Knowledge and Death in Animal Care
An Ethnographic Project in a Chicago Animal Shelter

Student Name: Emily Jetmore
Project Advisor: Lynn Morgan

This presentation draws on my ethnographic fieldwork at Chicago’s Anti-Cruelty Society to examine how care and communication with companion animals are navigated within an American animal shelter. While the species divide may offer a communicative challenge, care workers in this institution use partial knowledges of animal needs to provide care as they see fit. I trace these knowledges as they become authoritative within the shelter and become imperative as they are imposed upon the Chicago community. In this presentation I will focus specifically on care workers who practice euthanasia, and their engagement in a complex navigation of death, killing, and care. Ultimately I will demonstrate how care workers share animal suffering in the emotionally weighty practice of euthanasia to gain an unstable but functional impression of the animal experience.

Keywords: euthanasia, multispecies ethnography, care, sharing suffering, communication, Chicago