

# An Analysis of Diversity in Nonhuman Animal Rights Media

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Accepted: 10 December 2015  
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**Abstract** Lack of diversity in the ranks as well as a failure to resonate with disadvantaged groups and other anti-oppression movements has been cited as one important barrier to the American Nonhuman Animal rights movement's success (Kymlicka and Donaldson in *Animal rights, multiculturalism and the Left*. The Mellon Sawyer Seminar at the Graduate Center, CUNY. City University of New York, New York, 2013). It is possible that social movements are actively inhibiting diversity in the ranks and audience by producing literature that reflects a narrow activist identity. This article creates a platform from which these larger issues can be explored by investigating the actual demographic representations present in a small sample of popular media sources produced by the movement for other animals. A content analysis of 131 magazine covers produced by two highly visible movement actors, PETA and VegNews, was conducted to demonstrate that activist representations in at least some dominant American Nonhuman Animal rights media are mostly white, female, and thin.

**Keywords** Gender · Race · Social movements · Media · Animal rights

## Introduction

In *Empty Cages: Facing the Challenge of Animal Rights* (2004), 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

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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).<sup>1</sup> 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 and Morgan 2011), while in the United States, researchers find that Nonhuman Animal liberation efforts are frequently conflated with terrorism (Sorenson 2011). While negative representation is common, representation itself, however, is rare. For the most part, pro-animal messages are excluded altogether (Freeman 2009).

In part, this adverse response likely manifests as pushback against anti-speciesist mobilization. The American Nonhuman Animal rights movement is a political movement that advocates for the reform of Nonhuman Animal use or its abolition. With trillions of Nonhuman Animals killed, tortured, or otherwise exploited annually across the globe, there is a principal focus on alleviating systemic speciesism with most movement actors promoting some type of dietary reform (Beers 2006). Although the movement hosts a variety of positions and continues to support grassroots efforts, it likens other modern social justice movements with its power centralized in professionalized non-profits, preference for moderated, reform-focused goals, and tendency toward organizational isomorphism (Wrenn 2012). Over its two centuries of activity, the movement has generated considerable counter-mobilization from exploitative industries that seek to reframe anti-speciesist activism as volatile and illegitimate (Jasper and Poulsen 1993; Phelps 2007).

While researchers speak mostly to stereotypes of activists for Nonhuman Animals as disturbed and violent, other identity markers related to race, gender, and class could be restricting the movement's growth. Scholars of the American movement find that activists are overwhelmingly women at about 80 % (Gaarder 2011). Most are middle-class and white (Maurer 2002; The Humane League 2014).<sup>2</sup> In advocacy spaces, it is often thin women who are used as movement representatives (Harper 2010) and women are also often sexually objectified (Adams 2004; Gaarder 2011). PETA is most frequently criticized for regularly employing female sexual objectification as a tactic, but as a dominant presence in the American movement, it has normalized this tactic for many smaller activist groups as well (Wrenn 2015).<sup>3</sup> Importantly, these representations are not a result of

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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

mainstream media bias, but are constructions of the movement itself, meaning that the movement could be unnecessarily aggravating these diversity problems identified by researchers. As will be discussed, poor diversity can discredit the movement, but also undermine coalition-building.

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

This paper will first determine the importance of media as an agent of socialization and its relationship with social movements in a brief literature review. Social movements often prioritize media exposure to recruit new members, though, as previously mentioned, mass media can be an unreliable and sometimes dangerous tool (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Gitlin 2003). I will argue that, while it is known that mainstream media can work to a movement's disadvantage, movement-created media is also relevant to the conversation. Research indicates that representations in media can both inspire and demotivate. If the Nonhuman Animal rights movement is presenting a limited activist ideal-type, it may encourage participation from thin, white women, but deter potential participants from other groups, especially certain marginalized groups. For instance, poll research indicates that persons of color view vegans more favorably than whites (Gutbrod 2013),<sup>4</sup> but whites disproportionately identify as vegans in the United States. A failure to recognize diversity in representations, then, could represent an incongruence in claimsmaking, it could also represent a serious strategic oversight.

