the prevailing organized entity (O_2) to which shelter staff identify. Through staff discourse, communication played a central role in the creation of animals as *organized* (O_2), "ordered entities" (or collections of animals as O_3 *organizations*) who arise from processes of *organizing* (O_1) (Nicotera, 2020, p. 7).

The second study of this project sought to answer the following research question: "How do animal identities emerge from communication?" Examining the language used by staff, I was

able to better understand how discourse has a bearing on animal identity, and subsequent welfare and treatment and identify practices of power and resistance. I found that as staff communicated about, with, and for animals, several discourses surfaced: (1) animals need humans to communicate for them and (2) you can't save every animal. In their quest to construct meaning as they interact with shelter animals, especially as they talked for animals, participants reinforce the ideas that animals are objects, animals have characteristics that make a human-animal bound impossible, and animals do not possess self-awareness, all of which contributed to the creation and maintenance of the two discourses listed above. This rhetoric becomes problematic because it places humans in the role of speaking for animals, which can impact animals in negative ways (Rothfels, 2002). However, participants also resisted the myth of the unadoptable animal by insisting that specific shelters have specific resources to help "unadoptable" animals, that there is a home for every animal. Refusing the discourse that some animals cannot be saved gives the most vulnerable of animals a fighting chance against euthanasia. In the next section, I integrate the findings of both studies and discuss their intersection.

Summary of Implications

With the knowledge that communication can be a lens that helps "researchers to understand organizational processes and action" (Heide et al., 2018, p. 356), this dissertation contributes theoretically to CCO and internatural communication research, and practically to animal shelters, NPOs, and shelter animal and staff well-being. Specifically, in Chapter Two, I argue for and present ways that communication, such as increased transparency and support groups, can be leveraged to increase retention and limit burnout. I made two theoretical contributions. First, organizational identity within these animal shelters is primarily communicated through discursive practices and interactions rather than through mission

statements, thus supporting CCO research that argues organization happens in communication. Secondly, shelter staff identify with the animals and animal welfare over identifying with the organizations, emphasizing animals as the prevailing organized entity and animal welfare as the prevailing mission. In addition to the two theoretical contributions, I also offer two practical contributions. The first is that concerns about animal welfare (proper vetting, proper use of time caring for animals, and decisions to euthanize) were the greatest barrier to organizational identification. Secondly, animal shelters actively sanction membership via their communication and enacted practices.

In Chapter Three, I presented several theoretical and practical implications. First, I extended organizational CCO research on identity and identification by considering how animals impact identity work as they "co-construct organizational system of meaning" (Kopaneva, 2019, p. 141). My second theoretical contribution provides support for internatural communication. Precisely, I found staff communicate about, with, and for animals in a systematic manner that provides a basis for a theoretical understanding of how internatural communication in animal sheltering occurs. Finally, this study provides a practical synthesis of shelter animal identities and the resulting discourses that confirm, or resist these identities, which prove helpful for those interested in challenging multi-species communication for the betterment of animals. Based on this implication, I recommend staff reflect upon whether they are unwittingly contributing to the reification of common truisms that negatively impact animals' identities and treatment.

Discussion

Integrating all the findings of this dissertation, the ways staff communicate their identity (Chapter Two) occurs largely via internatural communication[4] (Chapter Three). Participants

[4] Internatural communication is "at its core, as is the study of communication generally," an analysis of "the construction of meaning and the constitution of our world through interaction" (Plec, 2013, p. 6).

primarily communicated their identity as an animal lover via communication *with* animals. Furthermore, in communicating about, with, and for shelter animals (Chapter Three), staff not only create, affirm, and challenge animals' identities, they also indicate whether staff personally identify with the organization (Chapter Two). In other words, as staff organize animal identities via internatural communication that consisted of communication about, with, and for shelter animals (Chapter Three), staff simultaneously organize their individual identities by choosing to align, resist, or negotiate their values relative to the organization's values (Chapter Two).

Further, as staff organize and communicate their individual and animal identities, the organizations are also sanctioning membership. Organizations exercise their power to deny staff identification (Chapter Two), and staff have the power to deny animals identification (Study 2). Each of these claims could not be successfully made without looking at how the findings of both studies in this dissertation project intersect.

