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Shocked or Satiated? Managing Moral Shocks Beyond the Recruitment Stage

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Abstract

Sociologists James Jasper and Jane Poulsen have argued that activists' deployment of emotionally triggering 'moral shocks' can stimulate recruitment for movements, particularly for those which are less successful in recruiting through social networks. Others have suggested that, more than a recruitment tool, these moral shocks are useful for *sustaining* activist motivation. This study, however, explores the tendency of activists to disengage from moral shocks as a means of managing emotions such as compassion fatigue, burnout and psychological distress. Although many respondents see the utility in moral shocks as an outreach tool, they carefully consider their own exposure to protect their emotional well-being and protest sustainability. Results are based on an email-based qualitative interview with twenty-five newly recruited activists and established activists in the Western Nonhuman Animal rights movement.

Keywords

Animal rights – Bearing witness – Burnout – Compassion fatigue – Motivation – Moral shocks – Social movement media

1 Introduction

Recruitment is more difficult for some social movements than others given the diversity of social problems they address. When interest is lacking and

traditional means of mobilisation are ill-fitting, movements may undertake creative efforts to solicit the attention of would-be activists. The Nonhuman Animal rights movement, for instance, is said to be less successful in recruiting through personal networks (this kind of network mobilisation has been more effective for civil rights, gay rights, women's rights, and the like, whereby churches, family members, friends, and classmates can be called upon to participate).¹ Instead, anti-speciesist activists often enter the movement after having been exposed to compelling images or information, much of which is graphic and disturbing.² James Jasper and Jane Poulsen refer to these tactics as 'moral shocks', intended as they are to align with existing values and trigger emotional responses believed necessary to motivate the uninitiated and unaffiliated. However, movements are not only interested in recruitment but also retainment.³ There are a number of heavy costs and risks which may be associated with activism, including, but not limited to, alienation from social groups, countermovement retaliation, job discrimination, and sometimes encounters with law enforcement. Nonhuman Animal rights activism, however, is especially burdensome, as it is deeply stigmatised and even considered extremist or terrorist activity by many Western nations,⁴ leading some researchers to consider moral shocks as necessary for maintaining activist commitment.⁵

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- 1 David Snow, Louis Zurcher, and Sheldon Ekland-Olson, 'Social Networks and Social Movements: A Microstructural Approach to Differential Recruitment,' *American Sociological Review* 45, no. 5 (1980): 787–801.
 - 2 Laura Fernández, 'Using Images of Farmed Animals in Environmental Advocacy: An Anti-speciesist, Strategic Visual Communication Proposal,' *American Behavioural Scientist* 63, no. 8 (2019): 1137–55; Laura Fernández, 'Images that Liberate: Moral Shock and Strategic Visual Communication in Animal Liberation Activism,' *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 45, no. 2 (2021): 138–58; Laura Fernández, 'The Emotional Politics of Images: Moral Shock, Explicit Violence and Strategic Visual Communication in the Animal Liberation Movement,' *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* 17, no. 4 (2000): 53–75; Barbara McDonald, "'Once You Know Something, You Can't Not Know It": An Empirical Look at Becoming Vegan,' *Society & Animals* 8, no. 1 (2000): 1–23; Corey Wrenn, 'Trump Veganism: A Political Survey of American Vegans in the Era of Identity Politics,' *Societies* 7, no. 4 (2017): 32, <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc7040032>.
 - 3 James Jasper and Jane Poulsen, 'Recruiting Strangers and Friends: Moral Shocks and Social Networks in Animal Rights and Anti-nuclear Protests,' *Social Problems* 42, no. 4 (1995): 493–512.
 - 4 Jessica Beth Greenebaum, 'Questioning the Concept of Vegan Privilege: A Commentary,' *Humanity & Society* 41, no. 3 (2017): 355–72; Jon Sorenson, 'The Myth of "Animal Rights Terrorism,"' *The Brock Review* 12, no. 1 (2011): 69–99.
 - 5 Fernández, 'Images that Liberate'; Niklas Hansson and Kerstin Jacobsson, 'Learning to Be Affected: Subjectivity, Sense, and Sensibility in Animal Rights Activism,' *Society & Animals* 22, no. 3 (2014): 262–88.

Moral shocks, in other words, are thought to counter activists' propensity to lose interest, concede, or free-ride on the efforts of other activists.

There is reason to suppose, however, that *established* activists may actively avoid morally shocking movement propaganda as a matter of self-preservation. Rather than motivate, repeated exposure to disturbing material could inhibit activism should it contribute to compassion fatigue or burnout. Research in long-term and professional activist groups finds that compassion fatigue is a considerable threat to activists' well-being and their propensity to remain committed.⁶ Not surprisingly, this issue is found to impact those serving Nonhuman Animals, such as veterinarians, welfare agents and shelter workers.⁷ Paul Gorski, Stacy Lopresti-Goodman, and Dallas Rising have identified activist burnout in the Nonhuman Animal rights movement as well, much of which can be attributed to 'strong emotional connections' to movement issues.⁸ A Faunalytics survey of the Nonhuman Animal rights movement, likewise, finds that about one in five paid activists and one in ten volunteer activists believe they have experienced secondary stress or trauma as a result of their advocacy.⁹ As a consequence, Nonhuman Animal rights activists have been found to engage in considerable emotion work to sustain their commitment.¹⁰

Emotion work refers to the affective labour inherent in particular social interactions, and it comes with potential consequences to psychological well-being.¹¹ Although this phenomenon often speaks to employees and clients (for example, 'service with a smile'), it can be extended to understand activist interactions with movement audiences (for example, maintaining a professional or pleasant demeanour when engaging with the public). It can also be extended to understand how activists negotiate emotions *for themselves*, given the highly affective nature of anti-speciesist advocacy. Whether

6 Cher Chen and Paul Gorski, 'Burnout in Social Justice and Human Rights Activists,' *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 7, no. 3 (2015): 366–90.

7 Angela K. Fournier and Brandon Mustful, 'Compassion Fatigue: Presenting Issues and Practical Applications for Animal-Caring Professionals,' in *Clinician's Guide to Treating Companion Animal Issues: Addressing Human-Animal Interaction*, ed. Lori Kogan and Christopher Blazina (London: Academic Press, 2019), 511–534.

8 Paul Gorski, Stacy Lopresti-Goodman, and Dallas Rising, "Nobody's Paying Me to Cry": The Causes of Activist Burnout in United States Animal Rights Activists,' *Social Movement Studies* 18, no. 3 (2019): 364–80.

