

What is Vegan Sociology?:

Sociology for total liberation
and a vegan world

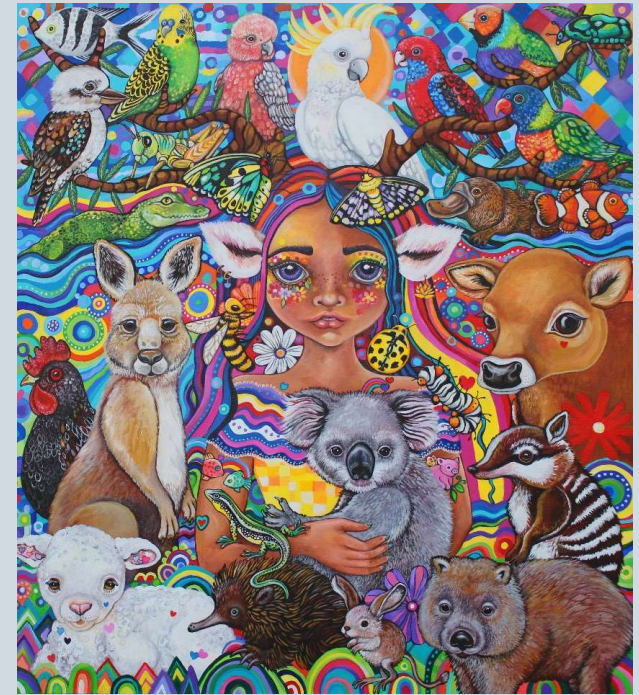
COREY L. WRENN PHD

LECTURER IN SOCIOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF KENT

CO-DIRECTOR, CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL MOVEMENTS

PAST-CHAIR, SECTION ON ANIMALS & SOCIETY, AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

CO-FOUNDER, INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF VEGAN SOCIOLOGISTS



Objectives

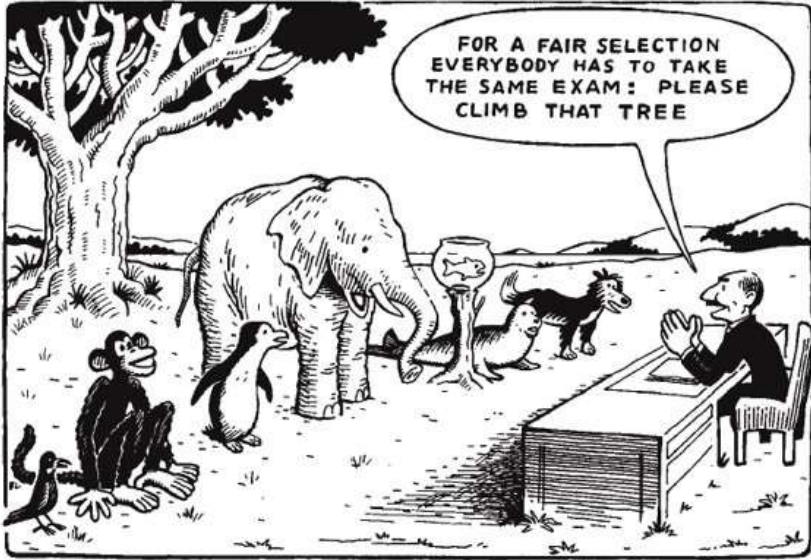
- ❖ Introduction to a **new field** of sociology
- ❖ A case for including **other animals**
- ❖ Suggestions for **veganizing your sociology**
- ❖ And employing **sociology in your veganism**

Building the Case

Sociological Anthropocentrism

- ❖ “...the systematic study of human society” (Macionis and Plummer 2005)
- ❖ “Sociology involves the systematic study of patterns of human interaction” (Cohen and Kennedy 2000)
- ❖ **Weber:** Sociology should also engage subjective meaning (animals supposedly lack this)
- ❖ **Marx:** Animals lack ability to contemplate and plan actions
- ❖ **Mead:** Animals lack capacity for significant symbols

The Anthropocentric “Perspective”



