



Buzz: *Urban Beekeeping and the Power of the Bee*

Robin Bearss and Thomas Legeza

About the Authors

Lisa Jean Moore and Mary Kosut

- Both lived long term in New York City
- Both work for Purchase College, State University of New York
- Lisa Jean is a feminist medical sociologist with a focuses on the human body in the sociocultural context
- Mary is a cultural sociologist and Assistant Professor exploring the sociality of art scenes in New York City





Purpose and Background

- Spent three years speaking to beekeepers and interacting with bees for this project
- Had never studied animals in a sociological context before
- Wanted to study the interactions and parallels between humans and honeybees
- Focused on urban beekeeping
- Studied honeybees through active observations and hive checks
- They were not beekeepers, and the bees were referred to as subjects, not animals



Research Methods

- Took classes, studying both the material and the people in attendance
- Attended lectures
- Attended events (Honey Fest)
- Observed hives in different areas (rural vs urban) and countries (USA vs Italy)
- Interviewed many different kinds of beekeepers (backwards vs scientific)
- Used their senses to identify and describe the “Buzz”
- Had to view the bees with as little “humanness” as possible so as not to introduce bias. Although, most bias is unavoidable.



Beekeeper Responsibility

- Bees' outdoor season begins in the spring when the temperature is warm enough (~60 degrees Fahrenheit)
- Beekeepers' season begins months before spring so they can arrange to buy bees
- Each beekeeper is unique in their respective schedules and gear
- Each hive inspection seen as an event rather than a chore
- Beekeepers see bees as pets in some cases, and in others a means of financial gain or a way to atone for humanity's sins against nature



Scientific Versus Backwards Beekeeping

- “The backwards practice and philosophy encourages a more hands-on approach, literally to leave bees alone and accept that some will die off.”
- They feel that the least amount of disturbance possible should be strived for when managing bees. Some even go so far as to whisper when they are near their hives
- “In comparison, scientific beekeepers are more invested in helping bees through empirical observation, intervention, and technology.”
- Beekeepers who employ these methods use antibiotics, and use their own judgments of when bees need human intervention



“And I personally think that if there are magical creatures in the world, honeybees are those creatures”

-Meg Paska



Model Insects

- Social insects that “do as they are told”
- Pollinate and produce honey cooperatively as a harmonious society
- Efficient, interdependent and prosper all without harming the planet’s ecosystems
- Only insects to produce food that is eaten by humans
- Annual value of honeybee pollination to agriculture is more than \$15 billion to the US
- Past civilizations have used honey for different reasons other than consumption
- Humans and bees have coexisted for millennia
- Martyrs, self-sacrificial



Colony Collapse Disorder

- “To say that CCD has triggered large-scale bee deaths obscures and simplifies what is happening to the bees today.”
- CCD is described as not having one singular cause, or having multiple causes depending on what group you speak for (ex: professional, environmental, political, emotional, or economic)
- CCD has put the spotlight on bees and given them a social currency. In other words, it is “cool” to care about bees.
- Attempting to define and treat CCD makes the concept easier to grasp. It has been compared with a disease or disorder. However, viewing the problem in this light is dangerous because the solution might not address other concerns.



Bee/Human Connections

- We regard bees as companions yet also as objects for various reasons
- Connection between humans and bees are different than other pets
- Getting stung is the only physical form of connection
- “All forms of life are connected... and that no being, idea, or object can exist independently...”
- CCD is the bees natural instinct to fall away and become out of sync of human interference with the hives
- Affective buzz - form of insect love between human and bee
- Major emotional connection from humans to bees (sadness when hives die, happy when around the hives, etc.)