9 Jo Anderson, *The State of Animal Advocacy in the U.S. and Canada* (Olympia: Faunalytics, 2020), 1–53.

10 Hansson and Jacobsson, 'Learning to Be Affected.'

11 Dieter Zapf, 'Emotion Work and Psychological Well-being: A Review of the Literature and Some Conceptual Considerations,' *Human Resource Management Review* 12 (2002): 237–68.

or not this emotion work for Nonhuman Animal rights activists entails intentional *exposure to* or *avoidance of* moral shocks, however, remains unclear. Laura Fernández and Niklas Hansson and Kerstin Jacobsson note that emotion work is a major component of anti-speciesism,¹² but have not adequately considered how or why activists might avoid upsetting advocacy materials with regard to emotional sustainability and commitment. This essay extends their investigation with qualitative interviews of established activists to solicit their thoughts on the role of moral shocks. Themes emerging from this data suggest that many activists prioritise avoidance over ‘bearing witness’ to speciesism. But avoidance is not always possible in a movement saturated with morally shocking activist material, and the heightened empathy that attracts many activists to the movement could also, paradoxically, render them vulnerable to the psychological distress that can arise from repeated exposure. The ability of activists to manage their emotional well-being is important for what Laurence Cox refers to as ‘emotional sustainability’ and sustained participation.¹³ Moral shocks are important for movement mobilisation, yet they seem to encourage a level of disengagement for most of the participants in this study. It is thus useful to problematise moral shocks for their inhibitive potentials, and, while not examined in this study, future research might also inquire as to their capacity for demobilisation.

2 Review of the Literature

2.1 *Emotions and Activism*

Sociologists began earnest research into the importance of emotions for identity construction, group dynamics and politics in the 1970s.¹⁴ Much of this relates to or expands upon Arlie Hochschild’s theory of emotion work in the maintenance of social relationships.¹⁵ American efforts in this topic area have particularly emphasised the social psychological nature of emotions in society, and this trend has also surfaced in social movement studies, which have more recently turned attention to the intersection of emotion and collective action. Earlier, pre-civil rights era incarnations of social movement theory dismissed

12 Fernández, ‘Images that Liberate’; Hansson and Jacobsson, ‘Learning to Be Affected.’

13 Laurence Cox, “‘Hearts with One Purpose Alone?’: Thinking Personal Sustainability in Social Movements,’ *Emotion, Space and Society* 2, no. 1 (2009): 52–61.

14 Rebecca Olson, Jordan McKenzie, and Roger Patulny, ‘The Sociology of Emotions,’ *Journal of Sociology* 53, no. 4 (2017): 800–18.

15 Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

protest as irrational, mob-like behaviour. Scholars today now revisit emotion as integral to movement motivation, group maintenance, and persuasion.¹⁶

For all their potential to invigorate and inspire, however, emotions can also hinder movements. Sociology's traditional emphasis on the ideological has tended to neglect the physical, embodied nature of social life,¹⁷ and, perhaps for this reason, the activist's psychological and corporeal experience remains unexamined as social movement scholars prioritise institutional influences, political identity, tactics, strategies and other group-level and system-level issues. Activists' prolonged exposure to depictions of social injustice and the consistent resistance they face from the public and policymakers can become psychologically toilsome. Activists are constrained, to some extent, by their movement's repertoires of acceptable strategies and claims (this may be imposed by movement leadership or powerful nonprofits, or internalised by activists socialised by movement culture and norms).¹⁸ Although they may be labelled 'activists', they could also be, in Foucauldian terms, recognised as 'docile bodies', given how they are shaped and disciplined for political purposes.¹⁹

Some activists do resist this movement-level pressure by adapting tactics to suit their physical and psychological capabilities. This includes modifications as needed to preserve their mental health. Nonprofit employees working in social justice have been found to invest considerable amounts of energy into managing their emotions.²⁰ Likewise, research on peace activists finds that 'persisters consciously shape their lives in order to stay active',²¹ and this includes self-management and mutual support to avoid burnout and activist community.²² In the Nonhuman Animal rights movement, the stigmatisation of activism has encouraged activists to conform their strategies to alleviate the

16 Jeff Goodwin, James Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, 'The Return of the Repressed: The Fall and Rise of Emotions in Social Movement Theory,' *Mobilization* 5, no. 1 (2000): 65–83.

17 Chris Shilling, 'The Rise of Body Studies and the Embodiment of Society: A Review of the Field,' *Horizons in Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 (2016): 1–14.

18 James Ennis, 'Fields of Action: Structure in Movement's Tactical Repertoires,' *Sociological Forum* 2, no. 3 (1987): 520–34.

19 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1995).

20 Kathleen Rodgers, "'Anger is Why We're All Here": Mobilizing and Managing Emotions in a Professional Activist Organization,' *Social Movement Studies* 9, no. 3 (2010): 273–91.

21 James Downton, Jr, and Paul Wehr, 'Persistent Pacifism: How Activist Commitment is Developed and Sustained,' *Journal of Peace Research* 35, no. 5 (1998): 531–50 (535).

22 Sharon Neptstad, 'Persistent Resistance: Commitment and Community in the Plowshares Movement,' *Social Problems* 51, no. 1 (2004): 43–60.

negative social and psychological consequences of their deviant status.²³ Jonas Lindblom and Kerstin Jacobsson have also noted that emotion work takes place in the Nonhuman Animal rights community in order to ‘sustain commitment to moral ideals and to alleviate the emotional stress that norm-transgression often implies.’²⁴ This emotion work can involve containing their emotions, venting them, engaging in social rituals to manage them, embracing any guilt associated with imperfect activism, and intentionally exposing themselves to moral shocks to maintain motivation.

With regard to human interventions on nonhuman suffering, considerable research relates to direct care work such as veterinary treatment or rescue and adoption.²⁵ While social justice work of any kind is likely to trigger compassion fatigue, there may be a case for Nonhuman Animal welfare exceptionalism, given that nonhumans are seen as comparatively vulnerable, the violence they experience is so extreme, and many advocates may find themselves in the position of needing to euthanise suffering individuals. As the Nonhuman Animal rights movement remains under-studied by sociologists, little more is known about the emotional labour of traditional activists (those who rely on protest, lobbying and so on, and are not necessarily involved in providing direct services to nonhumans in need). One study of American university students does confirm greater empathy for Nonhuman Animals than adult humans.²⁶ Other research finds that those concerned with the treatment of other animals

23 Jonas Lindblom and Kerstin Jacobsson, ‘A Deviance Perspective on Social Movements: The Case of Animal Rights Activism,’ *Deviant Behavior* 35, no. 2 (2014): 133–51.