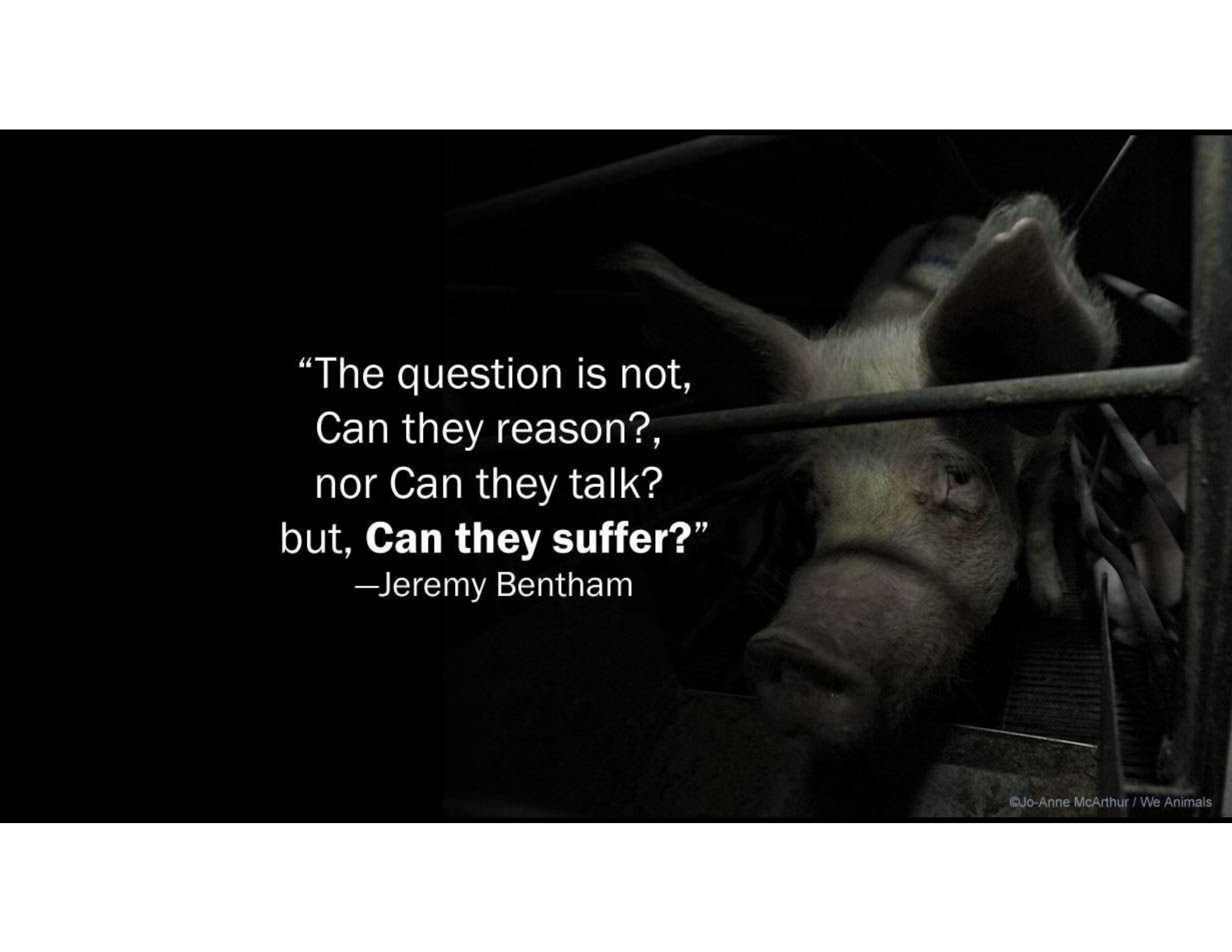
- ❖ Literally “**humans at the center**”
 - ❖ Others (re: animals) to the margins
- ❖ **Human bias**
 - ❖ Humans as taken-for-granted measure of perfection and importance
- ❖ Emphasis on rationality, culture, language, etc.

Human Primacy Politics

“Although organic differences exist among all animals (human and nonhuman), the ‘key’ division between human and nonhuman animals is founded in scientific categorizations of hierarchical differences that are a display of human identity, **since hierarchical distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’ are founded in, I argue, judgements and choices rather than in naturally occurring scientifically verifiable hierarchical divisions.**” (Peggs 2009: 86)

Human Identity Politics

- ❖ Humanity as a **performative identity**
- ❖ Animality as a **symbolic category**
- ❖ **Hierarchical** ordering of identity
- ❖ **Binaries** (us/them, human/animal)

