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Recommended Citation

Wrenn, C. L. (2016). An Analysis of Diversity in Nonhuman Animal Rights Media. *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, 29(2), 143-165.

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1 **An Analysis of Diversity in Nonhuman Animal Rights Media**

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4

5 **Abstract:** *Lack of diversity in the ranks as well as a failure to resonate with disadvantaged*
6 *groups and other anti-oppression movements has been cited as one important barrier to the*
7 *American Nonhuman Animal rights movement’s success (Kymlicka and Donaldson 2013). It is*
8 *possible that social movements are actively inhibiting diversity in the ranks and audience by*
9 *producing literature that reflects a narrow activist identity. This article creates a platform from*
10 *which these larger issues can be explored by investigating the actual demographic*
11 *representations present in a small sample of popular media sources produced by the movement*
12 *for other animals. A content analysis of 131 magazine covers produced by two highly visible*
13 *movement actors, PETA and VegNews, was conducted to demonstrate that activist*
14 *representations in at least some dominant American Nonhuman Animal rights media are mostly*
15 *white, female, and thin.*

16

17 **Keywords:** Gender, Race, Social Movements, Media, Animal Rights

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An Analysis of Diversity in Nonhuman Animal Rights Media

Introduction

In *Empty Cages: Facing the Challenge of Animal Rights* (2004), Tom Regan suggests that the two most pressing challenges facing the American movement for other animals are, first, its small membership and, second, its lack of public credibility. At a talk given at the University of Genoa in 1996, he specifies that these challenges entail both retaining existing members and recruiting new members (Regan 1996). Like many vegan scholars, Regan cites unfavorable public views about American Nonhuman Animal rights activism as a primary barrier against movement success. Attitude research supports this in demonstrating that non-vegetarians hold very negative views of vegans (Povey et al. 2001).¹ One poll reports that about 2/3rds of Americans view vegans unfavorably (Gutbrod 2013), while another reports that 30% of non-vegetarian online daters would not date a vegetarian (*Business Wire* 2012). Researchers in Britain have documented the tendency for mainstream media to portray vegans as ridiculous, hostile, angry, etc. (Cole & Morgan 2011), while in the United States, researchers find that Nonhuman Animal liberation efforts are frequently conflated with terrorism (Sorenson 2011).

¹ While not all vegans are activists for other animals, and not all activists are vegan, this study explores Nonhuman Animal rights media which is grounded in ethical veganism (veganism that is engaged as a political action against speciesism). The Nonhuman Animal rights movement tends to situate veganism as an idealized lifestyle for advocates, meaning that anti-speciesist and vegan rhetoric often overlap. Therefore, the terms will sometimes be used interchangeably.

43 While negative representation is common, representation itself, however, is rare. For the most
44 part, pro-animal messages are excluded altogether (Freeman 2009).

45
46 In part, this adverse response likely manifests as pushback against anti-speciesist
47 mobilization. The American Nonhuman Animal rights movement is a political movement that
48 advocates for the reform of Nonhuman Animal use or its abolition. With trillions of Nonhuman
49 Animals killed, tortured, or otherwise exploited annually across the globe, there is a principal
50 focus on alleviating systemic speciesism with most movement actors promoting some type of
51 dietary reform (Beers 2006). Although the movement hosts a variety of positions and continues
52 to support grassroots efforts, it likens other modern social justice movements with its power
53 centralized in professionalized non-profits, preference for moderated, reform-focused goals, and
54 tendency toward organizational isomorphism (Author year). Over its two centuries of activity,
55 the movement has generated considerable countermobilization from exploitative industries that
56 seek to reframe anti-speciesist activism as volatile and illegitimate (Jasper and Poulsen 1993,
57 Phelps 2007).

58
59 While researchers speak mostly to stereotypes of activists for Nonhuman Animals as
60 disturbed and violent, other identity markers related to race, gender, and class could be
61 restricting the movement's growth. Scholars of the American movement find that activists are
62 overwhelmingly women at about 80 per cent (Gaarder 2011). Most are middle-class and white
63 (Maurer 2002, The Humane League 2014).² In advocacy spaces, it is often thin women who are
64 used as movement representatives (Harper 2010) and women are also frequently sexually

² Scholars acknowledge a distinction between those who advocate politically for Nonhuman Animal rights and those who are vegan or vegetarian for cultural or religious purposes.

65 objectified (Adams 2004, Gaarder 2011). PETA is most frequently criticized for regularly
66 employing female sexual objectification as a tactic, but as a dominant presence in the American
67 movement, it has normalized this tactic for many smaller activist groups as well (Author year).³
68 Importantly, these representations are not a result of mainstream media bias, but are
69 constructions of the movement itself, meaning that the movement could be unnecessarily
70 aggravating these diversity problems identified by researchers. As will be discussed, poor
71 diversity can discredit the movement, but also undermine coalition-building.

72

73 Given the possibility that exclusionary representations may alienate movements from the
74 public and their pools of potential participants, this paper investigates how social movements
75 might disadvantage themselves in their mechanisms of self-presentation. There are a number of
76 ways that movements present themselves to the public, many of which must be filtered through
77 mass media to find platform. This study will specifically explore a sample of some media that is
78 produced by the movement itself (two leading magazine publications with large audiences), as
79 the findings could be speak to a disconnect in the movement’s framework. This is a disconnect
80 that is reasonably within the movement’s control to manipulate, and control is a precious
81 advantage rarely afforded to movements when negotiating in mass media spaces.

82

83 This paper will first determine the importance of media as an agent of socialization and its
84 relationship with social movements in a brief literature review. Social movements often prioritize

³ By way of example, PETA often employs nude or nearly nude Playboy models and volunteers to hold signs or hand out literature and food samples in public spaces. PETA’s “I’d Rather Go Naked Than” ad campaign, featuring pornified images of women, has been a primary tactic since the early 1990s. Smaller groups that have mimicked the PETA approach include Animal Liberation Victoria, Citizens United for Animals, Fish Love, and LUSH Cosmetics Fighting Animal Testing (author, year).