24 Kerstin Jacobsson and Jonas Lindblom, ‘Emotion Work in Animal Rights Activism: A Moral-Sociological Perspective,’ *Acta Sociologica* 56, no. 1 (2013): 55–68 (60).

25 Susan Cohen, ‘Compassion Fatigue and the Veterinary Health Team,’ *Veterinary Clinics Small Animal Practice* 37, no. 1 (2007): 123–34; Michelle McArthur, Jena Andrews, Conor Brand, and Susan Hazel, ‘The Prevalence of Compassion Fatigue among Veterinary Students in Australia and the Associated Psychological Factors,’ *Journal of Veterinary Medical Education* 44, no. 1 (2017): 9–21; Michael Rank, Tracy Zapanick, and Eric Gentry, ‘Nonhuman-Animal Care Compassion Fatigue,’ *Best Practices in Mental Health* 5, no. 2 (2009): 40–61; Vanessa Rohlf, ‘Interventions for Occupational Stress and Compassion Fatigue in Animal Care Professionals – A Systematic Review,’ *Traumatology* 24, no. 3 (2018): 186–92; Charles Figley and Robert Roop, *Compassion Fatigue in the Animal-Care Community* (Washington, DC: Humane Society Press, 2006); Raegan Murphy and Shaughnagh Louise Daly, ‘Psychological Distress among Non-human Animal Rescue Workers,’ *Society & Animals* 31, no. 2 (2013): 221–41.

26 Jack Levin, Arnold Arluke, and Leslie Irvine, ‘Are People More Disturbed by Dog or Human Suffering?’, *Society & Animals* 25, no. 1 (2017): 1–16.

exhibit higher than average levels of empathy,²⁷ particularly activists.²⁸ These findings suggest that anti-speciesist activism is likely to entail greater than average psychological burden. The correlation between activism and empathy indicates why emotional appeals are so integral to movement recruitment, but this heightened empathy might also inform their desire to manage the same emotionally provocative information that initially motivated them.²⁹

2.2 *Moral Shocks in Nonhuman Animal Rights*

Emotive tactics are key to anti-speciesist campaigning, particularly moral shocks, which can be traced to the very inception of the Western Nonhuman Animal rights movement. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), founded in early nineteenth-century Britain, for instance, relied heavily on graphic descriptions and engravings of nonhuman suffering in its early materials. Its journal, *Voice of Humanity*, as well as the publications of competing advocacy organisations, depicted the conditions of slaughter, dog ‘fighting’, bull ‘baiting’, and horrendous working conditions imposed on Nonhuman Animals.³⁰ In the later Victorian era, antivivisection organisations utilised the same strategy. Various publications produced by organisational leader Frances Power Cobbe offered extremely disturbing images of Nonhuman Animals in various stages of torture or death as described by eyewitnesses,³¹ as did *The Shambles of Science*, authored by activist-scholars Louise Lind-af-Hageby and Liesa Schartau, who attended vivisection theatres as students.³²

Activists of the second wave movement continued this tradition, notably through campaigns against vivisection and particularly heinous agricultural and slaughter practices. Ruth Harrison’s gruesomely detailed *Animal Machines*, in fact, can be credited with inspiring a wave of policy change and activist

27 Ann Erlanger and Sergei Tsytarev, ‘The Relationship Between Empathy and Personality in Undergraduate Students’ Attitudes toward Nonhuman Animals,’ *Society & Animals* 20, no. 1 (2012): 21–38.

28 Tania Signal and Nicola Taylor, ‘Attitudes to Animals and Empathy: Comparing Animal Protection and General Community Samples,’ *Anthrozoös* 20, no. 2 (2007): 125–30.

29 Julian Groves, ‘Learning to Feel: The Neglected Sociology of Social Movements,’ *Sociological Review* 43, no. 3 (1995): 435–61.

30 Diana Donald, *Women against Cruelty: Protection of Animals in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

31 Hilda Kean, *Animal Rights: Political and Social Change in Britain since 1800* (London: Reaktion Books, 1998).

32 Louise Lind-af-Hageby and Liesa Schartau, *The Shambles of Science* (London: Ernest Bell, 1903).

mobilisation in its innovative exposé on British factory farming.³³ This publication was bolstered by the 1975 release of Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*, which similarly detailed descriptions of Nonhuman Animal suffering in agricultural facilities and further invigorated the movement.³⁴

Today, moral shocks remain a mainstay of the Nonhuman Animal rights movement. Writes Mark Hawthorne in his guide to anti-speciesist activism, a project in its second edition and based on interviews with over one hundred leading activists:

Most people abhor cruelty to animals. The trouble is, they almost never see it. ... Of course, when they do see it, most people are shocked. The job of the activist is to access people's innate compassion by showing them that the horrors of animal exploitation are everywhere.³⁵

Photographers, artists, and cinematographers have earned esteemed positions in the movement for their documentary work. Jo-Anne McArthur, for instance, has released her wide-ranging portfolio to activists free-of-charge (Figure 1). In a crowdfunding campaign to support her new photography book, *HIDDEN: Animals in the Anthropocene*, she explains the vital role of moral shocks: 'My vision for this ground-breaking new book was inspired by the war photography that has shaped history. Images of conflict and suffering have always played a crucial role in exposing atrocities and galvanizing the masses'.³⁶

The average on-the-ground activist also relies heavily on this 'war photography'. Student and grassroots organisations often stage film screenings depicting the horrors of speciesism, while nonprofits operate pay-per-view screenings of clips depicting the same (viewers receive a small remuneration for watching a few minutes of footage, sometimes with virtual reality technology). Another popular tactic is to stage public protests using signs decorated with images of violence against animals or even the physical deceased bodies of nonhuman

33 Ruth Harrison, *Animal Machines* (London: Vincent Stuart, 1964); see Heleen van de Weerd and Victoria Sandilands, 'Bringing the Issue of Animal Welfare to the Public: A Biography of Ruth Harrison (1920–2000)', *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* 113 (2008): 404–10.

34 Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (London: Random House, 1975); Gonzalo Villaneuva, "The Bible" of the Animal Movement: Peter Singer and *Animal Liberation*, 1970–1976', *History Australia* 13, no. 3 (2016): 399–414.