A number of movement pundits have speculated on this weakness in addition to Regan. Kymlicka and Donaldson (2013), for instance, specifically cite the movement's failure to seriously embrace multiculturalism as an important political obstacle. Harper (2010) has also identified this shortcoming as a social justice issue, as entire communities of color have been alienated by the movement and ignored by Nonhuman Animal rights and vegan outreach efforts. There is at least some interest in improving diversity from an organizational standpoint, as evidenced by groups like VegFund which prioritize outreach in communities of color and the proliferation of multi-language outreach literature as published by groups like Vegan Outreach, Abolitionist Approach, and Food Empowerment Project. It is also evidenced by

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Footnote 3 continued

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 (Wrenn 2015).

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

PETA's attention to ethnic enclaves in the United States (Drew 2010) and its establishment in other nations (PETA India, PETA Asia–Pacific, etc.). The Humane Research Council,<sup>5</sup> a research non-profit that works with Nonhuman Animal protection groups to improve efficacy, has also commented on the problem of activist homogeneity (Glasser 2014). Failure to diversify could have the effect of limiting participant numbers, skills and innovation, and access to other resource pools. Further, it runs the risk of hypocrisy in advocating for species-inclusive diversity, while simultaneously being unable to achieve human diversity in its own ranks. If only a particular demographic appears to support rights for other animals, a lack of diversity may also drain the movement's cultural capital. That is, a more diverse support for anti-speciesism may grant the position more legitimacy with the public and would improve the audience's ability or willingness to respond to outreach efforts (Einwohner 1999). In light of these criticisms, this study will illuminate demographic trends that exist in movement-produced media. To accomplish this, a purposive sample of exemplar cases was selected from two magazines that regularly feature human subjects, are relatively highly visible to the public, and enjoy predominance in the movement.

## Literature Review

### Media, Power, and Vulnerable Groups

Social movements are mindful of media because it has the power to, for better or for worse, shape attitudes and behaviors. The structure of media and the messages conveyed are frequently rooted in social inequality. Media and communications research demonstrates that media tends to reflect the epistemologies of those in power (Wilson and Gutiérrez 1995). In the United States, this has generally meant a reflection of whiteness and maleness. As agents of socialization, television, magazines, music, and other forms of mass communication work to normalize existing power structures and encourage behaviors and attitudes that replicate those structures (Holtzman 2000). Not surprisingly, white men dominate as both media creators and media owners. White men also enjoy more representation and coverage within the media itself. Marginalized groups such as women and people of color occupy few powerful positions in the media industry (National Association for Multi-Ethnicity in Communications 2013), which translates to relatively homogenous productions that are more likely to reflect privileged populations. Likewise, when minorities *are* portrayed in mainstream newspapers, magazines, television shows, and movies, they tend to be cast stereotypically in ways that reinforce their inferior status (Baker 2005; Mastro and Greenberg 2000; Mastro and Stern 2003). More recent research suggests that stereotypical representation is declining, though underrepresentation remains pervasive (Monk-Turner et al. 2010).

The media has also maintained body image standards of thinness, sexuality, and beauty which negatively and disproportionately impact women. Research shows

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<sup>5</sup> This organization has since rebranded itself as Faunalytics.

that women are increasingly sexualized in the media (Coltrane and Messineo 2000; Hatton and Trautner 2011). It has also been suggested that exposure to sexually explicit media could foster misogynist attitudes and increase men's aggressive behavior towards women (Kalof 1999; MacKay and Covell 1997; Malamuth and Check 1981; Mundorf et al. 2007; Ward 2002). The media's glorification of thin bodies and female sexualization is also linked to increased body dissatisfaction and decreased self-esteem among women (Aubrey et al. 2009; Groesz et al. 2002; Holmstrom 2004; Turner et al. 1997). Adding to this, weight discrimination is correlated with hiring and promotional discrimination in the workplace and lower overall earnings, especially for women (Puhl et al. 2008; Zagorsky 2004). Therefore, while media is a social construction and may only depict ideations of reality, the consequences of these constructions are very real indeed. Through its ability to "maintain boundaries in a culture" (Shoemaker and Reese 1996: 225), the media can both preserve power and entrench powerlessness.

