

Demographic Representations in Nonhuman Animal Rights Magazines

& Implications for Mobilization Efforts and Diversity



Corey Lee Wrenn, M.S., ABD Ph.D.
Colorado State University
corey.wrenn@gmail.com

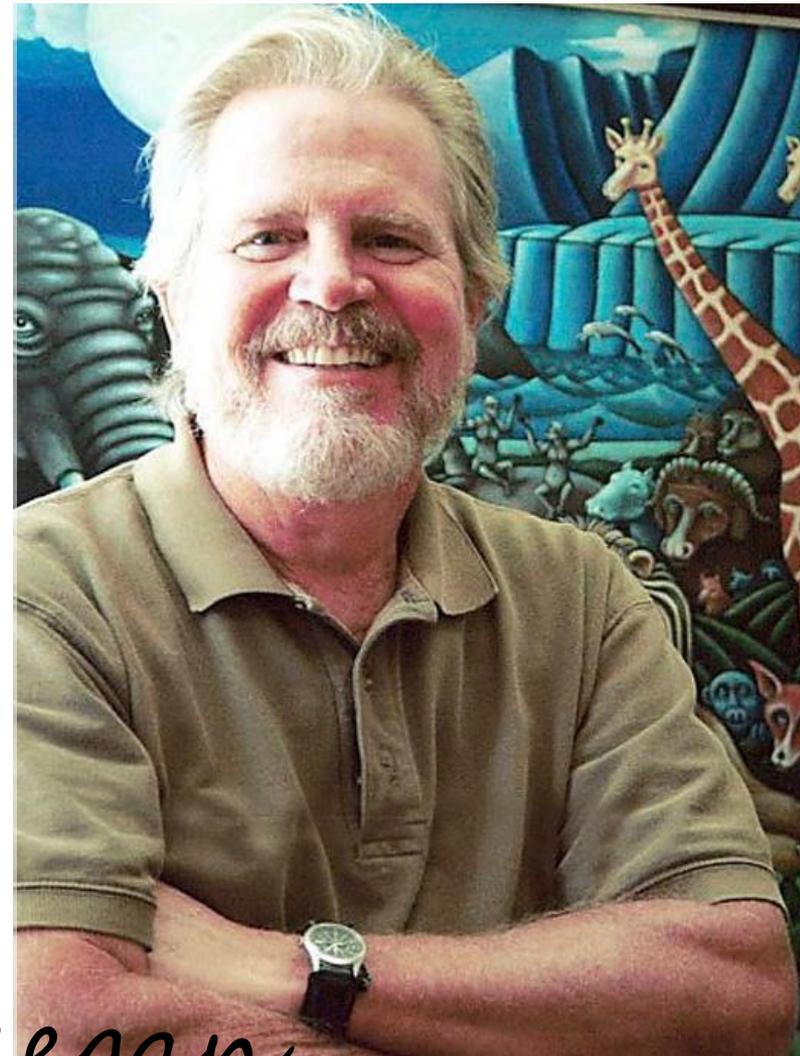
Abstract

- *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 Nonhuman Animal rights movement's success (Kymlicka and Donaldson 2013). While a variety of factors influence a movement's homogeneity, it is possible that social movements are actively reproducing a specific demographic through movement-produced literature that reflects a narrow activist identity. Social movement research on collective action motivation and research on the media's role in constructing identity suggests the possibility of such a link. A content analysis of 131 magazine covers was conducted to demonstrate that activist representations in Nonhuman Animal rights media are mostly white, female, and thin.*

Stunted Animal Advocacy

“Among the challenges we face, growth is the most important. [...] First, we must retain the activists [...] that we already have. Second, we must do a better job of recruiting new people to the movement. And not just a few. In the years ahead we must recruit very large numbers of new people to our already existing ranks. Only then, I believe, will the animal rights movement have a realistic chance of transforming itself from what we are today: a fringe movement, in the eyes of the general public and our elected officials to a powerful force of social change.”