85 media exposure to recruit new members, though, as previously mentioned, mass media can be an
86 unreliable and sometimes dangerous tool (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993, Gitlin 2003). I will
87 argue that, while it is known that mainstream media can work to a movement's disadvantage,
88 movement-created media is also relevant to the conversation. Research indicates that
89 representations in media can both inspire and demotivate. If the Nonhuman Animal rights
90 movement is presenting a limited activist ideal-type, it may encourage participation from thin,
91 white women, but deter potential participants from other groups, especially certain marginalized
92 groups. For instance, poll research indicates that persons of color view vegans more favorably
93 than whites (Gutbrod 2013),⁴ but whites disproportionately identify as vegans in the United
94 States. A failure to recognize diversity in representations, then, could represent an incongruence
95 in claimsmaking, it could also represent a serious strategic oversight.

96
97 A number of movement pundits have speculated on this weakness in addition to Regan.
98 Kymlicka & Donaldson (2013), for instance, specifically cite the movement's failure to seriously
99 embrace multiculturalism as an important political obstacle. Harper (2010) has also identified
100 this shortcoming as a social justice issue, as entire communities of color have been alienated by
101 the movement and ignored by Nonhuman Animal rights and vegan outreach efforts. There is at
102 least some interest in improving diversity from an organizational standpoint, as evidenced by
103 groups like VegFund which prioritize outreach in communities of color and the proliferation of
104 multi-language outreach literature as published by groups like Vegan Outreach, Abolitionist
105 Approach, and Food Empowerment Project. It is also evidenced by PETA's attention to ethnic
106 enclaves in the United States (Drew 2010) and its establishment in other nations (PETA India,

⁴ Importantly, this data may be skewed due to the small response rate of non-white participants.

107 PETA Asia-Pacific, etc.). The Humane Research Council,⁵ a research non-profit that works with
108 Nonhuman Animal protection groups to improve efficacy, has also commented on the problem
109 of activist homogeneity (Glasser 2014). Failure to diversify could have the effect of limiting
110 participant numbers, skills and innovation, and access to other resource pools. Further, it runs the
111 risk of hypocrisy in advocating for species-inclusive diversity, while simultaneously being
112 unable to achieve human diversity in its own ranks. If only a particular demographic appears to
113 support rights for other animals, a lack of diversity may also drain the movement's cultural
114 capital. That is, a more diverse support for anti-speciesism may grant the position more
115 legitimacy with the public and would improve the audience's ability or willingness to respond to
116 outreach efforts (Einwohner 1999). In light of these criticisms, this study will illuminate
117 demographic trends that exist in movement-produced media. To accomplish this, a purposive
118 sample of exemplar cases was selected from two magazines that regularly feature human
119 subjects, are relatively highly visible to the public, and enjoy predominance in the movement.

120

121 **Literature Review**

122

123 *Media, Power, and Vulnerable Groups*

124

125 Social movements are mindful of media because it has the power to, for better or for
126 worse, shape attitudes and behaviors. The structure of media and the messages conveyed are
127 frequently rooted in social inequality. Media and communications research demonstrates that
128 media tends to reflect the epistemologies of those in power (Wilson & Gutiérrez 1995). In the

⁵ This organization has since rebranded itself as Faunalytics.

129 United States, this has generally meant a reflection of whiteness and maleness. As agents of
130 socialization, television, magazines, music, and other forms of mass communication work to
131 normalize existing power structures and encourage behaviors and attitudes that replicate those
132 structures (Holtzman 2000). Not surprisingly, white men dominate as both media creators and
133 media owners. White men also enjoy more representation and coverage within the media itself.
134 Marginalized groups such as women and people of color occupy few powerful positions in the
135 media industry (National Association for Multi-Ethnicity in Communications 2013), which
136 translates to relatively homogenous productions that are more likely to reflect privileged
137 populations. Likewise, when minorities *are* portrayed in mainstream newspapers, magazines,
138 television shows, and movies, they tend to be cast stereotypically in ways that reinforce their
139 inferior status (Baker 2005, Mastro and Greenberg 2000, Mastro and Stern 2003). More recent
140 research suggests that stereotypical representation is declining, though underrepresentation
141 remains pervasive (Monk-Turner et al. 2010).

142

143 The media has also maintained body image standards of thinness, sexuality, and beauty
144 which negatively and disproportionately impact women. Research shows that women are
145 increasingly sexualized in the media (Coltrane and Messineo 2000, Hatton and Trautner 2011). It
146 has also been suggested that exposure to sexually explicit media could foster misogynist attitudes
147 and increase men's aggressive behavior towards women (Kalof 1999, Lanis and Covell 1995,
148 MacKay and Covell 1997, Malamuth and Check 1981, Mundorf et al. 2007, Ward 2002). The
149 media's glorification of thin bodies and female sexualization is also linked to increased body
150 dissatisfaction and decreased self-esteem among women (Aubrey et al. 2009, Groesz et al. 2002,
151 Holmstrom 2004, Turner et al. 1997). Adding to this, weight discrimination is correlated with

152 hiring and promotional discrimination in the workplace and lower overall earnings, especially for
153 women (Puhl et al. 2008, Zagorsky 2004). Therefore, while media is a social construction and
154 may only depict ideations of reality, the consequences of these constructions are very real
155 indeed. Through its ability to “maintain boundaries in a culture” (Shoemaker and Reese 1996:
156 225), the media can both preserve power and entrench powerlessness.

157

158 *Social Movements, Media, and Motivation*

159

160 This relationship that exists between media, social problems, and power presents a
161 challenge for collective behavior. Social movement theorists warn that the media, “[. . .]
162 generally operate in ways that promote apathy, cynicism, and quiescence, rather than active
163 citizenship and participation” (Gamson et al. 1992: 373). Certainly, agents of social change are
164 aware of the role media plays in replicating social problems. Indeed, they often expend
165 considerable effort working to counteract the media’s effects. Many times, this is attempted by
166 infiltrating mainstream media sources (such as protesting with the intention of being covered by
167 the news or writing letters to the editor of newspapers). In this way, media coverage is used to
168 increase the movement’s visibility (Vliegenthart et al. 2005), diffuse claimsmaking, and recruit
169 new members (Andrews and Biggs 2006, Gamson 2004, Sampedro 1997). Media representations
170 can also be useful in fostering a movement’s identity and solidarity (Roscingno and Danaher
171 2001).