Importantly, staff, in the process of working with animals, organize their individual identities, and those of the animals they work with. In turn, based on how staff communicated about, with, and for animals, organizations organize the identities of shelter staff. Staff who were deemed to care too much about animals organized animals as having emotions and needing more time. Staff who were deemed to not care enough about animals reduced shelter animals to object status. Referring to animals as objects works to reify the boundary work between humans and nature and justify allocating scarce resources to favor some animals over others. However, staff also contest this boundary work, mirroring the discursive shifts evident in the history of animal sheltering organizations.

Organizations exercise their power by determining which animals qualify for adoption and which volunteers qualify for employment. In this respect, both shelter animals and staff

member identities (and, read more critically, their lives) are sanctioned by their organization. However, staff also have the power to challenge their organization's constructions of animals. As the integration of both studies demonstrates, how staff engage in internatural communication also matters as it has the power to prevent identification from occurring: identification with their organization (Chapter Two) and identification with animals (Chapter Three). Said differently, how staff talk about, with, and for animals determines identification with the organization, as organizations use this communication to vet staff and sanction membership. Looking at the history presented in Chapter One, and the findings of Chapters Two and Three, it is apparent that animal sheltering's history still organizes meanings today. Traces of Phyllis Wright's rhetoric that promoted euthanasia remain, butting up to slightly more modern ideals to "save them all."

Further, it is evident across the chapters that there exists a struggle "over meaning-creation between dominant and nondominant groups" (Nicotera, 2020, p. 34). Nonprofit animal shelters are predicated on a desire to help animals, which makes thinking of staff as a dominant force uncomfortable. Staff, acting altruistically, are likely unaware of their role in communicatively constructing and re-constructing animal values and shelter priorities. However, animal shelters, like all organizations, are sites of political action. What is specific to animal sheltering are the questions, or ethical conundrums, that shelter staff reflect upon in the struggle over meaning creation. For instance, what level of care should animal shelters grant shelter animals? Is there a way to recognize animals' voices in their own circumstances? What are the consequences of adopting a no-kill mission? If an animal is deemed "unadoptable" what are the consequences of its euthanasia? Is the label of "unadoptable" ever justifiable? While participants wrestled with these questions, the resulting discourse gave way to how animals, staff and organizations are organized. For instance, being labeled as a "kill shelter" was a source of

conflict that created cohesion necessary for a collective identity, whereby participants (despite the negative label) identified with their organization. Dealing with conflict established a set of shared experiences that fortify a collective identity of being "open-minded" or "people-focused." However, in another example, participants looking at the animal and human experience collectively agreed that euthanasia is not a solution when it comes at the cost of shelter staffs' mental health and shelter animals' lives.

Future Directions

Scholars argue that volunteerism is often a first step toward social movement and/or political activism (Galston, 2000). Alternatively, other scholars found that volunteerism inhibits mobilization (Guenther, 2017). Conflicting findings aside, the implication here is that researchers conduct studies with the belief that volunteering is a critical component to civic engagement. This begs a question that future research could explore: Is it an NPO's duty to serve the community, or should they be sites of social justice through political activism? Related to this line of study are questions of: who gets to decide what an NPO's mission ought to be, and whose idea of social justice guides potential political action? Furthermore, might some NPOs be perceived as more political in terms of their goals and missions? Future research could help answer these questions using the CCO and internatural communication lens to further understandings of animal shelter organization and animal identity.

Another area of future research could separate staff experiences. The two studies in this dissertation project examined volunteer and employee experiences collectively. Volunteers' experiences differed in significant ways between one other and in comparison to employee staff members. Future research could explore the degree to which volunteers (like interns) "situate their identities on the borderline…as inside and yet outside the organization" (Woo et al., 2017,

p. 4). Furthermore, throughout both studies in this dissertation project, instances of employees signifying volunteers and volunteers signifying employees in meaningful ways emerged. Future research could further explore volunteer experiences apart from or in comparison to employee experiences for occurrences of in-group/out-group dynamics.

In another similar vein, future research could focus on a comparative analysis of in-group/out-group dynamics on the organizational level between "kill" and "no-kill" shelters. According to DeMello (2012), "no-kill" workers engage in this us versus them mentality, as their "identities hinge upon the idea that they are not engaged in animal cruelty and they are fighting to save all the animals; this identity also rests, in part on making kill shelters the bad guys" (p. 227). The findings of both studies within this dissertation project indicate that the "kill" workers also engaged in othering, referring to no-kill shelters as being in a place of privilege when it came to time and resources and too-close minded when it came to adoption procedures. Future small group research into these group dynamics could not only shed light on how these two fundamentally different yet similar organizations organize their identities in comparison to one another but offer practical recommendations on how to bridge the differences to not see one another as the enemy but as a partner. Research such as this could highlight the importance of working together amidst differences. Finding homes for stray and unwanted animals, reuniting lost animals with their people, assisting in animal control issues, providing basic veterinary care and assisting in trap, neuter, and spay programs is more work than any one type of organization can handle. Evelyn, a study participant, eloquently offered: "One person can't save them all but if you come together as a community and eventually with the right people in place and the right practices in place, I feel inspired that the future looks good."

