



BLOG RESOURCES CALENDAR SHOP ABOUT

VEGAN FEMINISM AND THE CRITICAL ROLE OF EDUCATION. INTERVIEW WITH COREY L. WRENN.

February 22, 2020 | India

Dr. Corey Lee Wrenn is an academic scholar and lecturer of Sociology with the School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research at the University of Kent. In July 2013, she founded the [Vegan Feminist Network](#) as an online platform to make vegan feminist theory more available to non-academics. In this interview she talks about the importance of vegan feminism, the role education can play in fighting oppression, and how she incorporates intersectional social justice praxis in her teaching.

Q: When and how did you first into contact with veganism and how has your outlook on veganism changed since?

My first connection with veganism was through PETA literature. I was vegetarian since the age of 13 in the early 90s; these were the days before the internet, so I wrote to PETA and received some informational pamphlets. As soon as I learned how my nonvegan food choices hurt other animals, I was ready to opt out of dairy. I've now been vegan for about 20 years. My outlook hasn't changed much as I got into radical vegan politics pretty early on and I've only grown from there.

Q: You founded the [Vegan Feminist Network](#) (VFN) in 2013. What prompted you to start the project and how has it evolved over the years?

In 2012, I started teaching gender at Colorado State University. I found that a lot of the material I was working with for this class had considerable relevance for my activism—yet I was finding extreme resistance to feminist politics in most activist spaces. At that time, there really wasn't any online platform for these radical feminist ideas. Most vegan feminist theory was secluded away in expensive academic books in university libraries—it wasn't really accessible to the average activist. I started VFN with my colleagues C. E. Abbate and [Aph Ko](#) to provide a platform to young women whose radical feminist theory was generally unwelcome in the larger movement discourse. Today, vegan feminist blogs abound—I like to think VFN was a part of that normalization.



Photo credit: Corey L. Wrenn.
[Image description: Head shot of Corey smiling at the camera.]

Q: How would you define vegan feminism and why is it so important?

Vegan feminism recognizes that both sexism and speciesism are rooted in oppression, hierarchies, and domination. Most fundamentally, species and gender division, two of the oldest forms of social distinction, emerged together. Today, as the work of Carol Adams [interviewer's note: click [here](#) for our interview with Carol J. Adams], Marti Kheel, and others demonstrates, we recognize that women are often animalized, while nonhuman animals are frequently feminized. This animalization and feminization work concurrently to normalize inequality and violence against marginalized groups. It is important because it really is at the root of the inequality activists are seeking to unpack. It isn't selfish for activists to "bring sex into it" or "bring race into it". Quite the opposite: it's good sound theory which informs better activism. If activists can't recognize how oppression works, they're in no position to combat it. In fact, the movement has a serious problem with sexism and sexual violence, indicating that we need to get our own house in order before we can start fighting effectively for others.

Q: What are the most important lessons that you have learned since starting the Vegan Feminist Network?

Primarily, I have learned that the intersecting oppressions experienced by marginalized humans and other animals are vastly underappreciated in the animal rights movement and that, based on the considerable pushback our work has incited, there is an underlying vein of sexism. Yet, I have also received a lot of positive feedback from women (especially young women) who have felt very validated and encouraged by our work, which is definitely promising.

Q: How is sexism perpetuated in the animal advocacy movement and what can we do to counteract this?

Sexism is perpetuated in a number of ways, primarily through hierarchical advocacy structures (which rely on deference to authority and inequality, a structural pattern that is inevitably male-serving). Furthermore, the movement has a penchant for celebrity-worship, which, in a patriarchal society, again, invariably benefits men. Women's contributions tend to be devalued as too emotional or simply illegitimate. Lastly, sexual harassment and sexual assault have been documented as rampant, and victim-blaming is the more common response rather than accountability.

Q: Do you receive criticism regarding your work - e.g. your critical stance on prostitution and pornography - and how do you respond to this?

I frequently get sexist criticisms that are common to any feminist activist. For instance, I am often accused of attention-seeking, a trope which draws on the expectation that women put others first, stay quiet, and have nothing legitimate to be complaining about. I'm also told that I need to put animals first and ignore my own experiences with oppression which, again, pulls on the sexist expectation that women put themselves last—by comparison, few lob accusations of selfishness at men who find themselves in legal trouble for their animal activism when they repeatedly pressure the activist community for legal help, financial support, etc. Likewise, middle-class folks who dominate nonprofits and take a salary off donations for other animals are rarely accused of such selfishness. There is also criticism from within the vegan feminist movement which purports to be "pro sex". This reflects the neoliberal turn in feminism and

activism, equating the individual experience of more privileged women who get the luxury of “choosing” to participate in sexist industries as a form of “liberation” with the more widespread and commonplace sex trafficking.