35 Mark Hawthorne, *Striking at the Roots: A Practical Guide to Animal Activism* (Ropley: Changemakers Books, 2018), 16.

36 Jo-Anne McArthur, 'HIDDEN: Animals in the Anthropocene, by We Animals' (Indiegogo campaign), accessed 4, August, 2023, <https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/hidden-animals-in-the-anthropocene-by-we-animals>.



FIGURE 1
 'Next in Line for Slaughter'. Jo-Anne McArthur offers her photography, which relies on the strategy of 'bearing witness' free-of-charge to activists
 FROM *WE ANIMALS*, 2010,
[HTTPS://JOANNEMCARTHUR.COM /PROJECTS/PHOTOS/WE-ANIMALS/](https://joannemcarthur.com/projects/photos/we-animals/)

victims (the latter is an approach popularised by the Spanish organisation Animal Equality). Groups such as Anonymous for the Voiceless, We the Free, and SURGE will sometimes deploy activists to busy public spaces where they silently stream speciesist practices on laptops and tablets (activists are often masked and silent to maintain the audience's focus on the images). Activists also recreate extreme violence on themselves, be it through body paint, fake blood, or, in the case of Israeli group 269life, physical assaults or branding with hot irons.

Although these displays are aimed at outsiders, activists, too, are regularly exposed to this imagery as they organise events and collect campaign materials. Sometimes this activist exposure is encouraged as a strategy in itself. Bearing witness, for instance, relies on activist exposure to moral shocks to activate policymakers, the public and those directly involved in speciesism.³⁷ Bearing witness is thought to be formational to the activists' identity, but it also nurtures a solidarity with the nonhumans for whom they advocate.³⁸ Research

37 Maneesha Deckha, 'The Save Movement and Farmed Animal Suffering: The Advocacy Benefits of Bearing Witness as a Template for Law,' *Canadian Journal of Comparative and Contemporary Law* 5, no. 1 (2019): 1–34.

38 Naisargi N. Dave, 'Witness: Humans, Animals, and the Politics of Becoming,' *Cultural Anthropology* 29, no. 3 (2014): 433–56.

on exposure effects, however, prioritises the experiences of new activists rather than their established counterparts. The same can be said of Fernández's study on moral shocks. Fernández argues that shocking images are key to sustaining activism, but she also hints that some respondents 'thought that exposure to these images, especially violent ones, was no longer effective or possibly even detrimental to the sustainability of their activism'.³⁹ Fernández's research does not substantively examine the relationship between the activists' opinions on moral shocks and their length of time as an activist, so to what extent morally shocking imagery is relevant to long-term activism is unclear. Ken Shapiro, psychologist and President of the Board of the Animals and Society Institute, has suggested that Nonhuman Animal activists are 'caring sleuths' who are characterised by their dedication to 'seeking and exposing suffering behind closed doors', sleuth work that is 'insidious, for it is difficult to stop seeking'.⁴⁰ For Shapiro, this sleuth work stems from a new perspective that activists adopt as they learn to think more critically about processes of speciesism. He recognises a diversity of psychological responses to repeated and prolonged exposure to this information: 'Its discovery is itself troubling, particularly to a caring person who habitually registers that suffering.... human pain commingles with the animals' suffering'.⁴¹ Likewise, Elisa Aaltola warns that repeated exposure to shocking images of animal suffering can lead activists to feel helpless and puts them at risk for compassion fatigue.⁴² For that matter, these images, when viewed by the public in a culture that has normalised violence against animals, could actually serve to further normalise that violence.⁴³ Uncovering how established activists engage with morally shocking campaigning material would thus be useful regarding its role in maintaining motivation, its potential impact on the emotional well-being of activists and, ultimately, the extent of its utility in the general social movement space.

39 Fernández, 'Images that Liberate,' 11.

40 Ken Shapiro, 'The Caring Sleuth: Portrait of an Animal Rights Activist,' *Society & Animals* 2, no. 2 (1994): 145–65 (158).

41 Shapiro, 'The Caring Sleuth,' 161.

42 Elisa Aaltola, 'Animal Suffering: Representations and the Act of Looking,' *Anthrozoös* 27, no. 1 (2014): 19–31.

43 Lee Hall, *On Their Own Terms: Bringing Animal-Rights Philosophy Down to Earth* (Darien: Nectar Bat Press, 2010).

3 Methods

3.1 Design

This study hypothesises that, rather than repeatedly and intentionally exposing themselves to morally shocking campaign materials to sustain motivation, committed activists negotiate their exposure as a means of managing their emotions. To discern the role that moral shocks play in the maintenance of activist motivation, this study undertakes qualitative, semi-structured email-based interviews with twenty-five activists. Activism is, of course, subjective and difficult to define,⁴⁴ but, for the purposes of this study, activists are defined as those who self-identify as such and regularly engage with protests of various types. This could include, but is not limited to, participation in marches or vigils, tabling, networking events and social media campaigning. The sample includes activists who were solicited online through two social media channels: 1) the 'ANIMAL RIGHTS WORLDWIDE' Facebook community group (4900 members); and 2) my personal Twitter account which, at the time of data collection, claimed approximately 1800 followers. Many of these followers are activists as well as colleagues (I encouraged readers to share the call for participation among their own activist networks). Both channels have a reasonably varied audience across English-speaking Western countries. As the sample was one of convenience, I did not stratify beyond activist status and age (eighteen years and older). The Facebook group was chosen based on its generic title and its prominence at the top of the search results for the phrase 'animal rights' in the Facebook groups directory.⁴⁵

Data collection began on 31 March 2021 on Twitter and, following several days' wait for membership approval, 5 April on Facebook. On 22 April, to counter the lack of responses from Facebook, I posted a call for participants on the 'Animal Rights' thread of Reddit (membership of over twenty thousand) although this also proved an ineffective channel. Potential participants were asked to contact me at my (secure) university email, and those who did were provided an information sheet about the study. I endeavoured that at least half of my sample had been activists for five years or more, as this is a threshold

44 Chris Bobel, "I'm Not an Activist, Though I've Done a Lot of It": Doing Activism, Being Activist and the "Perfect Standard" in a Contemporary Movement,' *Social Movement Studies* 6, no. 2 (2007): 147–59.

45 The top-ranked Facebook group was, at the time, 'Animal Rights,' but it did not approve my solicitation until three weeks later, necessitating the switch to 'ANIMAL RIGHTS WORLDWIDE' for the sake of time. After approval, I did post a call for participants, but this yielded no response.

recognised in the literature on sustained commitment,⁴⁶ but this proved difficult to achieve. Respondents were provided an informed consent form and asked to provide a statement of consent via email in order to participate in the study. Participants were assigned a number before data was stored and analysed. In total, twenty-eight individuals responded, with twenty-five completing the consent form and email-based questionnaire. Questionnaires were collected until early June 2021.