### **Social Movements, Media, and Motivation**

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

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

While mainstream media outlets can be hit-or-miss for social movements, the power of media to motivate participation and draw resources is unmistakable. News coverage was a major source of information about protests during the Civil Rights

movement (Andrews and Biggs 2006). Radio programs fostered solidarity for textile workers in the US South, enabling powerful strikes (Roscigno and Danaher 2001). Photography has been creating awareness and inspiring action for a litany of social issues including slavery, immigrant labor (Doherty 1976), and Nonhuman Animal exploitation (Jasper and Poulsen 1995). Hence, media can draw attention to a social problem, recruit new participants, and create a movement identity. It is this identity that helps to maintain participation and attract resources.

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

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

Alienation not only complicates coalition building (Ferree and Roth 1998), but it also stunts motivation at the individual level. Media researchers Wilson and Gutiérrez (1995), for instance, emphasize that the presence of representation can increase behavior change: "Media have their greatest effect when they are used in a manner that reinforces and channels attitudes and opinions that are consistent with

<sup>6</sup> 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).

<sup>7</sup> Many times "gender neutrality" centers boys and men as the default for humanity.

the psychological makeup of the person and the social structure of the groups with which he or she identifies” (44). In other words, media efficacy can be improved with adequate representations of audience members. While this research speaks to commercial interests, it could have implications for social change actors as well. I would suggest that social movement media operates similarly to that of advertising because it is generally intended to gain support and financial contributions from its audience. Media produced by movements is intended to build solidarity and encourage participation, but in the professionalized social change space, media also becomes an integral part of an organization’s successful business model. Advocates working in non-profits and agencies in the areas of domestic violence, rape, and prostitution have noted increased pressure to frame their literature in corporate terms, describing their constituents as “clients” and their services as “products” (Bierria 2007; Graham 2014). Likewise, major Nonhuman Animal rights organizations in the United States also regularly include fundraising themes in their media. Some organizations dedicate over a quarter of their media space to rallying financial support of this kind (Wrenn 2016a). Keeping in mind these relationships between media, representation, and behavior change, it is worth considering that social movement media which routinely features white, female subjects will attract support primarily from white women. For the American Nonhuman Animal rights movement, repeated portrayals of thinness and sexualization could be an attempt to “sell” the movement to women socialized to value and seek out that thinness and sexualization. However, these identities are only obtainable for a select few. Women of color, for instance, are often excluded from white-centric ideals of sexuality (Collins 2004).

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

### **The American Nonhuman Animal Rights Movement**

As previously discussed, the American Nonhuman Animal rights movement has been soundly criticized for its homogenous membership as well as its failure to adequately address vulnerable human communities (Harper 2010). For one, the movement is comprised mostly of women, though this is likely due to a historical association between women, care-taking, and nature (Adams and Donovan 1995; Wrenn 2015). However, the movement demonstrates distinct race and class patterns as well, as it is comprised by mostly white and middle-class participants (Maurer 2002; The Humane League 2014). Lundblad (2013) has speculated that concern for the welfare of other animals was historically grounded in constructions of racial

inequality and white supremacy. That is, following the abolition of slavery in the United States, African Americans were no longer characterized as docile and obedient servants, but became aggressive beast-like sub-humans devoid of moral character. In colonized regions, the United States and Britain also worked to construe non-white status with a predisposition towards Nonhuman Animal cruelty, a discriminatory tactic that is evidenced in many anti-cruelty laws of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Deckha 2013; Wilson 2009). Caring about other animals became a “white thing,” yet another status marker that worked to legitimize white rule and naturalize non-white inferiority.

While these associations have long histories, they are not completely invisible as there has been some degree of negotiation with identity in advocacy spaces over the years. Men tend to occupy many leadership positions and dominate theory production within the American movement, but Nonhuman Animal advocacy remains sharply associated with femininity (Gaarder 2011; Luke 2007). Indeed, plant-based diets and compassion for Nonhuman Animals have been marked as effeminate, which is thought to be a major impediment to recruiting men (Adams 2004; Luke 2007). Theoretically, opening up the movement to more men could lend Nonhuman Animal advocacy the legitimacy it needs to increase resonance. Activists have been keenly aware of this, and often lift men to visible, more prestigious positions and downplay feminine attributions in favor of more masculine ones (Groves 2001; Hall 2006). As part of this appeal to patriarchy, female advocates are frequently sexualized (Adams 2004). Hoping to increase resonance with men under the mantra “sex sells,” more and more organizations are relegating female participation to strip shows and soft-core pornography (Wrenn 2015). This bargain with patriarchy has been extremely off-putting to many women who view this posturing as threatening, insulting, or counterproductive (Deckha 2008; Gaarder 2011; Glasser 2011). Thus, women may dominate the American movement in both membership and the public’s imagination, but men enjoy considerable control over the movement’s decision-making and framing. As yet, there is no evidence to suggest such a strategy has increased male membership. Indeed, one study that analyzed the tactics of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) concludes that using sexualized images of women actually *reduces* support for ethical campaigns (Bongiorno et al. 2013). It is also worth considering that these tactics may be solidifying male dominance and marginalizing female participation in advocacy spaces (Wrenn 2015).