– Tom Regan



Animal Advocacy in the Media

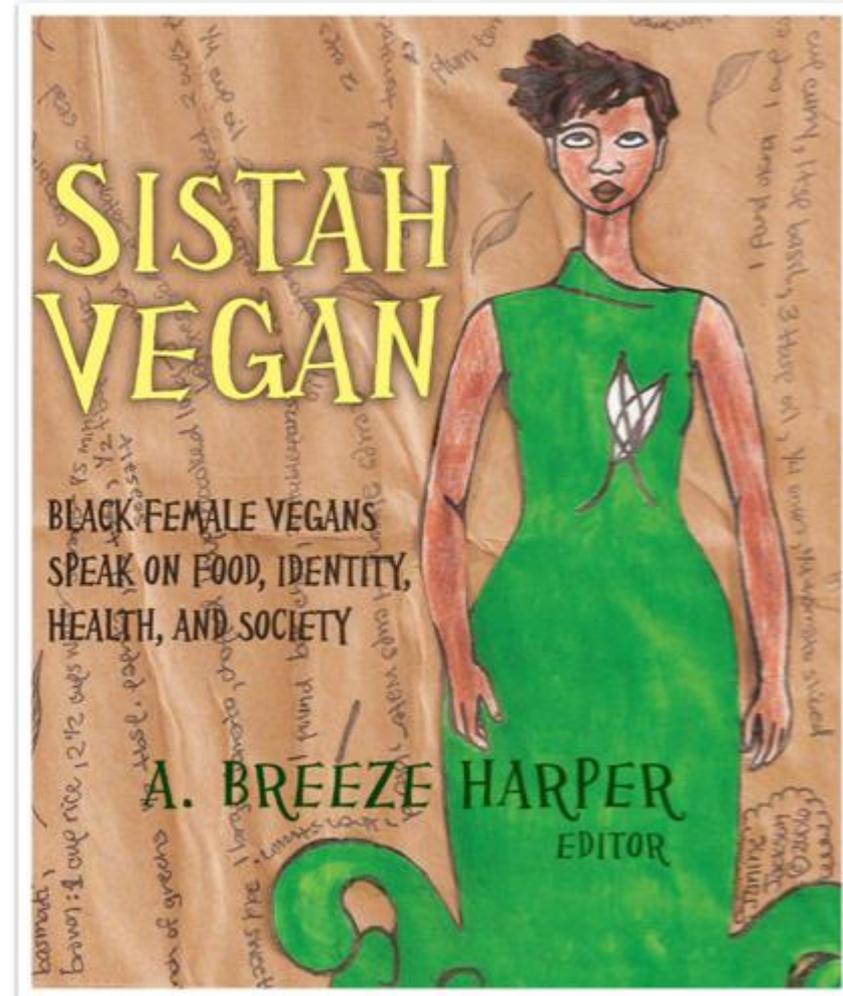
- Regan furthers:
 - “Most peoples’ perception of animal rights is based on how this idea is presented in the media, a source of information that I need not tell you often is misleading at best.”
- But the movement itself may be adding to this problematic representation...

Social Movements & Media

- Social movements often prioritize media exposure to recruit new members
- But mainstream media is usually unfavorable to SMs
 - SMs counter with the production of their own media
- Researchers speak mostly to stereotypes of AR activists as disturbed and violent...
 - But others have speculated on restrictive demographics in vegan media itself

Vegan Media Shortcomings

- Kymlicka and Donaldson (2013) cite the movement's failure to seriously embrace multiculturalism
- Harper (2010) posits that entire communities of color have been alienated by the movement and ignored by vegan outreach efforts



The Power of Media

- Media is elite-controlled, over-representing privileged groups and under-representing oppressed groups
- Sexualization & fetishization of thinness
- These representations (or lack thereof) related to discrimination, stereotype threat, and lowered levels of self-efficacy and self-esteem



Social Movement Identity

- Movements actively use media to construct reality through their claimsmaking and identity maintenance
- A movement identity that largely reflects the markers of privilege could be acting as a major disincentive to those excluded from that ideal type

Methodology

- 131 magazine covers between 2000 and 2012 of *VegNews* and PETA's *Animal Times*
- Coded for
 - Gender
 - Race
 - Body type
 - Sexualization

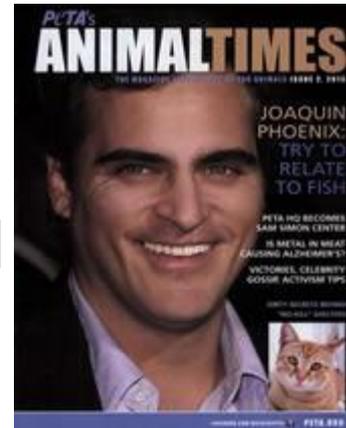
Results

- 149 total subjects
 - 87% White
 - 60% Female
 - 93% Thin
 - 13% Sexualized



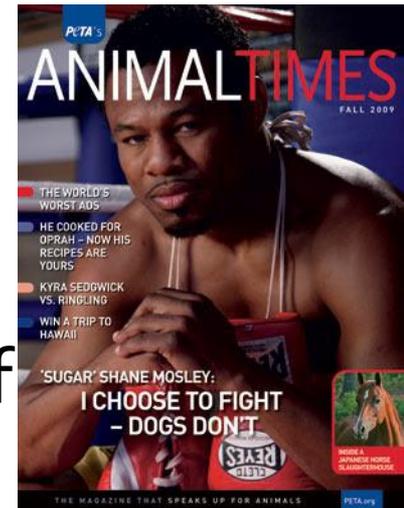
Gender

- Women comprise 80% of the movement
 - **But only 60% of subjects**
- Could result from
 - The privileged status men enjoy
 - The movement's tendency to elevate men and disassociate from stereotypes of femininity
 - Movement's attempt to be more inclusive to men
- Advocates should be concerned about aggravating sexist attitudes and strengthening patriarchal control over the movement