I employed qualitative interviewing, given its ability to solicit detailed descriptions, particularly with regard to processes and interpretations related to social events and artefacts.⁴⁷ Interviews took place in email exchanges. Email interviewing can be beneficial in offering flexibility in how participants engage with the interviews, but they can also provide more opportunity for participants to stage their responses (and themselves).⁴⁸ This flexibility grants participants more space to carefully form their responses without the pressuring presence of the researcher (or other respondents).⁴⁹ These characteristics of email interviewing would be useful for examining the difficult emotions that individuals must negotiate when engaging anti-speciesist activism. Beyond basic demographics, questions related to the participant's activist history, their considerations of morally shocking materials for the purposes of effective outreach, and their personal feelings about these materials (Table 1). They were explicitly asked to discuss how they understood morally shocking images in the context of motivation. To contribute additional breadth to the study, I encouraged respondents to share and explain examples of the types of materials they engage with. Visual qualitative research is an emerging methodology for capturing the social world as the subject sees it,⁵⁰ a methodology well suited to this study, as the anti-speciesist activist's world is a highly visual one. However, only one participant included an image.

The methodology, although limited in aforementioned ways, did prove successful in soliciting in-depth responses. Responses ranged in length from a couple of sentences to a couple of paragraphs. Although the email design of the

46 Downton and Wehr, 'Persistent Pacifism.'

47 Robert Weiss, *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

48 Nalita James, 'The Use of Email Interviewing as a Qualitative Method of Inquiry in Educational Research,' *British Educational Research Journal* 33, no. 6 (2007): 963–76.

49 Roschelle L. Fritz and Roxanne Vandermause, 'Data Collection via In-Depth Email Interviewing,' *Qualitative Health Research* 28, no. 10 (2017): 1640–49.

50 Marcus Banks, *Using Visual Data in Qualitative Research*, 2nd edn (London: Sage, 2018); Douglas Harper, 'What's New Visually?,' in *Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, ed. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (London: Sage, 2008), 177–212.

TABLE 1 Questionnaire

How long have you considered yourself an activist?

What kind of activism do you participate in (strategies, organizational affiliation, etc.)?

What is your activist affiliation? For instance, are you an individual activist, a volunteer for a community group, or employed with a nonprofit? I will create pseudonyms for named organizations in my published results, but if you are worried about confidentiality, you do not have to name your organization.

How often are you exposed to violence against animals in your activism? This might include images, films, animations, audio, or texts depicting and describing the extreme suffering of animals, killing of animals, or dead animals. It can also include real-life exposure via “bearing witness” activities, live export campaigns, undercover investigations, open releases, rescue work, etc.

When practicing your activism, do you use activist material that includes graphic or violent imagery? Why or why not? You may attach and describe examples if relevant.

What about yourself? Do you intentionally expose yourself to graphic imagery? Why or why not? Again, you may attach examples if you like.

As an activist, do you think it is important or necessary to bear witness to animal suffering in order to maintain your own motivation? Why or why not?

study allowed for follow-up with participants for clarification over responses, this was mostly unnecessary, as the original responses were quite expansive. This study aimed to identify how activists might be more avoidant with regard to moral shocks than previously assumed, but because so little research on this relationship exists to guide the analysis, I opted for open coding to identify emergent themes. The result of this approach was the identification of three major themes: confusion over whether or not moral shocks are useful for persuading the public, efforts to manage exposure to morally shocking materials and the uncomfortable emotions they can elicit, and the redirection of attention from this management to the potential utility of moral shocks for outreach purposes. These themes (coded as efficacy dilemma, emotional management and deflecting attention) indicate that exposure to moral shocks does impact the emotional lives of activists and that activists respond with various negotiation strategies. These mainly involve the avoidance of moral shocks, but they also involve, for some, the avoidance of owning this emotion work by aligning their accounts with mainstream movement narratives that exalt the importance of moral shocks.

Ethically, I also had to consider the potential for respondents to experience discomfort or become triggered as a result of revisiting stories, images and

other information about Nonhuman Animal suffering. I mediated this potential by reminding interviewees, where appropriate, that their participation was voluntary and that they needed only discuss as was consistent with their comfort level. Scholar-activist Paul Gorski has created an online resource collection for activists experiencing distress, with his institution, George Mason University.⁵¹ Activists were encouraged to visit the site if they felt any negative effects from participating in the study. That said, as feminist methodology has observed, research need not only be extractive; it can also be empowering.⁵² Activists could find participation rewarding, given their presumable interest in supporting research that could improve movement efficacy. This is a potential benefit that likely mitigated the psychological costs of participation. Indeed, more than one respondent finished their submission with a positive comment. 'Thank you for inviting me to take part. I have thought about things that I haven't consciously explored before and I enjoyed the experience', writes one. 'I find writing about this rather cathartic!', writes another.

3.2 *Limitations*

Email surveying is useful for discerning identity formation given the space it allows for reflexivity, but it is limited by the heightened potential for participants to construct an identity that may not be necessarily accurate.⁵³ In this study, for instance, it could be that respondents report that they actively avoid moral shocks, despite regularly interacting with them. Another limitation relates to the reach of the sample. Only a small number of participants were interviewed, to maintain the manageability of the sample and allow for more in-depth discussions. This sample is also limited to English-speakers and is biased towards activists in the West who gravitate to the two selected social media channels utilised in sampling. Vegans from different regions are likely to hold different opinions about the utility of moral shocks.

Although respondents were not asked to divulge how they learned about the study, most of the responses occurred directly after the tweet or otherwise mentioned Twitter in the initial email. It is likely that the high volume of content on the Facebook page and my failure to utilise attention-grabbing imagery invisibilised the Facebook post calling for participants. This certainly introduces a bias, as most of the respondents would have been familiar with me and

51 Paul Gorski, 'Thriving Activist Toolkit,' Center for the Advancement of Wellbeing, George Mason University, <https://wellbeing.gmu.edu/resources/thriving-activist>.