The movement’s saturation with white privilege has created a similar effect among communities of color. Nonhuman Animal advocacy’s strong association with whiteness has been cited as a major deterrent to demographics of color (Harper 2010). Unfortunately, the movement has aggravated this reaction by maintaining racist stereotypes about people of color and their supposed tendency towards cruelty (Glick 2013). Furthermore, several organizations stubbornly reproduce offensive and insensitive campaigns and tactics (such as the appropriation of slavery and Holocaust language and imagery), despite growing criticism from communities of color (Socha and Blum 2013; Kymlicka and Donaldson 2013).

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

Viewing veganism as a means for achieving the "perfect" body treats obesity as an individual problem rather than a structural one. This is detrimental to social justice advocacy as individualizing obesity (as a matter of personal choice and personal failure) is known to increase weight stigma (Puhl and Heuer 2010). In turn, this stigma is often psychologically damaging to people of size. It is also known to both *support* and *increase* weight-gain behaviors. It could be the case, then, that the individualized approach to veganism which frames it as a means to lose weight could be aggravating stigma, thus having the opposite effect on larger individuals by repelling them rather than inviting them. In addition to race and class implications, recall that an unrealistically thin and sexualized identity is also linked to the societal devaluation of women. Social movement media that engages in sexualization and the normalization of thinness, therefore, might stunt recruitment *and* contribute to inequality. If countering inequality is integral to that movement's goals, this could be particularly contradictory and problematic.

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

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

Class and consumerism are not included in this study, but Torres' observation of constricting identities dominating Nonhuman Animal rights media spaces is relevant to the relationship between movement diversity and success. This study

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<sup>8</sup> 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.

seeks to explore gender, race, sexualization, and body type representations in some prominent media produced by the American Nonhuman Animal rights movement. Thus far, I have argued that, because media plays a powerful role in constructing identity and motivating attitudes and behavior, how a movement presents itself to its constituents is an important variable in social movement success. While a movement may have little control over mainstream media bias, it *does* have control over its own media. How a movement chooses to mobilize its self-produced media resources is likely correlated with resonance, membership, available resources, and goal attainment. Because this content analysis is exploratory only, it cannot speak directly to the relationship between identity representation and social movement success. However, it can provide important implications for social movements based on preexisting research that demonstrates the media's clear correlation with social attitudes and behaviors. This study will provide an important first step in this inquiry by calculating the actual representation of various identities in some particularly visible Nonhuman Animal rights media spaces.

## Methodology

To explore identity representation in Nonhuman Animal rights spaces, a content analysis was conducted using two leading American publications in the American Nonhuman Animal rights movement: *VegNews* and PETA's *Animal Times*. These two publications were chosen because they are widely distributed, regularly feature human subjects on their covers, and have a back catalog large enough to facilitate analysis. Many other publications mostly picture Nonhuman Animals or have short publication histories. *VegNews* has about a quarter of a million readers and is sold in major grocery chains, natural food stores, and bookstores. PETA mails issues of *Animal Times* to all paying members and associates, a number well over 3 million.<sup>9</sup> Both magazines feature celebrities, models, and activists as cover subjects. For this study, only American magazines were explored. This may reasonably speak to the Western Nonhuman Animal rights movement in general, but further demographic research in other Western countries and also non-Western regions would be appropriate for future studies. Also better suited to future studies would be additional interviewing to ascertain the actual impact magazine covers are having on the audience. For the purposes of this study, content analysis was decided to be most economical and appropriate as the goal is to initially determine the diversity of media subjects in the sample, while later studies could determine the actual impact of that diversity.