Another comparative analysis or case study of two organizations could examine two seemingly different organizations where animals and humans intersect and interact, to analyze how the specific species of animals has a bearing on identity work. This study might critically ask why dogs, cats, and other small animals are deemed deserving of a human-animal bond that is often compared to that of a family. In other words, why are these animals deserving of a human bond while other animals are not? What might an exploration of the reality that animal sheltering focuses on helping "pets" and not other animals tells us about how we identify animals and ourselves? The type of work (i.e., animal sheltering work versus slaughterhouse work) when working with animals might influence how those who work with animals see themselves/define themselves. Likewise, this might also influence how they see, define, identity of the animals with which they work.

Finally, a fifth future study could examine how meaning is co-constructed by including staff, community members, and animal experiences as a network of experiences. This current study only accounted for staff and animal experiences. Irvine (2003), motivated to understand why people surrendered their pet, interviewed guardians, and engaged in participatory observation of shelter workers. According to her findings, "people simply want troublesome animals out of their homes" (p. 550). A future study that integrates internatural communication and/or a transhuman dialogue (Rogers, 1998) would offer theoretical contributions by placing animals in the center of this research (Arluke & Sanders, 1996), thus expanding Irvine's (2003) findings and the findings of this current project. Furthermore, future research that considers these multiple perspectives could address a limitation of this project. Due to social distancing restrictions, fieldwork was not possible. Despite these limitations, this current project offers a

unique and original understanding into processes of identity and identification in nonprofit animal shelters.

I present these future directions inspired by this current dissertation project with the acknowledgement that it could stimulate a host of additional meaningful research. Underlying each of the proposed future studies is a desire to further research that answers how can animal shelters "best organize (O_1) to create organized structures (O_2) to achieve the goals of the organization (O_3)?" (Nicotera, 2020, p. 19).

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have explored how, as humans and animals interact in meaningful exchanges within the context of nonprofit animal shelters, staff identify, animal identity and organizational identity work occur through communication. Communicative discourses reinforce certain identities but also allow for resistance and formation of counter identities. Participants, such as Ava, who explained that once the organization realized who she was they accepted her into their fold; she found a community of likeminded others. She went from "I" to "We." Ava's story isn't unlike many of the shelter animals who she helps. It parallels some of the stories participants told about animals who were also given the time to "become." More precisely, they were given time for a different identity to come into being. Communication has the power to order identities, and with time humans and animals can become "We."

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Appendixes

APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY of WISCONSIN
UWMILWAUKEE
Department of University Safety & Assurances

Leah Stoiber
IRB Administrator
Institutional Review Board
Engelmann 270
P. O. Box 413
Milwaukee, WI 53201-0413
(414) 662-3544

http://www.irb.uwm.edu
lstoiber@uwm.edu

Modification/Amendment Notice of IRB Exempt Status

Date: November 10, 2020

To: Sarah Riforgiate, PhD
Dept: Communication

CC: Samentha Sepulveda

IRB#: 20.197
Title: An Internatural Communication Study of Identity Work

After review of your proposed changes to the research protocol by the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Institutional Review Board, your protocol still meets the criteria for Exempt Status under Category 2 as governed by 45 CFR 46.104 subpart d, and your protocol has received modification/amendment approval for:

- Changing study title.
- Adding interviews.

This protocol has been approved as exempt for three years and IRB approval will expire on March 9, 2023. If you plan to continue any research related activities (e.g., enrollment of subjects, study interventions, data analysis, etc.) past the date of IRB expiration, please respond to the IRB's status request that will be sent by email approximately two weeks before the expiration date. If the study is closed or completed before the IRB expiration date, you may notify the IRB by sending an email to irbinfo@uwm.edu with the study number and the status, so we can keep our study records accurate.

Any proposed changes to the protocol must be reviewed by the IRB before implementation, unless the change is specifically necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. The principal investigator is responsible for adhering to the policies and guidelines set forth by the UWM IRB, maintaining proper documentation of study records and promptly reporting to the IRB any adverse events which require reporting. The principal investigator is also responsible for ensuring that all study staff receive appropriate training in the ethical guidelines of conducting human subjects research.