52 Nancy Naples, *Feminism and Method* (London: Routledge, 2003).

53 James, 'The Use of Email Interviewing.'

my work, whereas the Facebook page was far more wide-reaching and anonymous. I suspect the Twitter bias also accounts for why so very few participants were under thirty years old. A few respondents (likely drawn from Twitter) noted that they were in academia. This could mean that they have atypical exposure to research on tactical efficacy (although on-the-ground activists are typically aware about the debate on the utility of moral shocks). The academic Twitter bias might also explain why some participants were noticeably verbose in their responses. Likewise, self-selection bias could be at play; those with particularly strong views about moral shocks might be prompted to participate. Although the recruitment call did not explicitly indicate that the study invited negative perceptions on the utility of moral shocks, the fact that the study was calling their utility into question at all may have been indication enough.

This bias concerned me, but persistent posting on four different internet channels yielded no further results, so I decided to move forward to avoid a complete methodological redesign in the era of COVID-19, when options were limited. Additional research using alternative methodologies would be useful to expand on the results of this study. For instance, surveying random participants in a march or at a festival would be more likely to solicit the average activist's opinion on using moral shocks. Finally, anonymity was an issue. Although participants and their responses, once recorded in a spreadsheet, were anonymised, the management of the interviews over email created additional security issues. Interviews were therefore engaged using my secure university email, and responses, once recorded, were deleted from the email server following the study's completion.

4 Findings and Discussion

4.1 *Participant Demographics*

Consistent with other demographic research on animal rights activists,⁵⁴ most (eighteen) respondents identified as female, while five identified as male and another two as non-binary. Almost all of the respondents were white, with one identifying as Asian, another as mixed, and another choosing not to respond. The sample was a bit more ethnically diverse, however: British (six), American (five), Irish (three), Greek (three), British-Irish (two), British-Canadian (two),

54 Emily Gaarder, *Women and the Animal Rights Movement* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011).

Turkish (one), Scottish (one), Australian (one), and Canadian (one). Respondents were predominantly young adult and middle age, with the average age being thirty-nine.⁵⁵ Geographically, the sample was relatively representative of the West, with most residing in the United Kingdom (eight) and the United States (five). The remaining were located in Ireland (three), Canada (two), Greece (two), Austria (one), Australia (one), Germany (one), the Netherlands (one), or Sweden (one).

The majority (eighteen) of participants indicated that they had been activists for five years or more; the rest (seven) were relatively new to activism with less than five years' experience. The average length of activist career was thirteen years.⁵⁶ Sixteen participants indicated that they were independent activists, while eight identified as volunteers and one as an employee with a professional charity. Although many identified as independent activists (either acting alone or rotating between various groups as the opportunity or need arose), most also reported participating in collective action, much of which was organised by grassroots and direct action groups. The Nonhuman Animal rights movement is large, diverse, and fluid, such that most activists engage in a mixture of participation styles. For coding purposes, I emphasised the participation type which was reported as most prominent and current in their activist career. To this end, two participants reported to be active with a national charity and an additional six had participated in activism with a national charity in the past. Three indicated that they participated in grassroots activism, three participated in direct action, and another four participated in a mixture of grassroots *and* direct action (indeed, a considerable amount of direct action activism is grassroots in nature). The remaining seven participants insisted complete independence in their activities (engaging in academic research or online advocacy, for example).

4.2 *Is it Worth It? The Efficacy Dilemma*

Exposure to morally shocking imagery was standard in the sample; all but three individuals reported that they were simply unable to avoid it. Two reported only infrequent exposure, while the remaining were either currently exposed to it on a regular basis or had been so in the past. Much of this exposure had to do with the mediascape of their activist lives. They were exposed either from researching for campaigns or from the everyday navigation of activist

55 The median age was thirty-seven, with the youngest participant at twenty-four and the oldest at sixty-seven.

56 The median career length was nine years, with careers ranging from one year to more than forty.

spaces and networks (fourteen respondents indicated exposure of this kind). An additional eleven individuals reported exposure from outreach efforts (film screenings or illustrated flyers, for instance). Others had more direct exposure to suffering: six pointed to campaigns they participated in which required them to bear witness, such as vigils at slaughterhouses or live export stations. Four participants pointed to exposure in rescue efforts or hunting and fishing sabotages.

When asked whether they used shocking imagery in their activism, there was considerable difference, and many participants were compelled to discuss the efficacy of this tactic to explain their decision to use it (or not). Some believed it was tactically and psychologically effective, while others believed just the opposite. Six participants were clearly in support, indicating its utility in educating the public, overcoming denial, and depicting the true nature of speciesism in a society that largely invisibilises this suffering. Another six used it for these purposes but did indicate some reservations about its universal applicability. Some of these respondents were simply unsure of its general effectiveness, but others were specifically concerned about the need to tailor tactics to their audience and obtain consent before exposing the audience to upsetting materials.

Of those who disagreed with the utility of moral shocks, some indicated that they had evolved in their thinking from the status quo. Because the use of moral shocks is so institutionalised in the Nonhuman Animal rights movement, the onus seemed to be placed on individuals to ascertain their utility and rationalise their disuse. Of these abstainers, six worried that shocking imagery might *repel* the public. Notes one respondent: 'I find that it turns people away from the cause, which is the opposite of my intentions'. 'The last thing I want to do is have those I'm speaking to bury their head further in the sand', explains another. Three noted that there were ethical issues with using it. This related to the emotional (potentially triggering) imposition on viewers as well as the perceived disrespect to the nonhumans depicted in the campaign materials. 'If I was attacked or murdered,' explained one participant, 'I wouldn't want it shared and seen by lots of people.' To this end, moral shocks were sometimes likened to pornography. One female participant continues: 'shock and arousal can be similar physiologically and can warp/traumatize/desensitise your natural responses'. Moral shocks could subsequently facilitate the speciesist notion that 'animals are just there to be consumed and abused'. Seven participants reported that they abstained from moral shocks primarily because they found other tactics to be more effective. Alternatives included emphasising nonhuman individuality, engaging in rational dialogue, presenting scientific data, or relying on basic descriptions of injustices done to Nonhuman Animals.

Many respondents were genuinely unsure about the efficacy of this tactic, and put considerable thought into how the medium of dissemination, context and audience might impact its utility. Responses indicate that activists are relying on personal intuition, past experiences with outreach efforts, movement tradition, and norms established by organising institutions to determine their position on moral shocks. Participants who were simply unconvinced about the utility of moral shocks relied on a large variety of tactics to highlight the plight of other animals without spotlighting their extreme suffering. Jasper and Poulsen's research on moral shocks may be showing its age.⁵⁷ Activists of the twenty-first century mobilise in a society marked by advanced communication technology and saturated by social media. They are arguably exposed to nonhuman suffering on a scale not imaginable to the average activist in the 1990s.⁵⁸ This is to say nothing of the non-activist audience from which the movement hopes to derive new membership; moral shocks may be less effective to a public that is overloaded with information and perhaps even desensitised. Although this study is not designed to test the efficacy of moral shocks, the considerable mental deliberation and tactical innovation (or lack thereof) reported by participants suggests that research on tactical efficacy is especially needed.