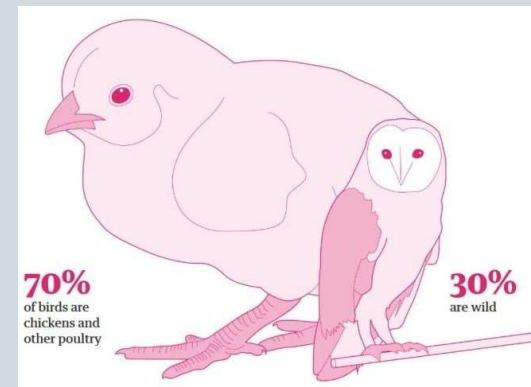
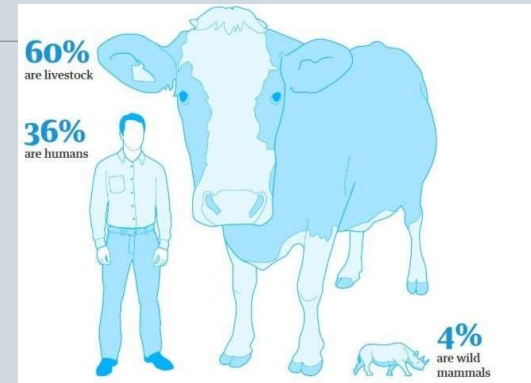
A dark, grainy photograph of a pig in a confined space, likely a cage. The pig's head is visible, pressed against a metal bar. The lighting is low, creating a somber and claustrophobic atmosphere. The pig's eyes are visible, and its snout is prominent.

“The question is not,
Can they reason?,
nor Can they talk?
but, **Can they suffer?**”

—Jeremy Bentham

Why Should Sociologists Care?

- ❖ Nonhumans are integral to the **development** and **maintenance** of human society
- ❖ **Largest minority/oppressed group**
 - ❖ Most mammalian biomass is nonhuman (Bar-On et al. 2018)
- ❖ Human oppression and nonhuman oppression are **entangled** (Nibert 2002)
- ❖ Key to our intimate **family** and **social** lives (Irvine 2004)



Bar-On, Y. et al. 2018. "The Biomass Distribution on Earth." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 115 (25): 6506-6511.

Irvine, L. 2004. *If You Tame Me: Understanding Our Connection with Animals*. Temple University Press.

Nibert, D. 2002. *Animal Rights/Human Rights*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Introducing the Field

The Field

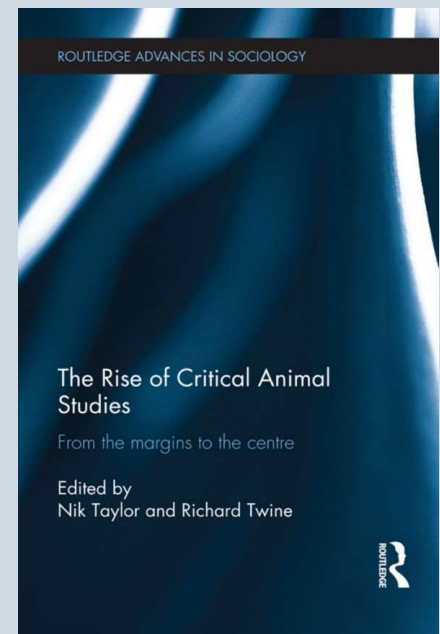
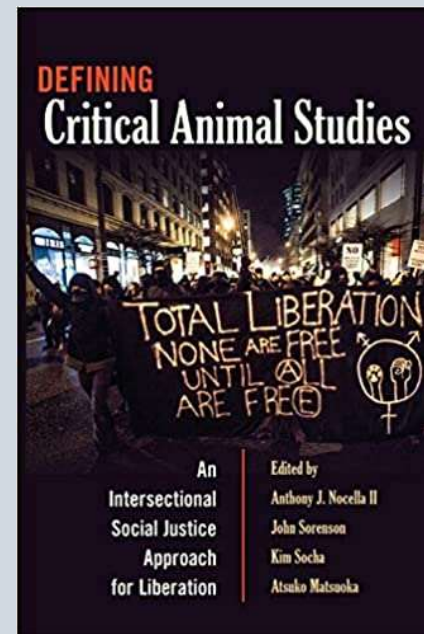
- ❖ Animal Ethics
- ❖ Ecofeminism
- ❖ Human/Animal studies
 - ❖ Posthumanism (Donna Haraway)
 - ❖ Animality Studies (Michael Lundblad)
 - ❖ Vegan Studies (Laura Wright)
 - ❖ Critical Animal Studies (CAS)
- ❖ Social Psychology
- ❖ Critical Sociology
 - ❖ Society & Animals
 - ❖ Intersectionality
 - ❖ Environmental sociology