As Principal Investigator, it is also your responsibility to adhere to UWM and UW System Policies, and any applicable state and federal laws governing activities which are independent of IRB review/approval (e.g., FERPA, Radiation Safety, UWM Data Security, UW System policy on Prizes, Awards and Gifts, state gambling laws, etc.). When conducting research at institutions outside of UWM, be sure to obtain permission and/or approval as required by their policies.

Contact the IRB office if you have any further questions. Thank you for your cooperation and best wishes for a successful project.

Respectfully,
Leah Stoiber
IRB Administrator

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Good day!

I hope this email/message/post finds you well! The purpose of this email/message/post is to ask for your participation in a research project. Please review the details below. If you are eligible and willing to participate, your help will greatly impact the success of this research project. I thank you in advance for your time.

I am recruiting 300 people who are interested in answering some questions in an interview about their experiences as an employee or volunteer of an animal shelter. You will be asked to share some basic information about yourself, the animal shelter you worked with, and your experience within that animal shelter. Interviews will occur via telephone, Skype, Zoom, or Teams and should take between 30-60 minutes. Although there is no compensation offered for your participation, take comfort in knowing that the data gathered in this study will benefit shelter staff and the animals they seek to help!

If you are at least 18 years old and are presently or were recently (within the past calendar year) an employee or volunteer at an animal shelter, you are eligible to participate in this study, and I would greatly appreciate your help!

If you are an interested and eligible participant, I'd love to send you more information about the study and schedule an interview. To move forward please reply to this message/email me at samentha@uwm.edu.

Please let me know if you have additional questions about the research I am conducting. Also, whether you decide to participate in our study or not, we would greatly appreciate you sharing this email/message/post or referring anyone you think might be interested!

Best Regards,

Samentha Sepúlveda
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Communication
University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee
IRB #: 20.197
IRB Approval Date: 11/10/2020

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Moderately Scheduled Interview Schedule

I. Opening
   A. (Establish Rapport) Good day! How are you today? I really appreciate you taking the time to answer some questions I have about your experience working in an animal shelter.
   B. (Indicate Purpose) I am currently conducting research on animal welfare organizations. I would like to ask you some questions related to your time with the animals shelter you worked at.
   C. (Develop Motivation) As someone who has experience working at an animal shelter, I believe the information you share today will clarify staff experiences. My hope is that this research can improve working experiences for volunteers and staff members of animal shelters, in addition to aiding the animals that you help.
   D. (Provide Timeline) This interview should take anywhere from 30-60 minutes. You do not have to answer any question that you do not feel comfortable answering. You are also free to stop this interview at any time. Is now still a good time for you? Do you have any question for me before we begin? May I use an audio recorder while we talk so that I can refer back to our conversation?

Transition to Body: I'd like to begin by asking you questions related to you and your work at an animal shelter.

II. Questions about the participant:
   A. I am interested in your story; will you tell me when and how you got involved working with animal shelters? (How did you come to know about the organization?)
      a) Was there something about this particular shelter that attracted you to working with them?
      b) What is the mission of the organization? Can you describe it in your own words?
      c) When you think about the organization's mission, what about the mission do you agree with?
   B. When talking about what you do for the organization, how do you explain your work?
      a) Do you get from people about your work with the organization?
         (1) If yes, what types?
      b) Is there anything about what you do that you emphasize or deemphasize? Why?
      c) Can you give me an example of the types of things you say?
      d) How often do you share that you work with an animal shelter with others?
   C. What would you like to accomplish as a member of your organization?
   D. Do you identity as an animal lover?
      a) If yes: In what ways do you enact this?
   E. What are some of the motives (intentions/beliefs) about animal shelter work that you brought with you to your position?
   F. What positive outcomes have you had as a result of working at an animal shelter?

a) Can you give me an example?

G. Have you encountered any negative outcomes working in an animal shelter?
   a) Can you give me an example?

H. Are you part of any social or networking groups related to animal shelters?
   a) If yes: What kinds of things do your post? Why?
   b) Would you be willing to share some posts?
   c) What, if any, are some of the positive outcomes of being a part of these networking groups?