4.3 *Managing Emotions*

Exposure to moral shocks is routine and activist comfort with utilising this tactic for outreach purposes is divided, but what about personal use? Recall that Fernández and Hansson and Jacobsson suggest that repeated exposure is important for maintaining motivation.⁵⁹ The data collected for this study do not support this hypothesis. Most of the respondents, regardless of affiliation or length of time as activist, indicated that they avoided or restricted personal exposure to shocking images. Only two individuals reported exposing themselves as a means of continued motivation; these were two of the youngest participants and one had only been an activist for two years. This could suggest a process of activist maturation with regard to managing emotional vulnerability. This is certainly a possibility, given that so many other respondents

57 Jasper and Poulsen, 'Recruiting Strangers and Friends.'

58 In addition to technology, time is also a factor. At the time of Jasper and Poulsen's research in 1995, the second wave movement was still quite young. That is, the amount of morally shocking material was comparatively limited. Today's activists can draw on half a century of accumulated documentation of nonhuman suffering in modern systems.

59 Fernández, 'Images that Liberate'; Hansson and Jacobsson, 'Learning to Be Affected: Subjectivity.'

reported that they had, *in the past*, been much more open to exposure (either intentionally self-exposing or being indirectly exposed as a result of their choice of campaigning). 'I used to gorge on such imagery to maintain motivation to act,' one participant explains, 'but that was at first when I had just discovered what happens to nonhumans and was angry about it most of the time.' Reflecting on the minimal improvement for Nonhuman Animals across the two decades of her activist career, the participant continues: 'I often had feelings of helplessness'. 'I try to avoid it at all costs now', one participant writes. Many respondents (thirteen) did indicate that they exposed themselves if it was necessary for educational purposes in order to prepare them for informed outreach and engagement: 'I will only watch graphic footage now if I feel I can learn something about a practice to better inform my advocacy, otherwise I will read about it'. Nearly half of the sample, however, did not identify moral shocks as useful for personal education or effective campaigning with the public. These eleven participants reported that they avoided self-exposure outright. Four of these abstainers had, in the past, self-exposed, suggesting some degree of emotional management as their activist career progressed. Moral shocks, for most of the participants in this study, are generally treated as an outreach tool to be carefully handled (if at all) and not to be turned on oneself.

Indeed, moral shocks were discussed with an air of danger, as considerable suffering emerged in the responses. Fifteen respondents cited their need to manage exposure with reference to various types of psychological distress; descriptions like 'depressed,' 'helplessness' and 'overwhelming' surfaced many times (Figure 2). Nine activists explicitly used a variant of the word 'trauma' to explain their relationship with morally shocking images. As one respondent who claims to have developed post-traumatic stress disorder from participating in slaughterhouse vigils summarises: 'burnout is real'. Many abstainers were highly reflective, considering that what might work for them may not work for others. Some recollected that morally shocking images had once worked for themselves, however, and considered whether intentional self-exposure might motivate them to be even *more* active. In any case, complete avoidance is not possible given the ubiquitousness of the tactic in movement spaces and even in the public sphere. 'I struggle to get through the RSPCA ads on TV without sobbing', admits one respondent.

Here, the discourse on trauma may enlighten the participants' thinking. Some social movement researchers highlight the mobilising potential of trauma. For instance, the AIDS epidemic and the heterosexist state response (or nonresponse) contributed to a collective trauma in the gay community



FIGURE 2
Frequency of participants' language
indicating psychological distress

which, in turn, served as an important impetus for collective action.⁶⁰ Research on the post-Holocaust Jewish community, furthermore, has suggested that trauma can serve as an identity.⁶¹ Others have argued, though, that trauma might be collectively experienced, but it is not necessarily empowering. Kai Erikson has emphasised how collective trauma undermines social life and disrupts community bonds.⁶² If this trend holds true for Nonhuman Animal rights activist communities, this could be troubling in terms of movement efficacy. Erikson continues that community is important for cushioning collectively experienced pain, but the responses offered by participants in this study do not identify such a capacity in the Nonhuman Animal rights movement. Although prompting in the interview may have revealed collective support, the responses as they are depict a more individualised, alienated experience for activists.

4.4 *Deflecting Attention from Self-Care Strategies with Narratives of Selflessness*

When explicitly asked if they believed morally shocking images were necessary to maintain their own motivation, only six participants agreed (although four of these had reservations about the utility or sustainability of this approach). Sometimes respondents would stray from their personal relationship with moral shocks to their understanding of how important the tactic is for movement recruitment and public education. One proponent explains: 'I personally believe that people DO need to see/hear about these issues. We really shouldn't "protect" people from the truth'. The self-harm that is clearly

60 Deborah Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

61 Arlene Stein, 'Trauma and Origins: Post-Holocaust Genealogists and the Work of Memory,' *Qualitative Sociology* 32 (2009): 293–309.

62 Kai Erikson, 'Notes on Trauma and Community,' *American Image* 48, no. 4 (1991): 455–72.

associated with exposure may be sidelined or deflected by the participant in their selfless prioritisation of social justice. As the above participant continues, denial is too easy without exposure: 'Folks who are totally uninitiated to these issues – I don't think many of them would believe what goes on without seeing it'. Another participant continues: 'I believe that it is the *only* way for human beings to really understand what is done to animals and to grasp the full horror of it'.

Of the remaining, ten participants indicated that continual exposure was not useful ('I think the images I saw in my youth are enough to sustain my activism for a lifetime'), eight worried about the associated trauma, and eight also pointed to the counterintuitiveness (or counterproductiveness) of 'preaching to the choir', so to speak. 'I see no point in exposing myself to it over and over', expounds one participant. Indeed, many explained that it was simply not necessary, as they were already activists (and, in many cases, also vegan). I detect a hint of sheepishness and self-deprecation in some of these responses. It is as though participants feel embarrassed about their abstinence in a movement that has normalised moral shocks. For instance, one participant writes:

I have never watched *Dominion*, *Land of Hope and Glory*, *Cowspiracy* or any of the well known documentaries. There are times I feel I 'should' in order to educate myself on different areas of the industries, but I know that I will just be heartbroken, traumatised and the images haunt me.