172

173 However, a large body of research has demonstrated that the media actually tends to
174 work *against* social movements by distorting their message or otherwise casting them in an

175 unfavorable light (Amenta et al. 2009, Gamson et al. 1992, McCarthy et al. 1996, Oliver &
176 Maney 2000). That is, movements usually do not enjoy the power to frame their message to their
177 liking in elite-controlled spaces. This is the case for the Nonhuman Animal rights movement as
178 explored above. Concerned with bias, movements may seek to produce their own media, with the
179 hopes that their message can be consumed without corruption. Or, if excluded from mainstream
180 spaces altogether, movements produce their own media to create a platform where otherwise
181 there is none (Downing 2001). For instance, many organizations create leaflets, magazines, and
182 videos that are hosted on the internet or public broadcasting stations, podcasts and radio shows,
183 newsletters, websites, and social networking sites. In fact, the advent of the internet has been an
184 especially useful and low-cost venue for movements with little resources or platform (Earl and
185 Schussman 2003).

186

187 While mainstream media outlets can be hit-or-miss for social movements, the power of
188 media to motivate participation and draw resources is unmistakable. News coverage was a major
189 source of information about protests during the Civil Rights movement (Andrews and Biggs
190 2006). Radio programs fostered solidarity for textile workers in the US South, enabling powerful
191 strikes (Roscigno and Danaher 2001). Photography has been creating awareness and inspiring
192 action for a litany of social issues including slavery, immigrant labor (Doherty 1976), and
193 Nonhuman Animal exploitation (Jasper and Poulsen 1995). Hence, media can draw attention to a
194 social problem, recruit new participants, and create a movement identity. It is this identity that
195 helps to maintain participation and attract new recruits.

196

197 Because identity is so essential to growing and maintaining movement participation, a
198 careful construction of that identity would presumably exist as a high priority goal. A welcoming
199 and encouraging identity can become a powerful tool in a movement’s repertoire. Research
200 indicates that marginalized groups can be motivated by “role models” that are seen to represent
201 them. For instance, female college students can be inspired to overcome gender barriers
202 associated with particular careers when they have access to female faculty members as role
203 models (Bettinger and Long 2005, Lockwood 2006). Likewise, the ill-effects of internalized
204 racism can also be mitigated by a positive role model. The election of President Obama has been
205 cited as a significant boost to the self-efficacy and academic performance for students of color
206 (Marx et al. 2009).⁶ In other words, when marginalized groups have someone to look to that
207 looks like them, they are apt to feel included and can gain a sense of agency. Advertisers that are
208 eager to appeal to a larger audience and increase product consumption have capitalized on this
209 response that representation can bring (Cortese 2008). The “pinkification” of “gender neutral”⁷
210 or otherwise masculine products to appeal to female-identified consumers is one example of
211 appealing to identity to affect purchasing behaviors (Paoletti 2012). While corporations may seek
212 to increase minority agency in order to facilitate their ability to consume values and purchase
213 products, social movements might want to invoke that agency towards collective action. A
214 movement identity that largely reflects the markers of privilege could be acting as a major
215 disincentive to those excluded from that ideal type.

216

⁶ Much of this research speaks to the “stereotype threat,” whereby stereotypes are internalized by marginalized groups. This is thought to negatively impact their attitudes and behaviors to the effect of fulfilling the stereotypes (Steele and Aronson 1995).

⁷ Many times “gender neutrality” centers boys and men as the default for humanity.

217 Recall that diversifying representations is a worthy goal for social change actors, as it can
218 earn a wider audience and increased resonance. This position derives, to some extent, from
219 Crenshaw’s (1991) intersectional perspective. Intersectionality understands various forms of
220 oppressions to be deeply related by mechanism and rooted, often, in the same beginnings. A
221 social justice framework that is non-intersectional, it is thought, fails to sufficiently imagine the
222 structure of oppression and unnecessarily alienates demographics from one another.

223

224 Alienation not only complicates coalition building (Ferree and Roth 1998), but it also stunts
225 motivation at the individual level. Media researchers Wilson & Gutiérrez (1995), for instance,
226 emphasize that the presence of representation can increase behavior change: “Media have their
227 greatest effect when they are used in a manner that reinforces and channels attitudes and
228 opinions that are consistent with the psychological makeup of the person and the social structure
229 of the groups with which he or she identifies” (44). In other words, media efficacy can be
230 improved with adequate representations of audience members. While this research speaks to
231 commercial interests, it could have implications for social change actors as well. I would suggest
232 that social movement media operates similarly to that of advertising because it is generally
233 intended to gain support and financial contributions from its audience. Media produced by
234 movements is intended to build solidarity and encourage participation, but in the
235 professionalized social change space, media also becomes an integral part of an organization’s
236 successful business model. Advocates working in non-profits and agencies in the areas of
237 domestic violence, rape, and prostitution have noted increased pressure to frame their literature
238 in corporate terms, describing their constituents as “clients” and their services as “products”
239 (Bierria 2007, Graham 2014). Likewise, major Nonhuman Animal rights organizations in the

240 United States also regularly include fundraising themes in their media. Some organizations
241 dedicate over a quarter of their media space to rallying financial support of this kind (Author
242 year [forthcoming]). Keeping in mind these relationships between media, representation, and
243 behavior change, it is worth considering that social movement media which routinely features
244 white, female subjects will attract support primarily from white women. For the American
245 Nonhuman Animal rights movement, repeated portrayals of thinness and sexualization could be
246 an attempt to “sell” the movement to women socialized to value and seek out that thinness and
247 sexualization. However, these identities are only obtainable for a select few. Women of color, for
248 instance, are often excluded from white-centric ideals of sexuality (Collins 2004).

249

250 Again, one of the most pressing challenges for social movements is motivating and
251 sustaining mobilization. Activists and other participants are essential to movement success as
252 sources of tactical innovation, leadership, organization, money, time, and other resources.
253 Because movements rely on a variety of resources and must usually appeal to a large segment of
254 the population to succeed, diversity among the ranks is often desired. Movements actively use
255 media to construct reality through their claimsmaking and identity maintenance. As feminist
256 theorist bell hooks (1994) stresses, what media portrays is no accident. Media creators are
257 actively working to tell a particular story. This study will contribute some part of what story is
258 being told in the Nonhuman Animal rights movement.