III. Questions about the organization:

A. What is/was your role within the organization?

B. Did you receive any training?
   a) If yes: Can you explain?

C. What services does the organization provide?

D. How long have you been with/were you at the organization?

E. Complete this prompt: [organization] is_____.

F. What are some words that you would use to define organization?
   a) Why do you use these terms?

G. Can you share a memorable experience working alongside a fellow staff member?

H. Generally speaking, do you feel that your individual values are the same as your organization's values?

III. Questions about the animals:

A. Can you please share a memorable experience working with an animal?

B. Have you ever felt especially connected to an animal that you work with?
   a) If yes: Can you tell me more about this connection?

C. How would you describe the community of animals that your organization helps?

D. In regard to adoption, does the shelter provide any counseling, education, or screening prior to adoption?

E. Generally speaking, do you feel that your individual goals regarding the welfare of the animals in your shelter are the same as your organization's goals?

F. What strategies do you and others in your organization use to encourage adoption of the shelter animals?
   a) If they don't mention specifically: Does your organization take photos and post bios online of the animals currently available for adoption?
   b) Can you tell me what you know about who takes these photos and writes these bios?

G. Are there times when these strategies did not work, and the organization could not place an animal in a home?
   a) If yes: Can you tell me what happens in these situations? Specifically, do you have a story of a specific animal who was hard to find a home for?

Transition: Well, it has been a pleasure learning more about your experiences. Allow me to briefly summarize the information that I have recorded during our interview. Please feel free to clarify at any point.

V. Closing

A. (Clearinghouse Question) Is there anything else you think would be helpful for me to know so that I can successfully account for your experience working at an animal shelter?

B. (Maintain Rapport) I appreciate the time you took for this interview.
C. (Action to Be Taken) I should have all the information I need. Would it be alright to contact you again if I have any more questions? Should you have any questions, concerns, etc. please feel welcome to contact me.
D. (Maintain Rapport) Thank you again for your time.

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION TABLE

TABLE D.1: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Location	Role	Tenure with Shelter*	Interview Length**
Emma	37	Female	WI	Volunteer	12	29
Ava	24	Female	WI	Employee	36	83
Sophia	47	Female	WI	Volunteer	48	62
Isabella	26	Female	MO	Volunteer	4	61
Charlotte	57	Female	WI	Volunteer	60	53
Liam	28	Male	MO	Employee	30	51
Noah	52	Male	WI	Volunteer	108	40
Amelia	47	Female	CA	Employee	96	81
Mia	47	Female	WI	Volunteer	144	49
Harper	43	Female	IL	Employee	36	32
Evelyn	39	Female	IL	Employee	30	19
Abigail	51	Female	WI	Volunteer	24	47
Emily	36	Female	MI	Volunteer	5	31
Oliver	43	Male	WI	Volunteer	6	44
Ella	35	Female	IL	Employee	168	93
Elizabeth	28	Female	AZ	Volunteer	60	28
Camila	18	Female	MO	Volunteer	30	25
Luna	33	Female	WI	Volunteer	6	63
Avery	39	Female	WI	Employee	12	57
William	37	Male	IL	Volunteer	66	27
Aria	33	Female	WI	Volunteer	24	45
Scarlett	21	Female	PA	Volunteer	24	32
Penelope	47	Female	WI	Volunteer	180	68
Layla	45	Female	NC	Volunteer	52	60
Chloe	69	Female	PA	Volunteer	72	31

* (in months)
** (in minutes)

Curriculum Vitae

SAMENTHA SEPÚLVEDA

University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee email address
Department of Communication Office: JOH 324

EDUCATION

2021 **Ph.D. University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI**
Communication
Dissertation: *An Internatural Communication*[5] *Study of Identity Within Nonprofit Animal Shelters*

2017 **M.A. Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, IL**
Communication, Media, and Theatre (Summa cum laude)
Thesis: *Where (Species) Inequality Exists*

2015 **B.A. Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, IL**
Communication, Media, and Theatre (Summa cum laude)

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

2020 – 2021 **Adjunct Lecturer, Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, IL**
Department of Communication, Media, and Theatre

- Fully developed and instructed several courses, including creating syllabi, assignments, lectures, and grading rubrics.

2017 – 2021 **Graduate Teaching Assistant, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI**
Department of Communication

- Fully developed and instructed several courses, including creating syllabi, assignments, lectures, and grading rubrics.

2016 – 2017 **Graduate Assistant, Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, IL**
Department of Communication, Media, and Theatre

- Performed bookkeeping duties for Stage Center Theatre
- Maintained and balanced several ledgers, managed weekly expense reports, created requisitions, and tracked purchase orders

2015 **Summer Transition Program Coordinator, Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, IL**
Division of Student Affairs

- Assisted in the development and training of STP Success Coaches.
- Developed weekly civic engagement activities, recruited, and coordinated guest speakers, oversaw volunteer activities, and prepared reflection activities.