Race

- **African Americans** compromise ~13% of the US population, but only **7%** of sample
- **Hispanic and Latin@s** comprise 17% of the US population, but **>1%** of sample
- **Asians** “well” represented at **4.7%** (5% of the US population)
- Data reflects findings from movement surveys that report a white majority (Maurer 2002) and Harper’s (2010) observations regarding the “whiteness” of vegan advocacy spaces

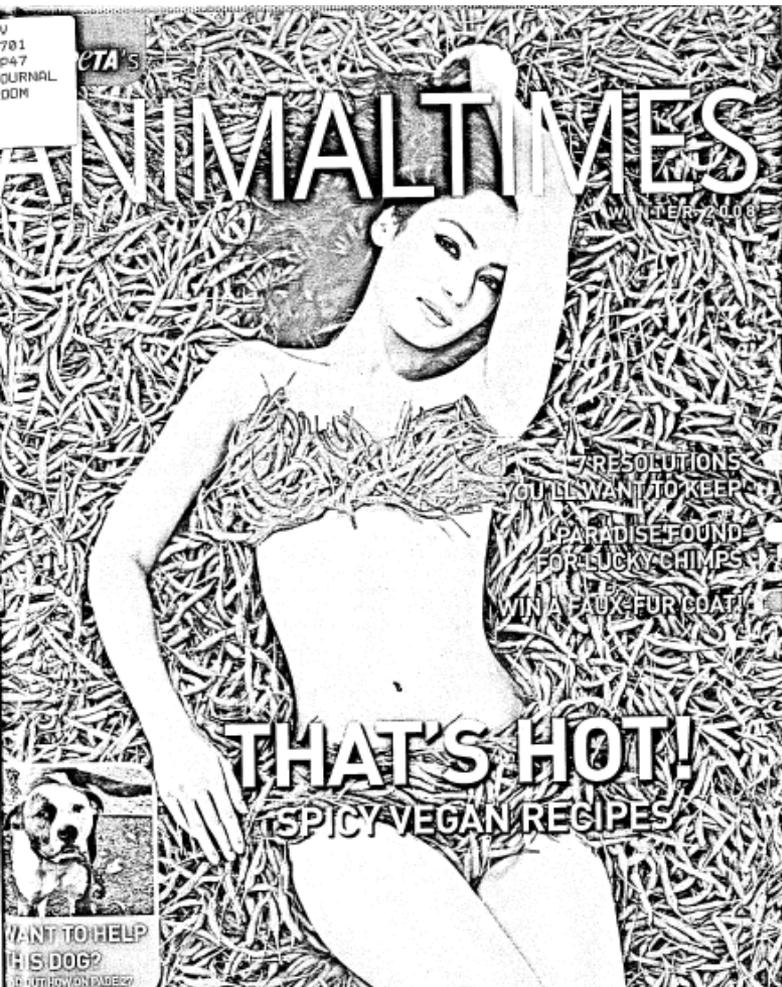


Body Type

- As much as 29% of veg*ns are considered overweight or obese (Newby, Tucker, and Wolk 2005), but >1% of subjects
 - May reflect association between veganism, weight loss, and the socially constructed ideal of a “healthy” body weight
 - Movement likely drawing on the appeal of thin privilege to entice new members
 - But the lack of body type diversity could be unwelcoming to some and could very likely aggravate stereotypes about weight and health
- A few muscular subjects as well (all of whom are male)
 - This may be indicative of the feminization of veganism & rise of vegan body-building



Sexualization



- The movement has been criticized for its reliance on sexualized images of women, but the vast majority of covers (87%) do **not** portray a sexualized subject
- Of the 13% sexualized, only ~1% of those are hyper-sexualized
- However, as consistent with other analyses of sexualization in the media, the overwhelming majority (88%) of sexualized subjects are female
- 37% of subjects of color were sexualized; only 10% of white subjects
 - Only 2 coded as hyper-sexualized, both persons of color
 - This could be indicative of racial stereotypes regarding persons of color and hyper-sexuality (Adams 2004, Collins 2004)

Implications

- Results confirm that thin, white women are the most commonly represented in popular vegan media
- Because the media constructs both *reality* and the *imaginable*, activists should be mindful of how their own media may be influencing participation
- Diversity in the ranks is an essential component for growth and alliance building

Looking Ahead

- Food Empowerment Project, Sistah Vegan Project, and VINE Sanctuary are important alternatives that speak to women of color, non-thin persons, the LGBTQ community, and other marginalized groups
- Organizers could benefit from cooperating with these grassroots efforts to improve resonance and identify problematic representations
- Additional research to test what impact these demographic trends in vegan media are actually having on viewers would be invaluable
- Analysis of *content* of magazines (and other mediums) may also offer a more nuanced understanding