259

260 *The American Nonhuman Animal Rights Movement*

261

262 As previously discussed, the American Nonhuman Animal rights movement has been
263 soundly criticized for its homogenous membership as well as its failure to adequately address
264 vulnerable human communities (Harper 2010). For one, the movement is comprised mostly of
265 women, though this is likely due to a historical association between women, care-taking, and
266 nature (Adams and Donovan 1995, Author, year). However, the movement demonstrates distinct
267 race and class patterns as well, as it is comprised by mostly white and middle-class participants
268 (Maurer 2002, The Humane League 2014). Lundblad (2013) has speculated that concern for the
269 welfare of other animals was historically grounded in constructions of racial inequality and white
270 supremacy. That is, following the abolition of slavery in the United States, African Americans
271 were no longer characterized as docile and obedient servants, but became aggressive beast-like
272 sub-humans devoid of moral character. In colonized regions, the United States and Britain also
273 worked to construe non-white status with a predisposition towards Nonhuman Animal cruelty, a
274 discriminatory tactic that is evidenced in many anti-cruelty laws of the 19th and 20th centuries
275 (Deckha 2013, Wilson 2009). Caring about other animals became a “white thing,” yet another
276 status marker that worked to legitimize white rule and naturalize non-white inferiority.

277

278 While these associations have long histories, they are not completely invisible as there
279 has been some degree of negotiation with identity in advocacy spaces over the years. Men tend
280 to occupy many leadership positions and dominate theory production within the American
281 movement, but Nonhuman Animal advocacy remains sharply associated with femininity
282 (Gaarder 2011, Luke 2007). Indeed, plant-based diets and compassion for Nonhuman Animals
283 have been marked as effeminate, which is thought to be a major impediment to recruiting men
284 (Adams 2004, Luke 2007). Theoretically, opening up the movement to more men could lend

285 Nonhuman Animal advocacy the legitimacy it needs to increase resonance. Activists have been
286 keenly aware of this, and often lift men to visible, more prestigious positions and downplay
287 feminine attributions in favor of more masculine ones (Groves 2001, Hall 2006). As part of this
288 appeal to patriarchy, female advocates are frequently sexualized (Adams 2004). Hoping to
289 increase resonance with men under the mantra “sex sells,” more and more organizations are
290 relegating female participation to strip shows and soft-core pornography (Author year). This
291 bargain with patriarchy has been extremely off-putting to many women who view this posturing
292 as threatening, insulting, or counterproductive (Deckha 2008, Gaarder 2011, Glasser 2011).
293 Thus, women may dominate the American movement in both membership and the public’s
294 imagination, but men enjoy considerable control over the movement’s decision-making and
295 framing. As yet, there is no evidence to suggest such a strategy has increased male membership.
296 Indeed, one study that analyzed the tactics of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals
297 (PETA) concludes that using sexualized images of women actually *reduces* support for ethical
298 campaigns (Bongiorno et al. 2013). It is also worth considering that these tactics may be
299 solidifying male dominance and marginalizing female participation in advocacy spaces (Author
300 year).

301

302 The movement’s saturation with white privilege has created a similar effect among
303 communities of color. Nonhuman Animal advocacy’s strong association with whiteness has been
304 cited as a major deterrent to demographics of color (Harper 2010). Unfortunately, the movement
305 has aggravated this reaction by maintaining racist stereotypes about people of color and their
306 supposed tendency towards cruelty (Glick 2013). Furthermore, several organizations stubbornly
307 reproduce offensive and insensitive campaigns and tactics (such as the appropriation of slavery

308 and Holocaust language and imagery), despite growing criticism from communities of color
309 (Socha and Blum 2013, Kymlicka and Donaldson 2013).

310
311 Harper (2010) also notes the American movement’s tendency to celebrate idealized
312 vegan body types. In an attempt to brand Nonhuman Animal advocacy and veganism as chic,
313 healthy, and slimming, thin bodies predominate in advocacy spaces and promotional materials.⁸
314 Harper notes that many bodies of color do not fit within that idealized type. Indeed, she suggests
315 that these ideal types are not only slim, but often white, to the effect of further deepening the
316 association between whiteness and a “cruelty-free” lifestyle. While body type and race cannot be
317 separated, it is also important to recognize the classist implications of excluding larger body
318 types. Lower socioeconomic status is directly linked to obesity (McLaren 2007). For that matter,
319 the body-centric approach to veganism is sizeist in presuming that being bigger is inherently bad
320 and unhealthy. As Harper’s work documents, framing veganism as something for skinny and
321 wealthy white people can be off-putting. For those already active in the movement, this constant
322 affront on body weight has been alienating to vegans of size (Heather 2011).

323
324 Viewing veganism as a means for achieving the “perfect” body treats obesity as an
325 individual problem rather than a structural one. This is detrimental to social justice advocacy as
326 individualizing obesity (as a matter of personal choice and personal failure) is known to increase
327 weight stigma (Puhl and Heuer 2010). In turn, this stigma is often psychologically damaging to
328 people of size. It is also known to both *support* and *increase* weight-gain behaviors. It could be
329 the case, then, that the individualized approach to veganism which frames it as a means to lose

⁸ See Dr. John McDougall’s 2008 essay “The Fat Vegan” in the *McDougall Newsletter* 7 (12) for an example of how thinness is encouraged as a positive representation of the vegan movement.

330 weight could be aggravating stigma, thus having the opposite effect on larger individuals by
331 repelling them rather than inviting them. In addition to race and class implications, recall that an
332 unrealistically thin and sexualized identity is also linked to the societal devaluation of women.
333 Social movement media that engages in sexualization and the normalization of thinness,
334 therefore, might stunt recruitment *and* contribute to inequality. If countering inequality is integral
335 to that movement's goals, this could be particularly contradictory and problematic.