[5] Internatural communication is the study of communication with and about nature.

RESEARCH AND TEACHING SPECIALTIES

Critical/Qualitative Research Methods, Organizational Communication, Intersectional Research, Communication Theory, Critical Animal Studies, Strategic and Persuasive Communication, Business Communication, and Media Studies.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Northeastern Illinois University (Fall 2020 – Spring 2021)
Adjunct Lecturer

Special Topics in Communication: Strategic Communication for Advocacy and Social Change (CMTC 306)

- Course designer and sole instructor of this synchronous distance learning course.
- Introduced critical rhetoric (as method for questioning a policy, societal value, or ideology, challenging a harmful social norm, or urging alternative ways of doing things) and then focused in depth on the development of an advocacy campaign to advocate for social change.

Mediated Communication (CMTC 300)

- Course designer and sole instructor of this asynchronous distance learning course.
- An investigation of the effects media and technologies have on social interaction and communication behaviors such as speaking, listening, understanding, and interpreting.

Persuasion (CMTC 310)

- Course designer and sole instructor of this synchronous distance learning course.
- Emphasis on the principles and methods of persuasion, with practice in the analysis and preparation of persuasive messages.

University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee (Fall 2017 – Spring 2021)
Graduate Teaching Assistant

Theory and Practice of Persuasion (COM 464)

- Course designer and sole instructor for 4 sections (up to 24 students per section) of this course, which included face-to-face, hybrid, and asynchronous distance learning formats.
- Emphasis on the principles and methods of persuasion, with practice in the analysis and preparation of persuasive messages.

Qualitative Research Methods (COM 372)

- Course designer and sole instructor for 1 section (up to 22 students per section) of this synchronous distance learning course.
- Concepts, strategies, and methods in the qualitative, social-scientific study of human communication. Emphasis on interviews, focus groups, and participant observation.

Interviewers and Interviewing (COM 300)

- Course designer and sole instructor for 4 sections (up to 22 students per section) of this course, which included face-to-face, and hybrid learning formats.
- Focuses on information-getting interviews. Discussion, practice, and analysis of interviewer effects, setting, question form, sequence, and wording.

Business and Professional Communication (COM 105)

- Sole instructor for 8 sections (up to 22 students per section) of this course, which included face-to-face, and asynchronous distance learning formats.
- Analysis and application of communication principles and practices (interpersonal communication, teamwork issues, public speaking, technological communication) fundamental to successful participation in organizational and professional activities.

For each of the classes listed above, I performed the following:

- Fully developed all assignments and grading rubrics in accordance with course objectives.
- Adopted textbooks and submitted materials for reserve.
- Created and adhered to the class syllabus and schedule, ensuring that both met department and college standards and schedules.
- Carefully crafted and delivered lessons which include abstract generalizations, concrete experiences to activate prior knowledge, reflective observations that interrogate concepts, and active experimentations.
- Provided helpful and prompt feedback on assignments, quizzes, research papers and exams.
- Assessed grades for students based on level and quality of comprehension and application.
- Systematically tracked each student's development and reported student learning outcomes and progress to universities.
- Adapted class lectures, assignments, and exams to meet various student accommodations.

Professional Development: Teaching Workshops

UWM Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning Workshop: Facilitating Student Community-Based Service Learning (2021)

UWM Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning Workshop: Course Design II (2019)

UWM Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning Workshop: Active and Small Group Learning (2018)

UWM LGBTQ+ Resource Center's LGBTQ+ 101 Workshop – (2017 & 2019)

HONORS AND AWARDS

Teaching Awards

Department of Communication Recognition Award - Excellence in Teaching (2021), University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI

*Melvin H. Miller Graduate Award for Teaching (*2019), University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI

Research Awards

A Top Paper, Women's Caucus Division, Central States Communication Association for Sepúlveda, S. (April 2020). *Of rats and women.*

A Top Paper, Activism, Communication Ethics, and Social Justice Division, Central States Communication Association for Sepúlveda, S. (April 2020). *Packaging chickens in glittering generality, virtue, and two-valued evaluation: A critical content analysis.*

Top Panel, Division/Group, Central States Communication Association for Riforgiate, S. E., **Sepúlveda, S.**, & Coker, M. C. (April 2020). *Attending to the health of graduate students who live "in-between": Developing healthy social-support and strategic course planning to reduce GTA role strain*.