Movements produce a wide variety of media, but magazines were chosen for their visibility and influence in public spaces. Magazine covers are convenient in terms of availability to the researcher and the consistency among units, but they are also frequently used as units of analysis by social scientists because industry treats

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<sup>9</sup> 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.

them as a sales tool. Researching the gendered impact of body type portrayals on magazine covers, Malkin et al. (1999) explain that the information displayed on covers are usually all a viewer has time to process. Their purpose is to influence quickly and persuade consumers to purchase them. While *VegNews* is not associated with a Nonhuman Animal rights organization (though it has a clear anti-speciesist agenda) and PETA's *Animal Times* is distributed primarily to paying members (though magazines are intended to be shared and they are also promoted on PETA's website), both still likely play a role in influencing movement recruitment. While not fully representative by any means, both magazines are highly visible and represent major actors in the movement.

Change makers understand that prominent media of this kind can have tangible influence over demographic representations off the printed page. Advocates for yoga as a means of healthfulness, self-empowerment, and decolonization, for instance, have pointed to the dominance of white-centric, thin women in yoga magazines as one reason for lack of diversity in Western practice (Barcelos 2011; Park 2014). Magazines have also been studied by psychologists as they are thought to influence dissatisfaction with physical appearance and problematize eating behaviors (Morry and Staska 2001), sexual socialization and self-concept (Beggan and Allison 2003). Magazine covers in particular act as “windows” to the content inside, and are carefully constructed to draw on particular psychological mechanisms to attract attention, disseminate information, facilitate a particular feeling, and encourage viewers to purchase (Held 2005). Magazine covers are considered rather unique in their ability to convey a particular mood and bring prominence to a particular narrative or concept (Spiker 2003).

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

Another limitation is the inherent subjectivity of coding identity. This analysis was able to draw on preexisting coding standards for sexualization (Hatton and Trautner 2011) and body type (Johnson 1990). The body type coding scheme utilized is rather straight forward as it utilizes visual representatives and brief text descriptions of five possible body types for the researcher to compare with the subject in question. However, the sexualization coding was particularly complex, with points assigned to number of items that, cumulatively, form a sexualized

image.<sup>10</sup> This could include parted lips, sexually suggestive text, self-touching, revealing clothing, or the display of the entire body (as opposed to just the face). For instance, PETA's Fall 2007 issue of *Animal Times* features a woman looking over her bare shoulder with parted lips. In this unit, enough indicators are present to code this image as sexualized. PETA's Winter 2008 issue of *Animal Times* features a recumbent nude woman partially covered by chili peppers. She is self-touching, posing in a sexually suggestive manner, and has the majority of her body exposed. The text assigned to the image reads, "THAT'S HOT!" In this instance, enough indicators are present that this subject would be coded as hyper-sexualized.

Without a pre-existing template of this kind for gender and racial identity, gender and race categories were ultimately up to the researcher's discretion. The fluidity of both gender and race can make identification challenging. While the entirety of the content analysis was conducted by the primary researcher, a secondary researcher was enlisted for the purposes of a reliability check.<sup>11</sup> There was 82 % agreement on a 10 % sample, with much of the disagreement involving difficult to identify or ambiguous racial identity.<sup>12</sup>

## Results and Discussion

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

<sup>10</sup> Hatton and 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 versus 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.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> The 10 % 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.

**Table 1** Frequency by gender

	Frequency	Percent
Valid		
Male	59	39.6
Female	90	60.4
Total	149	100.0

## Gender

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

## Race

Gender imbalance may not clearly surface, but the racial imbalance is far more prevalent. African Americans comprise around 13 % of the US population (US Census Bureau 2012), but only 7 % of the magazine sample population (Table 2). Hispanic and Latinx people of color comprise 17 % of the US population, but less than 1 % of covers. Asians are relatively well represented in the sample at 4.7 %, considering they make up around 5 % of the US population. These numbers reflect findings from movement surveys that report a white majority (Maurer 2002) and also support Harper's (2010) observations regarding the "whiteness" of advocacy spaces. However, representativeness among whites and Asian Americans might also align with Jasper's (1997) theory of post-citizenship mobilization, whereby groups that are better integrated in a given society are thought more apt to participating in collective behavior that seeks to improve the condition of others. Some vegan advocates of color might disagree with the presumption that the disenfranchised are uninterested or uninvolved in Nonhuman Animal rights work. An online advocacy project known as *#BlackVegansRock: 100 Black Vegans to Check Out* showcases an

**Table 2** Frequency by race

	Frequency	Percent
Valid		
White	130	87.2
Black	11	7.4
Asian	7	4.7
Latino	1	0.7
Total	149	100.0

extremely diverse group of Black identified vegans from various backgrounds, professions, and interests. As the author explains, people of color want to be involved and many *are* involved, but the white-led movement impedes on their visibility. Efforts to increase visibility in independent spaces like #BlackVegansRock seek to overcome “the routine exclusion of black folks” (Kocięda 2015).