336

337 Given this gendered and racialized context, it is fair to suggest that, while mainstream,
338 elite-controlled media certainly disadvantages social movements, social movements *themselves*
339 could play a major role in limiting their resonance. Speaking directly to these issues as
340 manifested in *VegNews*, a magazine sampled in this study, sociologist Bob Torres explains:

341 Because of the often exclusive focus on some of its practitioners, this brand of veganism
342 will never be able to make real connections with other movements or forms of
343 oppression. It must first slough off its latent desires to normalize classist and racist
344 domination through the promotion of a lifestyle and matching consumer goods that are
345 impossible or difficult for most people to accrue. (2006: 137)

346

347 Class and consumerism are not included in this study, but Torres' observation of constricting
348 identities dominating Nonhuman Animal rights media spaces is relevant to the relationship
349 between movement diversity and success. This study seeks to explore gender, race,
350 sexualization, and body type representations in some prominent media produced by the
351 American Nonhuman Animal rights movement. Thus far, I have argued that, because media
352 plays a powerful role in constructing identity and motivating attitudes and behavior, how a
353 movement presents itself to its constituents is an important variable in social movement success.
354 While a movement may have little control over mainstream media bias, it *does* have control over
355 its own media. How a movement chooses to mobilize its self-produced media resources is likely

356 correlated with resonance, membership, available resources, and goal attainment. Because this
357 content analysis is exploratory only, it cannot speak directly to the relationship between identity
358 representation and social movement success. However, it can provide important implications for
359 social movements based on preexisting research that demonstrates the media's clear correlation
360 with social attitudes and behaviors. This study will provide an important first step in this inquiry
361 by calculating the actual representation of various identities in some particularly visible
362 Nonhuman Animal rights media spaces.

363

364 **Methodology**

365

366 To explore identity representation in Nonhuman Animal rights spaces, a content analysis
367 was conducted using two leading American publications in the American Nonhuman Animal
368 rights movement: *VegNews* and PETA's *Animal Times*. These two publications were chosen
369 because they are widely distributed, regularly feature human subjects on their covers, and have a
370 back catalog large enough to facilitate analysis. Many other publications mostly picture
371 Nonhuman Animals or have short publication histories. *VegNews* has about a quarter of a million
372 readers and is sold in major grocery chains, natural food stores, and bookstores. PETA mails
373 issues of *Animal Times* to all paying members and associates, a number well over 3 million.⁹
374 Both magazines feature celebrities, models, and activists as cover subjects. For this study, only
375 American magazines were explored. This may reasonably speak to the Western Nonhuman
376 Animal rights movement in general, but further demographic research in other Western countries

⁹ Unfortunately, I was unable to obtain demographic information regarding readership, as PETA does not make this information available. *Animal Times* has an international readership, but it is produced in America and prioritizes Western culture. *VegNews* explicitly states on its website that reader information is never shared.

377 and also non-Western regions would be appropriate for future studies. Also better suited to future
378 studies would be additional interviewing to ascertain the actual impact magazine covers are
379 having on the audience. For the purposes of this study, content analysis was decided to be most
380 economical and appropriate as the goal is to initially determine the diversity of media subjects in
381 the sample, while later studies could determine the actual impact of that diversity.

382
383 Movements produce a wide variety of media, but magazines were chosen for their
384 visibility and influence in public spaces. Magazine covers are convenient in terms of availability
385 to the researcher and the consistency among units, but they are also frequently used as units of
386 analysis by social scientists because industry treats them as a sales tool. Researching the
387 gendered impact of body type portrayals on magazine covers, Malkin, Wornian, & Chrisler
388 (1999) explain that the information displayed on covers are usually all a viewer has time to
389 process. Their purpose is to influence quickly and persuade consumers to purchase them. While
390 *VegNews* is not associated with a Nonhuman Animal rights organization (though it has a clear
391 anti-speciesist agenda) and PETA's *Animal Times* is distributed primarily to paying members
392 (though magazines are intended to be shared and they are also promoted on PETA's website),
393 both still likely play a role in influencing movement recruitment. While not fully representative
394 by any means, both magazines are highly visible and represent major actors in the movement.

395
396 Change makers understand that prominent media of this kind can have tangible influence
397 over demographic representations off the printed page. Advocates for yoga as a means of
398 healthfulness, self-empowerment, and decolonization, for instance, have pointed to the
399 dominance of white-centric, thin women in yoga magazines as one reason for lack of diversity in

400 Western practice (Barcelos 2011, Park 2014). Magazines have also been studied by
401 psychologists as they are thought to influence dissatisfaction with physical appearance and
402 problematize eating behaviors (Morry and Staska 2001), sexual socialization and self-concept
403 (Beggan and Allison 2003). Magazine covers in particular act as “windows” to the content
404 inside, and are carefully constructed to draw on particular psychological mechanisms to attract
405 attention, disseminate information, facilitate a particular feeling, and encourage viewers to
406 purchase (Held 2005). Magazine covers are considered rather unique in their ability to convey a
407 particular mood and bring prominence to a particular narrative or concept (Spiker 2003).

408

409 With the exception of covers that did not feature human subjects, 149 subjects from 131
410 magazine covers between 2000 and 2012 were analyzed (47 subjects from *Animal Times* and 102
411 subjects from *VegNews*). As only two magazines were included, this would challenge the
412 generalizability of the results. Again, major magazines that fail to regularly feature human
413 subjects were excluded from the study, but opening up the sample to include other species or
414 non-animal subjects like food would improve representativeness. Arguably, nonhuman subjects
415 might circumvent gender, race, and size privilege and may be more welcoming to marginalized
416 demographics. However, this gender, race, and size “neutrality” as it were would likely still run
417 the risk of maintaining the stereotypical activist identity as the unspoken default in a space
418 known to have problems with inequality, as frequently happens with manifestations of “gender
419 neutrality” and “color-blindness.”

420

421 Another limitation is the inherent subjectivity of coding identity. This analysis was able
422 to draw on preexisting coding standards for sexualization (Hatton and Trautner 2011) and body

423 type (Johnson 1990). The body type coding scheme utilized is rather straight forward as it
424 utilizes visual representatives and brief text descriptions of five possible body types for the
425 researcher to compare with the subject in question. However, the sexualization coding was
426 particularly complex, with points assigned to number of items that, cumulatively, form a
427 sexualized image.¹⁰ This could include parted lips, sexually suggestive text, self-touching,
428 revealing clothing, or the display of the entire body (as opposed to just the face). For instance,
429 PETA's Fall 2007 issue of *Animal Times* features a woman looking over her bare shoulder with
430 parted lips. In this unit, enough indicators are present to code this image as sexualized. PETA's
431 Winter 2008 issue of *Animal Times* features a recumbent nude woman partially covered by chili
432 peppers. She is self-touching, posing in a sexually suggestive manner, and has the majority of her
433 body exposed. The text assigned to the image reads, "THAT'S HOT!" In this instance, enough
434 indicators are present that this subject would be coded as hyper-sexualized.

