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found the story irresistible; on Comedy Central, for example, Stephen Colbert warned that “albatresbians were threatening American family values with a Sappho-avian agenda”!

The more interesting story in this essay, however—more interesting than the discussion of what to call same-sex animal couples, that is—concerns the blind spots of animal researchers themselves. Mooallem rightly notes that researchers constantly provide alibis and excuses for the same-sex sexual behavior they observe, but he also discovers that most researchers do not actually know the sex of the animal they are observing, and so they infer sex based on behavior and relational sets. This has led to all kinds of misreporting on heterosexual courtship because the sex of the creatures in question is not actually scrutinized, and mixed-sex couples, as with the albatrosses and certainly with penguins, very often end up being same-sex couples. In the case of the albatrosses, researchers thought they were finding evidence of a “super-normal clutch” when they found two eggs in a nest rather than one; it never occurred to them that the two birds incubating the eggs were both female and each had an egg. The narrative of male superfertility was more comforting and appealing. Thus intuitive evidence that contradicts the contorted narratives that scientists put together is ignored because heterosexuality is the “human” lens through which all animal behavior is studied.

How should we think about so-called homosexual behavior among animals? Well, as the *New York Times* essay suggests by way of Joan Roughgarden, anything that falls outside of heterosexual behavior is not necessarily homosexual, and anything that conforms to human understandings of heterosexual behavior may not be heterosexual. In fact Roughgarden prefers to think about animals as creatures who may “multitask” with their private parts: some of what we call sexual contact between animals may be basic communication, some of the behavior may be adaptive, some survival-oriented, some reproductive, much of it improvised.

Which brings us back to the penguins and their long march into the snowy, icy, and devastating landscape of Antarctica. It is easy, especially given the voice-over, to see the penguin world as made up of little heroic families striving to complete their natural and pregiven need to reproduce. The voice-over provides a beautiful but nonsensical narrative that remains resolutely human and refuses to ever see the “penguin logics” that structure their frigid quest. When the penguins mass on the ice to find partners, we are asked to see a school prom with rejected and

spurned partners on the edges of the dance floor and true romance and soul mates in its center. When the mating rituals begin, we are told of elegant and balletic dances, though we see awkward, difficult, and undignified couplings. When the female penguin finally produces the valuable egg and must now pass the egg from her feet to the male's feet in order to free herself to go and feed, the voice-over reaches hysteria pitch and sees sorrow and heartbreak in every unsuccessful transfer. We are never told how many penguins are successful in passing their egg, how many might decide not to be successful in order to save themselves the effort of a hard winter, how much of the transfer ritual might be accidental, and so on. The narrative ascribes stigma and envy to nonreproductive penguins, sacrifice and a Protestant work ethic to the reproducers, and sees a capitalist hetero-reproductive family rather than the larger group.

Ultimately the voice-over and the Christian attribution of "intelligent design" to the penguins' activity must ignore many inconvenient facts. The penguins are not monogamous; they mate for one year and then move on. The partners find each other after returning from feeding by recognizing each other's call, not by some innate and mysterious coupling instinct. Perhaps most important, the nonreproductive penguins are not merely extras in the drama of hetero-reproduction; in fact the homo or nonrepro queer penguins are totally necessary to the temporary reproductive unit. They provide warmth in the huddle and probably extra food, and they do not leave for warmer climes but accept a part in the penguin collective in order to enable reproduction and to survive. Survival in this penguin world has little to do with fitness and everything to do with collective will. And once the reproductive cycle draws to a close, what happens then? The parent penguins do protect their young in terms of warmth, but the parents do nothing to stave off attacks by aerial predators; there the young penguins are on their own. And once the baby penguins reach the age when they too can take to the water, the parent penguins slip gratefully into another element with not even a backward glance to see if the next generation follows. The young penguins now have five years of freedom, five glorious, nonreproductive, family-free years before they too must undertake the long march. The long march of the penguins is proof neither of heterosexuality in nature nor of the reproductive imperative nor of intelligent design. It is a resolutely animal narrative about cooperation, affiliation, and the anachronism of the homo-hetero divide. The indifference in the film to all nonreproductive behaviors obscures the more complex narratives of penguin life: we learn in the first five minutes of

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