Top Student Paper, Performance Studies and Autoethnography Division, Central States Communication Association for Sepúlveda, S. (April 2019). *Coming out against speciesism*.

Additional Awards and Scholarships

The Bernard J. Brommel Doctoral Scholarship (2018), $1000, Northeastern Illinois University
Chancellor's Graduate Student Award (2018), $1000, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee
Theater Graduate Assistantship Award (2017) $1200, Northeastern Illinois University
Graduate Merit Tuition Scholarship (2016), Northeastern Illinois University
College of Arts and Science Tuition Scholarship (2015), Northeastern Illinois University

PUBLICATIONS

Publications

Riforgiate, S. E., & **Sepúlveda, S.** (In Press). Emotions and organizational life. In F. Cooren & P. Stücheli-Herlach (Eds.) *Handbook of Management Communication*. De Gruyer Mouton.

Sepúlveda, S., & Plec, E. (2021). Of rats and women: A cross-species read of space and place. In A. E. George (Ed.) *Feminism and Gender in Critical Animal Studies.* Lexington Publishers.

Sepúlveda, S. (2020). Models and levels of communication. In E. Mueller and M. Allen (Eds.), *Business and Professional Communication* (pp. 2-8). McGraw Hill Education.

Sepúlveda, S. (2020). Conducting career research. In E. Mueller and M. Allen (Eds.), *Business and Professional Communication* (pp. 40-43). McGraw Hill Education.

Coker, M. C., **Sepúlveda, S.**, & Cloitre, A. (2020). Organizational theories & leadership skills. In E. Mueller and M. Allen (Eds.), *Business and Professional Communication* (pp. 188-195). McGraw Hill Education.

Sepúlveda, S. (2019). Review of abstinence cinema: Virginity and the rhetoric of sexual purity in contemporary film. [Review of the book *Abstinence cinema,* by C. R. Kelly]. *Women & Language, 42*(1), 125-128.

Sepúlveda, S., and Allen, M. (2019). *Business and Professional Communication.* McGraw Hill Education.

Sepúlveda, S. (2018). Mastering impromptu speaking. In T. Rasmussen Lenox & M. Allen (Eds.), *Business and Professional Communication* (pp. 7-10). Pearson Education.

Sepúlveda, S. (2018). Persuasion: An overview. In T. Rasmussen Lenox and M. Allen (Eds.), *Business and Professional Communication* (3rd ed.) (pp. 183-188). Pearson Education.

Articles and Chapters Under Review

Sepúlveda, S. (Under Review). *Coming out against speciesism.*

Sepúlveda, S. (Under Review). *Critical Species Theory: A convergence and expansion of critical race theory and critical animal studies.*

Articles and Chapters in Progress

Sepúlveda, S. *Rethinking emotive dissonance.*

Sepúlveda, S. *Packaging chickens in glittering generality, virtue, and two-valued evaluation: A textual analysis.*

Sepúlveda, S. *Animal messages in televised commercials: A replicate study.*

Sepúlveda, S. *The incorporeal animal: Animal representation in popular culture.*

CONFERENCE ACTIVITY

Competitively Selected Research Papers and Panels

Sepúlveda, S. (March 2021). *An internatural communication study of identity work within nonprofit animal shelters.* Paper selected for presentation at the annual meeting of the Central States Communication Association, Cincinnati, OH. (Held virtually)

Sepúlveda, S. (February 2021). *Critical Species Theory: A convergence and expansion of critical race theory and critical animal studies.* Paper selected for presentation at the annual Midwestern Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference, Milwaukee, WI.

Sepúlveda, S., Romo, D., Fuller, S., & Lim, S. (November 2020). *Rethinking emotive dissonance*. Competitive paper accepted for presentation at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association, Indianapolis, IN.

Sepúlveda, S. (November 2020). *Augmenting the Deserted Island Survival Activity to Explore Social Influence and Group decision* making. Competitive paper accepted for presentation at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association, Indianapolis, IN.