Developing from Critical Animal Studies

❖ Sociologists at the forefront of CAS

- ❖ Yet ultimately multidisciplinary
- ❖ And not always vegan

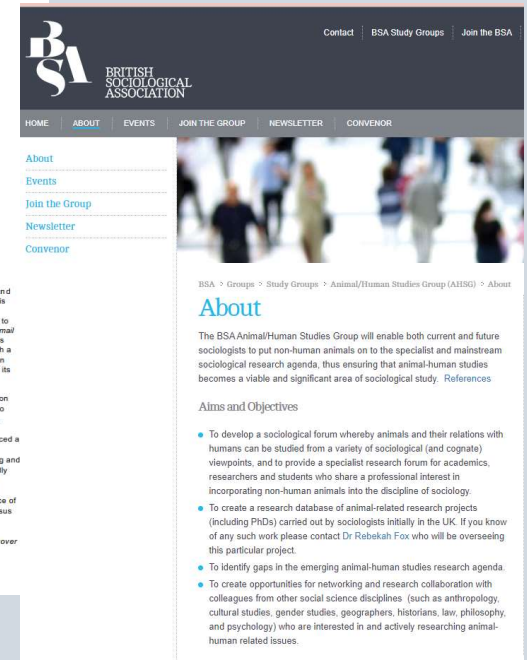
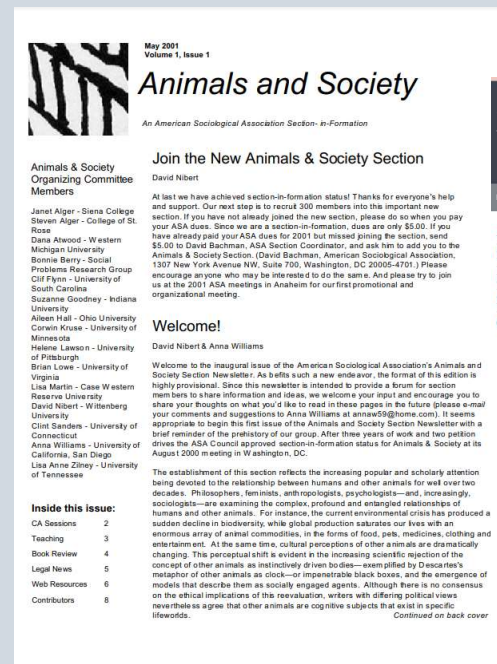
“Once sociology opened up to studying food and animal issues, and specifically veganism and farmed animals, vegan studies in sociology could emerge” (Cherry 2021: 152)



2014

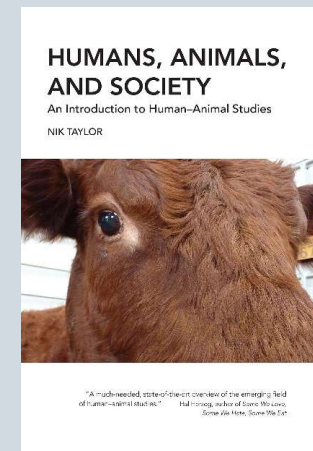
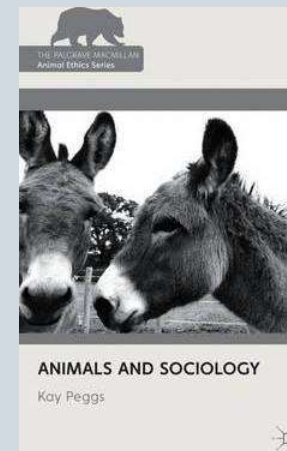
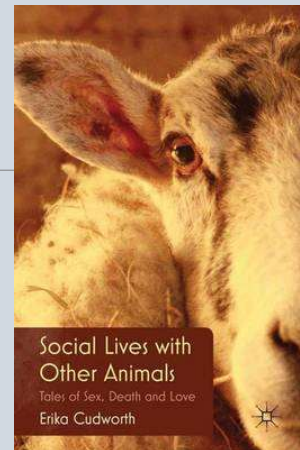
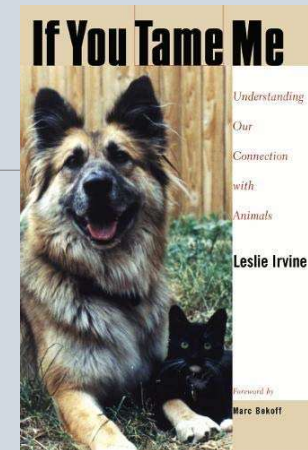
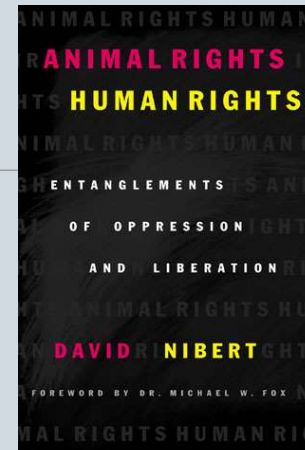
Developing from Animals & Society