Bee/Human Control

- Bees trigger human vulnerability; we run, tremble, act, but most importantly we want to repel or contain them
- They are out of our control completely
- Bees are self-sufficient entirely
- Contrary to popular belief, bees do not require the aid from humans
- Bee stings are rewarding in a sense: this is compared to people self-harming
- Adlers' argue self-harming relieves emotional pain, and that the bee sting to beekeepers is their equivalent
- It makes their job and the products more rewarding



Bees and their Uses

- Bee venom therapy, using venom to assuage arthritis pain
- Honey as food, and financial income for beekeepers
- Pollinators for over $\frac{2}{3}$ of our food (almonds, apples, strawberries...)
- Warfare; catapulting beehives into enemy territory
- Military; using bees to search for radiation, or other harmful toxins
- Wax; candles, salves
- Poster child for “going green” in the media
- Manuka Honey as a medicinal healing agent
- A type of social capital or “cool” factor



Bee/Human Intimate Engagement

- Beekeeping is calming and meditative through the practice and sounds
- Use all of our senses when beekeeping
- Bees are “blood cells swimming about within a body, and embryonic and cellular development as a link between human and bee”
- Being with bees require all the senses to be active: the sight of bees flying around one’s head, the smell of the hive and bee pheromones, the taste of honey, the pain of a sting, and the sound of many tiny wings rubbing together
- Tone and energy of the beehive can express certain feelings that beekeepers can decipher (higher pitched buzzing normally indicates agitated bees)
- Death of a hive is equal to death of a pet



“But from a human perspective, insects are often seen as living in another space and place- not an animal kingdom but an insectlandia, or parallel universe that borders our own.”



Ethics of Beekeeping

- Many government regulations have been put on the importation of honey and bees due to impure products received from China
- Bees can only be imported from New Zealand and Canada
- Meddle with the existence of the honeybee through these legislative acts; the life of the bee is prevented
- Regulation of bee population, swarms and migration patterns results in suffering among the honeybees
- Bees don't need us, yet we insist they do



Solutions to the Ethical Dilemma

Radical Disengagement

- Establish a more veganlike relationship with the bees
- We let them live and roam free from direct human interference
- Stop genetically modifying crops and using pesticides and insecticides
- Prevent destruction of ecosystems needed for bees and animals alike
- Problems that come with this include: crops may fail without forced pollination, no more honey, hybrid bees (including African bees) could emerge
- Ultimately found to be unrealistic



Solutions to the Ethical Dilemma

Ethical Engagement

- Create more deliberate working conditions for bees with their health and well being in mind
- Taking some of the proceeds from honey to researching and creating new pollinator gardens and hive boxes
- For treating parasites, using minimal treatment
- Requiring commercial beekeepers to have the bees pollinate a variety of crops rather than only one
- Goal is to continue engagement with the bees, but by modifying our practices so the bees are not taken for granted



Relations to Other Readings

- The research methods employed are similar but not congruent to the Field Guide for Human Centered Design that we read. Lisa and Mary do not hold humans at the center of their design, but bees. Although they use a lot of the field work mentioned in the reading
- The chapter focusing on CCD talks about a lot of the same things that Marla Spivak mentioned in her Ted Talk (ie: fungicides, pesticides, pathogens, etc.)
- The conclusions presented at the end of the novel very much reflect some of the qualities that the Wicked Problems article addressed: multiple consequences for possible solutions, multiple subproblems and categories of people affected, and no way to truly prototype ideas/answers
- One could even argue that beekeeping as a form of gathering data classifies as Art Based Research



Feelings About the Book

- Very informative while remaining engaging to read
- Chapters were well organized and had a nice flow
- Covered a variety of topics without overloading information. For example, discussed bee legislation, binary gender roles, stereotyping humans/bees, and affective behavior (subconscious reaction)
- Took into account the bias of being human: assumed to be at the top of the world's hierarchy, no communication with bees, cannot remove yourself from the universe to observe without bias
- Described informants very well, I felt like each one had their own personality. Normally with that many people it gets hard to tell them apart. (Sam Comfort, Meg Paska, Farmer John, etc.)



Questions?



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