435

436 Without a pre-existing template of this kind for gender and racial identity, gender and
437 race categories were ultimately up to the researcher's discretion. The fluidity of both gender and
438 race can make identification challenging. While the entirety of the content analysis was
439 conducted by the primary researcher, a secondary researcher was enlisted for the purposes of a

¹⁰ Hatton & Trautner's scheme allows for 23 total points on a sexualization scale. These are grouped into sections on clothing and nudity, touching others or self-touching, pose, position of mouth, exposure of breasts, chest, genitals, and buttocks, nature of accompanying text, head vs. body shot, demonstration of a sex act, and sexual role play. Each of these sections accounts for a number of possible indicators that can count towards a point. If five or more points are scored, the image is considered sexualized. If 10 or more are present, it is considered hyper-sexualized.

440 reliability check.¹¹ There was 82 per cent agreement on a 10 per cent sample, with much of the
441 disagreement involving difficult to identify or ambiguous racial identity.¹²

442

443 **Results and Discussion**

444

445 The content analysis conducted here seems to support existing research and speculations
446 regarding the demographics of the American Nonhuman Animal rights movement. Out of the
447 149 subjects analyzed, 87 per cent are white, 60 per cent are female, and 93 per cent are thin.
448 Thirteen per cent are sexualized. *VegNews* and *Animal Times* present an image of Nonhuman
449 Animal advocacy that is relatively privileged and not especially diverse. Again, this content
450 analysis did not explore how the audience might be interpreting these media patterns, but they do
451 align with previous observations that the movement is not adequately presenting itself as a
452 diverse space.

453

454 *Gender*

455

¹¹ The secondary researcher enlisted for reliability check is a coauthor for a similar study on social movement media that compares data in this study to that of comparable social movements. The researcher is therefore familiar with the study and sampling method. Unfortunately, the identity of the secondary researcher overlaps considerably with that of the primary researcher. Both identify as white cis-gender American women in their early thirties. Due to the similarities in identities, any diversity of interpretation would be limited.

¹² The 10 per cent sample was chosen randomly from each magazine sample. Because race resists categorization and the coding disagreement spoke to racial ambiguity, the researchers were not able to agree on a means of clarifying race categories. No major changes were made to the categories utilized by the primary researcher other than a slightly stronger reliance on the “other/unknown” category.

456 While women comprise 80 per cent of the American movement (Gaarder 2011), they comprise
457 only slightly more than half of the magazine subjects (Table 1). Men maintain a sizable presence
458 of 40 per cent. Again, such a small sample size will grant only limited generalizability, but the
459 patterns identified by previous research in the movement may put the findings into context. This
460 disproportionate representation of men in the sample could reflect the privileged status men
461 enjoy in general, or, it could reflect the movement’s tendency to elevate men and disassociate
462 from stereotypes of femininity. Alternatively, it may simply be indicative of the Nonhuman
463 Animal rights movement’s attempt (or at least these editors’ attempt) to be more inclusive to
464 men. While combating stereotypes about Nonhuman Animal advocacy as a strictly female
465 interest is useful for diversifying the movement’s ranks, advocates should also be concerned
466 about aggravating sexist attitudes and strengthening patriarchal control over the movement. It is
467 certainly puzzling that men are the only movement “minority” that is overrepresented in the
468 context of the actual numbers in the ranks, whereas people of color and people of size in the
469 sample do not experience the same. So, rather than an example of successful diversity in
470 representation, this could simply reflect male dominance. Interviewing in follow up studies could
471 enlighten these findings.

472

473 *Race*

474

475 Gender imbalance may not clearly surface, but the racial imbalance is far more prevalent.
476 African Americans comprise around 13 per cent of the US population (US Census Bureau 2012),
477 but only 7 per cent of the magazine sample population (Table 2). Hispanic and Latin@s
478 comprise 17 per cent of the US population, but less than 1 per cent of covers. Asians are

479 relatively well represented in the sample at 4.7 per cent, considering they make up around 5 per
480 cent of the US population. These numbers reflect findings from movement surveys that report a
481 white majority (Maurer 2002) and also support Harper’s (2010) observations regarding the
482 “whiteness” of advocacy spaces. However, representativeness among whites and Asian
483 Americans might also align with Jasper’s (1997) theory of post-citizenship mobilization,
484 whereby groups that are better integrated in a given society are thought more apt to participating
485 in collective behavior that seeks to improve the condition of others. Some vegan advocates of
486 color might disagree with the presumption that the disenfranchised are uninterested or
487 uninvolved in Nonhuman Animal rights work. An online advocacy project known as
488 *#BlackVegansRock: 100 Black Vegans to Check Out* showcases an extremely diverse group of
489 Black identified vegans from various backgrounds, professions, and interests. As the author
490 explains, people of color want to be involved and many *are* involved, but the white-led
491 movement impedes on their visibility. Efforts to increase visibility in independent spaces like
492 *#BlackVegansRock* seek to overcome “the routine exclusion of black folks” (Kocięda 2015).