### Body Type

Imbalance was also indicated in the shapes of the subjects. While vegans and vegetarians on average tend to weigh less than their flesh-eating counterparts, some research indicates that as much as 29 % of plant-based eaters are considered overweight or obese (Newby et al. 2005),<sup>13</sup> but the magazines overwhelmingly depict thin figures, with persons of size representing less than 1 % of subjects (Table 3). The sample, therefore, does not reflect the average body in the public, nor does it reflect actual diversity in the ranks. Importantly, many of the subjects included in the study were headshots only, meaning that they were coded as the default of “fit and thin” unless their face showed evidence of more weight. Not all individuals can be differentiated by weight based on facial structure. Regardless, the number of subjects who are clearly not “fit and thin” according to the Johnson (1990) coding scheme is extremely small. This pattern is understandable given the association between veganism, weight loss, and the socially constructed ideal of a “healthy” body weight. The movement is likely drawing on the appeal of thin privilege to entice new members, but the lack of body type diversity in Nonhuman Animal rights media could be unwelcoming to persons of size and could very likely aggravate inaccurate or offensive stereotypes about weight and health. It is also worth noting that there are few muscular subjects (all of whom are male). This may be indicative of the feminization of veganism and vegetarianism. Plant-based eating is often constructed as appropriate for women because it is associated with weight loss and compassion for Nonhuman Animals.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, “bulking up”

<sup>13</sup> 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 % of male vegan participants and 5 % of female vegan participants were considered obese (Key and Davey 1996).

<sup>14</sup> 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!*.

**Table 3** Frequency by Body Type

	Frequency	Percent
Valid		
Fit and thin	138	92.6
Muscle-toned, lack of fat	6	4.0
Some muscle definition/excess fat	4	2.7
Round/excess fat	1	0.7
Total	149	100.0

and weightlifting is seen as a masculine endeavor and does not appear to enjoy the same degree of prominence in the claimsmaking featured in the sample.<sup>15</sup>

### Sexualization

In addition to restrictive portrayals of body types in the sample, the presentation of those bodies could also inform the magazine's appeal, as well as convey its attitudes toward women. Though the Nonhuman Animal rights movement has been heavily criticized for its reliance on sexualized images of women (Adams 2004; Deckha 2008; Gaarder 2011; Wrenn 2015), the vast majority of magazine covers (87 %) do not portray a sexualized subject (Table 4) and there was little evidence to support sexualization is an increasing trend. Of the 13 % that is sexualized, only about 1 % of this is hyper-sexualized. This study utilized the coding methodology of Hatton and Trautner's (2011) survey of *Rolling Stone* covers which finds a pattern of increasing sexualization across the decades, with 83 % of women (and 17 % of men) sexualized. At least compared to the popular music scene, Nonhuman Animal rights magazines in this sample are relatively subdued. Given the movement's heavy use of nudity to attract membership in print campaigns and public demonstrations in spite of research that demonstrates the repellent effect it has, the lack of sexualization on magazine covers is good news for a movement that values effective outreach. However, inequality of representation is still present. As consistent with other analyses of sexualization in the media, the overwhelming majority (88 %) of sexualized subjects in the sample are female (Table 5). Furthermore, 37 % of subjects of color are sexualized, compared to only 10 % of white subjects (Table 6). Only two subjects were coded as hyper-sexualized, both are persons of color. While this number is far too small to be statistically significant, this could be indicative of racial stereotypes regarding persons of color and hyper-sexuality (Adams 2004; Collins 2004) and could be worth investigating in future research. Print campaign advertisements and public demonstrations where nudity is most notoriously observed would likely offer a more appropriate sampling pool for exploring intersections in race and sexualization.

<sup>15</sup> 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.