Activists thus engage emotion work in managing their own self-care, but also in managing a narrative about their abstinence in the activist community. By way of another example, some respondents felt the need to rationalise their decision by emphasising how abstinence allowed them to become better activists. There was a genuine fear for some that exposure would manifest into reality the dreaded 'angry vegan' stereotype (this hyperemotional trope is dismissed as tactfully ineffective). Likewise, the repeated references to self-protection against the threat of debilitating burnout or psychological distress is described as key to sustaining their long-term commitment. Potentially embarrassing emotional vulnerability is thus reframed as a rational strategy. Explains one participant: 'I find that exposure to such suffering makes it difficult to think clearly about which tactics are the most effective, because it causes feelings of hatred, panic, and helplessness, which are not conducive to making a positive difference in the world'. 'It makes me feel helpless and overwhelmed and too sad to act', explains another. One participant discloses: 'I actively try to avoid it. Maybe that makes me a coward, but I find it horrific'. Julian Groves finds that anti-speciesists strategically manage emotions expressed in outreach to

increase resonance,⁶³ but the findings in this study suggest that activists are managing them within movement audiences as well. With moral shocks the norm, the rejection of moral shocks becomes deviant. In Goffmanian terms, activists who avoid moral shocks could be engaging in impression management to negotiate the perceived associated stigma.⁶⁴ Indeed, Jacobsson and Lindblom have suggested that emotion work is not only engaged by activists in relation to wider society, but also to the activist in-group itself.⁶⁵

5 Conclusion

Are moral shocks necessary to maintain activist motivation? According to the respondents in this study: no. The activists in this sample were deeply ambivalent about the utility of morally shocking imagery. Most actively avoided personal exposure, although quite a few maintained its utility for educating the public and mobilising new activists. Most were also very clear that they found this material deeply disturbing, with several specifically using the term 'traumatic'. Activism clearly has a psychological impact on activists. In many cases, this impact manifests physically with respondents reporting shaking, crying, panic attacks, isolation and insomnia. Given the seriousness of these responses, many activists also report disengaging from moral shocks. The potential for some activists to completely detach from the movement, for that matter, is likely high. As Shapiro reflects, 'Between the sadness and the self-questioning, an impulse to remain uninvolved, to tend one's own garden, can gain momentum'.⁶⁶

For those who remain, Shapiro identifies three categories of committed activists: those stunted by too much information, those who turn off their emotions, and those who succumb to their emotions with anger and indignancy. He does not consider the possibility of *managing* emotions in order to avoid these unhelpful outcomes as Jacobsson and Lindblom have explored.⁶⁷ This study finds activists restricting their exposure to moral shocks, if not avoiding them altogether. For some, it simply is not necessary to self-expose, and doing otherwise is believed to risk counterproductiveness. Movement matron and feminist theorist Carol Adams summarises this perspective:

63 Julian Groves, 'Learning to Feel.'

64 Irving Goffman, *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990).

65 Jacobsson and Lindblom, 'Emotion Work in Animal Rights Activism.'

66 Shapiro, 'The Caring Sleuth,' 161.

67 Shapiro, 'The Caring Sleuth'; Jacobsson and Lindblom, 'Emotion Work in Animal Rights Activism.'

I do not think that people need to watch videos of animal cruelty. If you have seen it once, you've seen it. ... I think one the things those videos do is to tire us out; they exhaust us. They unleash so much emotion that we feel no control. I think those are disempowering, rather than empowering.⁶⁸

This threat of disempowerment was of concern to many in my study. Many respondents emphasised that avoiding moral shocks was essential to the maintenance of their personal well-being. This self-care maintenance, in turn, contributed to a sustained commitment, healthy and productive activism, and a positive social movement outcome. Erikson notes that collective trauma is not simply a loss for that community but a loss in a confidence in human decency.⁶⁹ For anti-speciesists, exposure to extreme speciesism certainly disrupts trust in the common decency of humanity and can lead to feelings of misanthropy.⁷⁰ This may contribute to the disengagement that many participants in this study exhibit, given the saturation of activist spaces with violent speciesist imagery.

Perhaps social movements might not simply benefit from greater support for self-care practices, but a structural reorientation away from masculinised activist repertoires themselves. Feminist scholars have, for instance, considered 'politics of softness' as an alternative approach which 'foregrounds vulnerability, emotionality, and earnestness' in contrast to hardness, which 'betrays a hefty stake in the (neo)liberal myth of the autonomous, independent subject'.⁷¹ If the goal in anti-speciesism is to highlight species interdependence and interconnectedness, perhaps a softer, less shocking approach to activism could prove useful, not just to public engagement but also to maintaining activist well-being. The Nonhuman Animal rights movement is comprised mostly of women, so the gendered impacts of its repertoire matters. With regard to this study, the small sample size prevents any significant interpretation of gender's influence, but a clue did surface in the data. Of the seven respondents who did not identify as female, two indicated that they intentionally exposed

68 Carol Adams, 'Why Constantly Questioning Ourselves and Staying Informed as Activists is Key. Interview with Carol J. Adams,' *The Vegan Rainbow Project* (blog), 28 August 2018, <http://www.the-vegan-rainbow-project.org/single-post/2018/08/28/Why-Constantly-Questioning-Ourselves-and-Staying-Informed-as-Activists-is-Key-Interview-with-Carol-J-Adams>.

69 Kai Erikson, 'Notes on Trauma and Community.'

70 David Cooper, *Animals and Misanthropy* (London: Routledge, 2018).

71 Andi Schwartz, 'The Cultural Politics of Softness,' *GUTS* (blog), 28 December 2018, <http://gutsmagazine.ca/the-cultural-politics-of-softness>.

themselves to this imagery to self-motivate; none of the female-identifying respondents reported doing so.

Given the considerable disagreement and confusion regarding the efficacy of morally shocking images that has surfaced in this study, there is clearly need for future research on its tactical utility. The usefulness of moral shocks for recruitment remains questionable, but results from this study indicate that this tactic's impact on activists' psychological well-being is less dubious. More work is needed to qualify this relationship. I predicted that there may be different relationships with moral shocks based on gender, length of time active, and activist affiliation, but the small sample made these correlations impossible to test. Likewise, if moral shocks are not found to motivate existing activists, what impact might they have had on *former* activists? It could be that the psychological distress from repeated exposure has manifested in a large population of movement dropouts. Future research might unpack these relationships and might do so more effectively with a survey of a much larger and more diverse sample.