493

494 *Body Type*

495

496 Imbalance was also indicated in the shapes of the subjects. While vegans and vegetarians
497 on average tend to weigh less than their flesh-eating counterparts, some research indicates that as
498 much as 29 per cent of plant-based eaters are considered overweight or obese (Newby et al.
499 2005),¹³ but the magazines overwhelmingly depict thin figures, with persons of size representing

¹³ This study included only women, who are more prone to weight gain. This figure also includes semi-vegetarians, which likely inflates percent overweight or obese. Another British study that looks only at obesity (rather than obese *and* overweight individuals) reports that 3 per cent of

500 less than 1 per cent of subjects (Table 3). The sample, therefore, does not reflect the average
501 body in the public, nor does it reflect actual diversity in the ranks. Importantly, many of the
502 subjects included in the study were headshots only, meaning that they were coded as the default
503 of “fit and thin” unless their face showed evidence of more weight. Not all individuals can be
504 differentiated by weight based on facial structure. Regardless, the number of subjects who are
505 clearly not “fit and thin” according to the Johnson (1990) coding scheme is extremely small. This
506 pattern is understandable given the association between veganism, weight loss, and the socially
507 constructed ideal of a “healthy” body weight. The movement is likely drawing on the appeal of
508 thin privilege to entice new members, but the lack of body type diversity in Nonhuman Animal
509 rights media could be unwelcoming to persons of size and could very likely aggravate inaccurate
510 or offensive stereotypes about weight and health. It is also worth noting that there are few
511 muscular subjects as well (all of whom are male). This may be indicative of the feminization of
512 veganism and vegetarianism. Plant-based eating is often constructed as appropriate for women
513 because it is associated with weight loss and compassion for Nonhuman Animals.¹⁴ On the other
514 hand, “bulking up” and weightlifting is seen as a masculine endeavor and does not appear to
515 enjoy the same degree of prominence in the claimmaking featured in the sample.¹⁵

516

517 *Sexualization*

518

male vegan participants and 5 per cent of female vegan participants were considered obese (Key and Davey 1996).

¹⁴ See Alicia Silverstone’s (2009) *The Kind Diet: A Simple Guide to Feeling Great, Losing Weight, and Saving the Planet* and Rory Freedman and Kim Barnouin’s (2005) *Skinny Bitch: A No-Nonsense Tough-Love Guide for Savvy Girls Who Want to Stop Eating Crap and Start Looking Fabulous!*

¹⁵ At this time I am not aware of any research that would confirm this observation, but it is offered as a general reflection on subject representations in the sample.

519 In addition to restrictive portrayals of body types in the sample, the presentation of those bodies
520 could also inform the magazine's appeal, as well as convey its attitudes toward women. Though
521 the Nonhuman Animal rights movement has been heavily criticized for its reliance on sexualized
522 images of women (Adams 2004, Deckha 2008, Gaarder 2011, Author year), the vast majority of
523 magazine covers (87 per cent) do not portray a sexualized subject (Table 4) and there was little
524 evidence to support sexualization is an increasing trend. Of the 13 per cent that is sexualized,
525 only about 1 per cent of this is hyper-sexualized. This study utilized the coding methodology of
526 Hatton & Trautner's (2011) survey of *Rolling Stone* covers which finds a pattern of increasing
527 sexualization across the decades, with 83 per cent of women (and 17 per cent of men) sexualized.
528 At least compared to the popular music scene, Nonhuman Animal rights magazines in this
529 sample are relatively subdued. Given the movement's heavy use of nudity to attract membership
530 in print campaigns and public demonstrations in spite of research that demonstrates the repellent
531 effect it has, the lack of sexualization on magazine covers is good news for a movement that
532 values effective outreach. However, inequality of representation is still present. As consistent
533 with other analyses of sexualization in the media, the overwhelming majority (88 per cent) of
534 sexualized subjects in the sample are female (Table 5). Furthermore, 37 per cent of subjects of
535 color are sexualized, compared to only 10 per cent of white subjects (Table 6). Only two subjects
536 were coded as hyper-sexualized, both are persons of color. While this number is far too small to
537 be statistically significant, this could be indicative of racial stereotypes regarding persons of
538 color and hyper-sexuality (Adams 2004, Collins 2004) and could be worth investigating in future
539 research. Print campaign advertisements and public demonstrations where nudity is most
540 notoriously observed would likely offer a more appropriate sampling pool for exploring
541 intersections in race and sexualization.

542

543 Although the findings do not suggest that sexualization is as prevalent on magazines covers as
544 might be expected, the relationship between sexualization and activist mobilization commands
545 careful consideration nonetheless. Recall that research has shown that female sexualization is
546 increasing in other media spaces (Coltrane and Messineo 2000, Hatton and Trautner 2011), and
547 that these images have been linked to sexist attitudes and behaviors (Kalof 1999, Lanis and
548 Covell 1995, MacKay and Covell 1997, Malamuth and Check 1981, Mundorf et al. 2007, Ward
549 2002), self-objectification, and low self-esteem (Aubrey et al. 2009, Groesz et al. 2002,
550 Holmstrom 2004, Turner et al. 1997). The Nonhuman Animal rights movement and the mediums
551 that represent it might consider avoiding this trend if the hope is to remain welcoming to
552 marginalized groups and to avoid eroding the agency and self-efficacy of female-identified
553 advocates. The sample in this study may have used nudity in moderation, but it appears to be
554 more heavily utilized in negotiations with mass media where movement actors have to contend
555 with gatekeeping. In these cases, nudity is used as a means of soliciting attention in order to
556 overcome the mass media's underrepresentation of social movement activity.

557

558 **Alternative Approaches**

559 Einwohner (1999), Kymlicka & Donaldson (2013), and the Humane Research Council (Glasser
560 2014) point to the American Nonhuman Animal rights movement's failure to engage
561 multiculturalism as a political obstacle to achieving legitimacy for anti-speciesist claimsmaking.
562 Harper (2010) furthers that this phenomenon is also an ethical problem for the vulnerable human
563 groups who are marginalized from advocacy spaces and ignored by outreach efforts. This study's
564 findings can offer some clarity to this concern with homogeneity. Recall that representation in

565 media facilitates agency and behavior change (Wilson and Gutiérrez 1995), a relationship that
566 should interest any social movement interested in success. An analysis of *VegNews* and *Animal*
567 *Times* demonstrates that this motivating and advantageous multicultural representation seems to
568 be lacking in at least some major Nonhuman Animal rights media spaces.

569
570 Given these results and the implications they could have for movement efficacy, it is worth
571 addressing some possible means of improving diversity in social movement media. Though
572 *VegNews* and *Animal Times* are especially visible and likely have greater influence, alternatives
573 do exist in the form of grassroots and small non-profit outreach efforts. Harper's Sistah Vegan
574 Project,¹⁶ for instance, regularly attracts people of color and other demographics marginalized
575 from mainstream Nonhuman Animal rights spaces. Harper's project entails books, blogs, videos,
576 conferences, webinars, lectures, and social media networking to increase diversity of interests
577 and widen the circle of vegan and anti-speciesist community. Importantly, she also presents
578 veganism as a multi-issue political effort. Rather than focusing on veganism as a means of
579 achieving an idealized weight, she rejects the notion of a "perfect" body and demonstrates that
580 veganism is an effective means of enacting the decolonization of vulnerable groups. Instead of
581 billing veganism as a means to get skinny and sexy, she presents it as a means of liberating
582 oppressed groups from animal-based diets that are relics of colonization, enslavement, and
583 violence against humans and nonhumans alike.