Sepúlveda, S. (April 2020). *Packaging chickens in glittering generality, virtue and two-valued evaluation: A critical content analysis*. Competitive paper accepted for presentation at the annual meeting of the Central States Communication Association, Chicago, IL. (Conference canceled)

*__A Top Five Paper on the Top Paper Panel.__

Sepúlveda, S. (April 2020). *Of rats and women.* Competitive paper accepted for presentation at the annual meeting of the Central States Communication Association, Chicago, IL. (Conference canceled) *__A Top Three Paper on the Top Paper Panel.__

Sepúlveda, S. (April 2020). *Put your head on my shoulder: A story of shouldering your emotions in organizations*. Competitive panel paper accepted for presentation at the annual meeting of the Central States Communication Association, Chicago, IL. (Conference canceled)

Riforgiate, **S. E., Sepúlveda**, S., & Coker, M. C. (April 2020). *Attending to the health of graduate students who live "in-between": Developing healthy social-support and strategic course planning to reduce GTA role strain*. Discussion panel accepted at the Central States Communication Association, Chicago, IL. (Conference canceled) *__Top Panel.__

Sepúlveda, S. (January 2020). *Telling terrible stories better: Confessional tales of a vulnerable observer*. Competitive paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Association of Autoethnography and Narrative Inquiry Conference, St. Pete Beach, FL.

Sepúlveda, S. (April 2019). *Coming out against speciesism*. Competitive paper presented at the annual meeting of the Central States Communication Association, Omaha, NE. *__Top Student Paper.__

Davis, B., Mueller, E., **Sepúlveda, S.**, Kelpinski, L., Kappers, A., & Kim, S-Y. (April 2019). *Integrating meta-analysis into Bayesian modeling: An argument for adapting quantitative communication research methods*. Competitive paper presented at the annual meeting of the Central States Communication Association, Omaha, NE.

Sepúlveda, S. (April 2017). *Where Species Inequality Exists*. Competitive paper presented at the NEIU Annual Student Research and Creative Activities Symposium, Chicago, IL.

SERVICE ACTIVITY

Discipline Service

Regional and National Conference Paper and Panel Reviewer

Media Studies Interest Group, 2021 & 2020 *Central States Communication Association (CSCA) Convention*

Graduate Student Caucus, 2019 *Central States Communication Association Convention*

Great Ideas for Teaching Students (G.I.F.T.S), 2019 *National Communication Association (NCA) Convention*

Regional and National Conference Panel Chair

"Exploring the Cartesian Mind/Body Divide: Merging Boundaries to Create Breakthroughs for Academic Life Sponsor": Communication Theory Interest Group, *Central States Communication Association (CSCA) Convention*, Chicago, IL 2020.

"Communities and Identities" *International Association of Autoethnography and Narrative Inquiry*, St. Pete Beach, FL, 2020.

"Creating PR Opportunities to Make a Difference" *Central States Communication Association*, Milwaukee, WI, 2018.

Volunteer

National Communication Association, 2018

Central States Communication Association Conference, 2018

University & Department Service

University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Communication Graduate Student Association

President, 2019–2020

PhD Student Mentorship Coordinator, 2018–2019

PhD Student Mentor, 2018–2020

University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Volunteer Representative

Graduate Open House UWM, 2017–2020

Undergraduate Open House UWM, 2018–2019

UWM Open House, NCA, 2018

University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Judge

13th Annual UWM Undergraduate Research Symposium, 2021

Department of Communication Public Speaking Showcase, 2018–2019

10th Annual UWM Undergraduate Research Symposium, 2018

Northeastern Illinois University – Volunteer

Graduate Open House NEIU, 2015–2017

Community Service

Foster Volunteer

Wisconsin Humane Society, Milwaukee, WI

Milwaukee Area Domestic Animal Control Commission, Milwaukee, WI

Tree House Humane Society, Chicago, IL

Humane Education and Fundraising Volunteer

H.E.A.R.T., Chicago, IL

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Animals and Society
Western States Communication Association
Central States Communication Association
National Communication Association
UWM Communication Graduate Student Council

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

Research Workshops & Panels

ASI-HAS Institute 2020-2021 Cohort Webinar, *Animal Society Institute's 4th Annual Human-Animal Studies Institute*, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 2020

Digging Deep into our Hidden Narratives: Decompartmentalizing our Way through Autoethnography, *Doing Autoethnography Conference*, Dolphin Beach, FL, 2020

Animals, Nature and Human Relationships: Analyzing Evidence and Advocating for Inclusion in Communication Studies Pre-Conference Workshop, *Western States Communication Association Conference*, Seattle, WA, 2019

Plantationocene Attachment Sites: Dr. Ana Tsing and Dr. Donna Haraway, *Center for 21st Century Studies*, Milwaukee, WI, 2019

Beyond Journal Publishing, *UWM Libraries Scholarly Communication Series*, Milwaukee, WI, 2018