- ❖ Animals & Society Section of **ASA** forms in 2001
- ❖ Animal/Human Studies Group of **BSA** forms in 2006
- ❖ Sociology & Animals thematic group of **TASA** forms in 2017
- ❖ Animals in Society research cluster of **CSA** forms in 2019
- ❖ Section of Interspecies Relations of the Polish Sociological Association in **2020**
- ❖ International Association of Vegan Sociologists forms in **2020**



Developing from Animals & Society

- ❖ ***Animal Rights/Human Rights*** – David Nibert (2002)
- ❖ ***If You Tame Me: Understanding Our Connection with Other Animals*** Leslie Irvine (2004)
- ❖ ***Social Lives with Other Animals*** – Erika Cudworth (2011)
- ❖ ***Animals and Sociology*** – Kay Peggs (2012)
- ❖ ***Humans, Animals and Society*** – Nik Taylor (2013)



Defining Vegan Sociology

What is Veganism?

- ❖ Political position
- ❖ Philosophy
- ❖ Identity
- ❖ Lifestyle
- ❖ Consumer choice



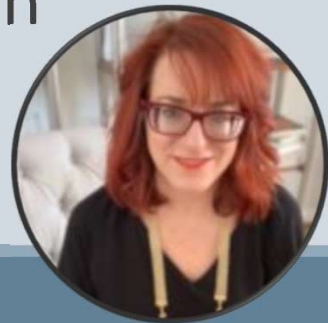
What is Vegan Sociology?

- ❖ Explicit recognition of **nonhuman subjectivity**
- ❖ And human **empathy** and **responsibility**
- ❖ Informed by **feminist** and **critical race** theories
 - ❖ And **environmental** justice
- ❖ Academic and **activist-oriented**



What is Vegan Sociology?

“Vegan sociology seeks to **include nonhuman animals into the sociological imagination**. We conduct sociological research and we use sociological theories to **advance the cause of nonhuman liberation**. We explore the **intersectional** oppression of speciesism, racism, sexism, and other forms of exploitation. We research vegan identity, vegan ideology, and vegan practice. But mostly, it means creating a cruelty-free world void of hierarchy, domination, and oppression for all, human animals, nonhuman animals, and earth.”



What is Vegan Sociology?

- ❖ Animal-centered
 - ❖ Challenging human supremacy
 - ❖ Visibilizing animals
 - ❖ Effective social change
- ❖ Human-centered
 - ❖ Identity politics
 - ❖ Food culture
 - ❖ Motivations, attitudes, behaviors
 - ❖ Social movement politics



Conclusion

What is Vegan Sociology?

- ❖ A distinct branch of **Critical Animal Studies** that is firmly sociological and unequivocally anti-speciesist
- ❖ If human **identity is performative** and the human/animal **binary is socially constructed**, it can be troubled
- ❖ Vegan sociology is a sociology for **total liberation** and a **vegan world**
 - ❖ Morally and **ethically driven**
 - ❖ Deeply **intersectional**



Where is Vegan Sociology Going?

- ❖ **Decentering whiteness** and the West
- ❖ Building **connections** with environmental and race/class/gender sociological collectives
- ❖ Expanding **classical theory**
- ❖ Building **new theory**
- ❖ Pioneering **multispecies methodology**
- ❖ Imagining anti-speciesist **futures** and **system changes**

Veganize Your Sociology

- ❖ **Accentuate animals** and their experiences
- ❖ Consider **power relations** between humans and other animals
- ❖ Check **euphemistic** or **objectifying language** and references
- ❖ How does **animality** influence social relations?
- ❖ Recognize difficulties in obtaining **consent**
- ❖ Start an animal-themed **study group**
- ❖ Request **vegan catering** at events

Follow Me

Facebook

@coreyleewrenn

@vegansociology

Instagram

@coreyleewrenn

Twitter

@drcoreyleewrenn

@vegansociology

Web

@coreyleewrenn.com

@vegansociology.com

@veganfeministnetwork.com



***International Association of
Vegan Sociologists***

2023



Vegan Intersectionality