Q: What role does education play in fighting oppression?

The first wave of women-led animal advocacy had long recognized education as a critical tactic in undermining speciesism. Many of these women emphasized humane education in churches, schools, and communities. Today, women continue this role, acknowledging that continual policing of speciesist behaviors will be an exercise in futility without striking at the roots of oppression. Sociologist Antonio Gramsci recognized that, in order to combat oppressive state hegemony, a counterhegemony would need to be facilitated and popularized. That is, he believed in the power of culture in challenging inequality. Indeed, state institutions such as government, law, policing, religion, etc. have historically been wielded in the ideological control of unequal power relations, such that, activists will likely find it difficult to make serious headway in relying on the ‘tools of the oppressor’. If reforms, policies, etc. are limited in their capacities to liberate (and predictably they will be as they emerge from state institutions, and the state functions primarily to protect elite interests), education provides an important counter-tactic which can be affordably utilized by activists.



Photo credit: Corey L. Wrenn.

[Image description: Corey standing in front of a seated audience while delivering a talk at Kent Vegan Festival in May 2019.]

Q: As a lecturer of Sociology at the University of Kent, how do you incorporate intersectional social justice praxis in your teaching?

Fortunately, universities in the UK are embracing a ‘decolonize the curriculum’ campaign. Lecturers are now working to ensure that course content considers power relations, legacies of colonialism, ongoing inequalities, and how those may even surface in our teaching materials. I regularly incorporate critiques of sexism, racism, speciesism, etc. in my lectures and ensure there are a diversity of contributors in the theory and readings I cover. As a sociologist, I take this a step further and emphasize how capitalism is a key contributor to these divisions. I encourage students to envision an alternate future in which competition and conflict are not the status quo, but instead comradery, solidarity, and fairness.

As far as programming, I am involved with the human/animal relations research group with the Department of Psychology which focuses on research that can turn folks vegan and liberate other animals. I work most closely with psychologist Dr. Kristof Dhont – we have organized an [animal advocacy conference](#) at our university for June 2020 and hope to build a university-wide research center in future years. I currently co-direct the [Centre for the Study of Political and Social Movements](#) at my university as well, and regularly host vegan scholars who give research talks to the university and Canterbury community. Ideally, I would like to organize a vegan studies postgraduate program in the future—although the current financial crisis in the UK university system means I may have to wait some time to bring this project to fruition.

Q: Since finishing your doctoral thesis “[Professionalization, Factionalism, and Social Movement Success: A Case Study on Nonhuman Animal Rights Mobilization](#)” you have expanded your work in the area and published your book “[Piecemeal Protest: Animal Rights in the Age of Nonprofits](#)” in 2019. Could you briefly explain what your book is about and what the key findings from your research were?

Modern social movements are dominated by bureaucratically-oriented nonprofits, a special arrangement which creates significant tension between activists and movement elites who compete for success in a corporate political arena. *Piecemeal Protest* examines the impact of nonprofitization on factionalism and a movement's ability to mobilize, resonate, and succeed. My research finds that entities with greater symbolic capital are positioned to monopolize claimsmaking, disempower competitors (particularly radicals, including feminists), and replicate hegemonic power, eroding democratic access to dialogue and decision-making essential for movement health.

Q: What are your plans and hopes for the future?

I have just been offered a contract on my third book, *Animals in Irish Society*, which applies vegan feminist theory to examine intersections of animality, class, and colonialism in the oppression of humans and other animals in Ireland. As the manuscript is complete, it is likely to publish with SUNY Press in 2021. I'm also working on two new books on environmental injustice in Appalachia and vegan feminism with a focus on mobilization in the 2nd and 3rd waves of the animal rights movement. The latter project will hopefully take advantage of the Marti Kheel collection at Harvard University as well as interviews with important leaders of modern vegan feminism. Most vegan feminist texts only prioritize Victorian advocacy, which I believe is a critical gap in the literature.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to share at this point?

Folks can follow my research on my [website](#); there, they can sign up for a newsletter summarizing my work which I publish 3-4 times a year. I can also be followed on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

Books written by Corey:

- Corey Wrenn. 2016. *A Rational Approach to Animal Rights: Extensions in Abolitionist Theory*. Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Corey Wrenn. 2019. *Piecemeal Protest: Animal Rights in the Age of Nonprofits*. The University of Michigan Press.