**Table 4** Frequency of sexualization

	Frequency	Percent
Valid		
Not sexualized	130	87.2
Sexualized	17	11.4
Hyper-sexualized	2	1.3
Total	149	100.0

**Table 5** Frequency of sexualization by gender

	Sexualization			Total
	Not sexualized	Sexualized	Hyper-sexualized	
Gender				
Male	56	2	1	59
Female	74	15	1	90
Total	130	17	2	149

**Table 6** Frequency of sexualization by race

	Sexualization			Total
	Not sexualized	Sexualized	Hyper-sexualized	
Race				
White	117	13	0	130
Black	8	2	1	11
Asian	5	1	1	7
Latino	0	1	0	1
Total	130	17	2	149

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

## Alternative Approaches

Einwohner (1999), Kymlicka and Donaldson (2013), and the Humane Research Council (Glasser 2014) point to the American Nonhuman Animal rights movement's failure to engage multiculturalism as a political obstacle to achieving legitimacy for anti-speciesist claimsmaking. Harper (2010) furthers that this phenomenon is also an ethical problem for the vulnerable human groups who are marginalized from advocacy spaces and ignored by outreach efforts. This study's findings can offer some clarity to this concern with homogeneity. Recall that representation in media facilitates agency and behavior change (Wilson and Gutiérrez 1995), a relationship that should interest any social movement interested in success. An analysis of *VegNews* and *Animal Times* demonstrates that this motivating and advantageous multicultural representation seems to be lacking in at least some major Nonhuman Animal rights media spaces.

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

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

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.sistahvegan.com>.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.foodispower.org>.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.vine.bravebirds.org>.

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

## Conclusion

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

The small scale of this study leaves many questions and merits further study on a number of points. First, despite the small sample size, it is notable that sexualized and hyper-sexualized subjects were more likely to be persons of color. Of the 19 persons of color coded in the study, 6 were also coded as sexualized or hyper-sexualized. Additional research would be useful here to explore how sexist and racist stereotypes may be reinforced in movement cultures by its media. As it stands, those non-white and non-thin body types that do land covers exist in this sample only as tokens. That is, their representation is small, and, according to Harper's thesis, likely very superficial. Without media that seriously embraces and explores experiences outside the white, thin, female default, even occasional representation will be rendered meaningless. For instance, if people of color are to be included on covers, whiteness would be replicated nonetheless if the magazines themselves continue to focus on white values, experiences, and interests. In many cases, people

of color were presented on covers as charity cases, particularly as those in need of food and disaster relief.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, if these magazines were to feature persons of size on covers, only to replicate sizeism and thin privilege in the body of the magazine, the potential to foster diversity is likely nullified. This extends beyond the magazine rack to activist spaces in general. In addition to discouraging minority participation, tokenistic representations may also work to reinforce stereotypes (Cortese 2008). The movement must do more than symbolically include diverse persons; it must actively seek to address and embrace a diversity of perspectives, interests, and experiences as well.

Diversifying magazine content, then, is only the first step in dismantling hindering and unwelcoming stereotypes about Nonhuman Animal activism. Social movements battle with existing power structures for the right to construct reality, but they must also conduct that battle internally. Fortunately, there are some important grassroots efforts to remedy this shortcoming. As we have seen, the Food Empowerment Project works to fill the gap between vegan outreach and underserved communities, particularly the Latinx community. Harper's Sistah Vegan Project also gives platform to women of color, women of size, queer women, and other marginalized groups. Movement organizers could benefit from cooperating with these grassroots efforts to improve resonance and identify problematic representations. Likewise, additional research to test what impact these demographic trends are actually having on viewers would be invaluable. Additional research could illuminate this possibility by perhaps surveying those who have been exposed to movement-produced media using interviews or focus groups. It may also be helpful to understand the ways in which movement leaders and professionalized organizations conceptualize both diversity and the challenges to achieving it. Finally, in depth analysis of anti-speciesist media that explores the *content* of magazines (and other mediums) can offer a more nuanced understanding of identity politics and indicate areas that could be improved. This may be particularly relevant for analyzing issues surrounding cis-normativity and heteronormativity, as a cover image may not be as forthcoming on some identity representations.

**Acknowledgments** This paper is part of a larger project conducted with my colleague Megan Lutz of Georgia Tech, who offered important suggestions and assistance with statistical analysis. A version of this paper was presented at the American Sociological Association's 2014 annual conference.

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

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