584

¹⁶ <http://www.sistahvegan.com>

585 Likewise, the Food Empowerment Project seeks to ground vegan outreach efforts in the larger
586 framework of social justice.¹⁷ Food Empowerment outreach materials are bilingual, with a
587 primary emphasis on the issues facing Hispanic communities in the United States and
588 communities of color living in developing nations. The project offers a vegan retention program,
589 a library of traditional Hispanic recipes that have been veganized, and a monthly newsletter. The
590 newsletter is intended to improve vegan retention by speaking to those topics that resonate with
591 poor communities and communities of color, issues that are largely ignored by the
592 professionalized Nonhuman Animal rights movement. VINE Sanctuary offers another important
593 alternative, focusing on the LGBTQ community and actively seeking to ally veganism and anti-
594 speciesism advocacy with other social justice efforts.¹⁸

595
596 Should any of these entities reach the commercial success of PETA and *VegNews* and begin
597 publishing sophisticated print periodicals, perhaps their commitment to diversity would
598 materialize in the human representations illustrating their magazine covers. Alternate vegan
599 narratives and diverse identities have great potential to expand advocacy ranks. Unfortunately,
600 those organizations that are attempting to do so are relatively small, resource-poor, and quite
601 powerless in the larger social movement space. As such, none of the aforementioned
602 organizations have a sizable presence in the American movement, and they lack mainstream
603 representation via glossy magazines. These organizations are small and under-funded, meaning
604 that they do not produce material that would be comparable to the scale and prominence of
605 PETA or *VegNews*. Nonetheless, the content of their work does demonstrate potential for
606 informed media creation.

¹⁷ <http://www.foodispower.org>

¹⁸ <http://www.vine.bravebirds.org>

607

608 **Conclusion**

609

610 The results of this study indicate that thin, white women are the most commonly represented in
611 popular vegan media. For a social movement that has been highly criticized for ostracizing
612 underprivileged groups and potential allies (Socha and Blum 2013, Kymlicka and Donaldson
613 2013, Author year 2016), these trends identified should be cause for concern for social justice
614 movements. Because the media constructs both reality and the imaginable, social change actors
615 may benefit from acknowledging how their own media may be influencing participation. While
616 activists and organizations have very limited control over mainstream media coverage of their
617 social movement activities (and much of that coverage tends to be negative or neutralizing),
618 movements *do* have control over their own media. If the American Nonhuman Animal rights
619 movement seeks to increase its diversity, it should begin to reflect that desire in media
620 representations. PETA and *VegNews* would be good candidates for leading this change. Diversity
621 in the ranks is an essential component for growth and alliance building. The Nonhuman Animal
622 rights movement is a relatively under-resourced movement that enjoys little positive media
623 coverage. Self-produced media is one of the few areas the movement does have control over and
624 could easily improve.

625

626 The small scale of this study leaves many questions and merits further study on a number of
627 points. First, despite the small sample size, it is notable that sexualized and hyper-sexualized
628 subjects were more likely to be persons of color. Of the 19 persons of color coded in the study, 6
629 were also coded as sexualized or hyper-sexualized. Additional research would be useful here to

630 explore how sexist and racist stereotypes may be reinforced in movement cultures by its media.
631 As it stands, those non-white and non-thin body types that do land covers exist in this sample
632 only as tokens. That is, their representation is small, and, according to Harper's thesis, likely
633 very superficial. Without media that seriously embraces and explores experiences outside the
634 white, thin, female default, even occasional representation will be rendered meaningless. For
635 instance, if people of color (African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, etc.) are to be included on
636 covers, whiteness would be replicated nonetheless if the magazines themselves continue to focus
637 on white values, experiences, and interests. In many cases, people of color were presented on
638 covers as charity cases, particularly as those in need of food and disaster relief.¹⁹ Likewise, if
639 these magazines were to feature persons of size on covers, only to replicate sizeism and thin
640 privilege in the body of the magazine, the cover's potential to foster diversity is likely nullified.
641 This extends beyond the magazine rack to advocacy spaces in general. In addition to
642 discouraging minority participation, tokenistic representations may also work to reinforce
643 stereotypes (Cortese 2008). The movement must do more than symbolically include diverse
644 persons; it must actively seek to address and embrace a diversity of perspectives, interests, and
645 experiences as well.

646

647 Diversifying magazine content, then, is only the first step in dismantling hindering and
648 unwelcoming stereotypes about Nonhuman Animal advocacy. Social movements battle with
649 existing power structures for the right to construct reality, but they must also conduct that battle
650 internally. Fortunately, there are some important grassroots efforts to remedy this shortcoming.
651 As we have seen, the Food Empowerment Project works to fill the gap between vegan outreach

¹⁹ *VegNews* 2000, November/December (3); *VegNews* 2001, February (5); *Animal Times* 2005, Fall.

652 and underserved communities, particularly the Latina/Latino community. Harper's Sistah Vegan
653 Project also gives platform to women of color, women of size, queer women, and other
654 marginalized groups. Movement organizers could benefit from cooperating with these grassroots
655 efforts to improve resonance and identify problematic representations. Likewise, additional
656 research to test what impact these demographic trends are actually having on viewers would be
657 invaluable. Additional research could illuminate this possibility by perhaps surveying those who
658 have been exposed to movement-produced media using interviews or focus groups. It may also
659 be helpful to understand the ways in which movement leaders and professionalized organizations
660 conceptualize both diversity and the challenges to achieving it. Finally, in depth analysis of anti-
661 speciesist media that explores the *content* of magazines (and other mediums) can offer a more
662 nuanced understanding of identity politics and indicate areas that could be improved. This may
663 be particularly relevant for analyzing issues surrounding cis-normativity and heteronormativity,
664 as a cover image may not be as forthcoming on some identity representations.

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