You can also find a list of her [essays](#) and publications [here](#).

Note: This interview was carried out in written form via e-mail correspondence. We thank Dr. Corey L. Wrenn for taking the time to answer these questions.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed and informations provided in this interview are prepared to the interviewee's and the interviewer's best capacity and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of The Vegan Rainbow Project itself. Please also not that people change and so do their opinions. We kindly ask you to be mindful of that when reading past articles and/ or statements that are referenced in this interview.

Tags: academia university Dr. Corey Lee Wrenn Vegan Feminist Network Feminism Feminismus vegan feminist animal advocacy animal advocacy conference social justice social justice movement

[Share on Facebook](#)

[Share on Twitter](#)



RECENT POSTS:

Vegan Feminism and the Critical Role of Education. Interview with Corey L. Wrenn.
February 22, 2020

Vegane Freundschaften und Soja-Steaks. Interview mit den Margits.
February 1, 2020

Ecofeminism and Climate Justice. Interview with Greta Gaard.
April 6, 2019

The Sexy Goddess Inside Ourselves and the Joys of Eating

SEARCH BY TAGS:

#MeToo Afghanistan

Aktivismus

Albert Schweitzer Stiftung

Animal Rights Aph Ko Asien

Beasts of Burden Behinderung

Belgium Beyond Carnism

Burlesque CSD Freiburg

Carol J. Adams Derek Walter

Dominion Dr. Corey Lee Wrenn

Vegan. Interview with Lauren Karl.
January 21, 2019

Why We Need to Talk about
Ableism, Ageism, and Speciesism.
Interview with Geertrui Cazaux.
December 17, 2018

Sexism, Male Privilege, and
Violence in the Anymal Liberation
Movement. Interview with Lisa
Kemmerer.
December 13, 2018

Reclaiming Your Identity. Interview
with Wotko (Gerardo Tristan).
November 27, 2018

About Being a LGBTQ Resource
Nurse and Animal Rights Activist.
Interview with Clare Madrigal.
November 20, 2018

Connecting Feminism to Animal
Advocacy and the Importance of
Widening Our Activism Circles.
Interview with Karolina Skowron.
November 14, 2018

Why Constantly Questioning
Ourselves and Staying Informed
as Activists is Key. Interview with
Carol J. Adams
August 28, 2018

Dr. Lisa Kemmerer Drag king

Dutch Eating Animals

Eating our way to extinction

Ecofeminism Elle'n Belle

Esther the Wonderpig

EverythingFeminism Ex-Muslim

Fabulous.ch Feminism

Feminismus Feminist Gay

Geertrui Cazaux

Gerardo Tristan HIV Hospital

Human Rights

Human-Animal Studies Hund

International Animal Rights
Conference

Intersectional James Cameron

Jasmin Singer Jeff Mannes

Just veganin Kamala Harris

Kathmandu Kochen LGBTIQ

LGBTQ LGBTQIA LGTT*IQ

Lauren Karl Lesbian Lesbisch

Lisa A.Kemmerer

Marian Sullivan MeToo

Mexican Mobbing Moby

Momo Movie Natalie Portman

Nemat Sadat Nepal Netflix

Nurse Onlineshop

Our Hen House PoC Poland

QTPOC Queer Rainbow

Regenbogen Restaurant

Rotten Schweiz Schwul

Sexualwissenschaften

Sneha's Care Spanish

Steve Jenkins Sunaura Taylor

Swetlana Hildebrandt Syl Ko

Taking Note Thamel

The Game Changers

The Veronicas Tierbefreiung

Tierbefreiungsbewegung

Tierheim Tierrechte

Tierschutz United States

Vagina Monologues Vegan

Vegan Feminist Network

Veganismus Wiesenhof

Women Women of Colour

Women's Congress Wotko

Yuval Noah Harari Zürich

ableism absent referent

academia activism ageism

animal advocacy

animal advocacy conference

animal liberation

animalizing women

anti-speciesist anymal

battered women cats

climate change climate crisis

climate justice csd

domestic violence

empowering women

environmental racism essen

environmental racism essen
factory farming feminist
fetisch gardening gay
gender studies greta gaard
intersectionality lesbisch
nahuatl native objectification
philosophy plant-based
plant-based food queer
racism religion researcher
schweiz schwul
sexual politics of meat
shoe.org social justice
social justice movement
speciesism teaching
university vegan vegan dog
vegan feminist veganism
violence white privilege
youtube