



Marginalized Genders in the Animal Rights Movement

Lessons from Vegan Activists and Queer Black
Feminism

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Objectives

- ❖ Explore vegan feminist theory and queer Black feminist theory to understand gender diversity in animal rights
- ❖ Critically understand multispecies oppression and liberation
- ❖ Begin a dialogue about shared experiences between gender nonconforming people and the other animals they advocate for
- ❖ Consider how a multispecies consciousness informs their participation in the animal rights movement

Marginalized Genders & Social Justice Inclusivity

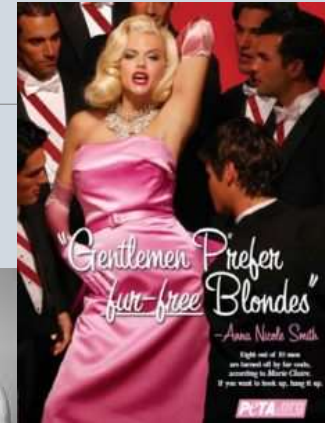
- ❖ Trans, non-binary, etc. folks historically excluded from
 - ❖ Lesbian & gay movement
 - ❖ Feminist movement
- ❖ Many issues specific to this community
 - ❖ Homelessness, medical access, job security, incarceration, assault
- ❖ Now much more inclusive
 - ❖ What about animal rights?



Miss Major, leader in trans activism

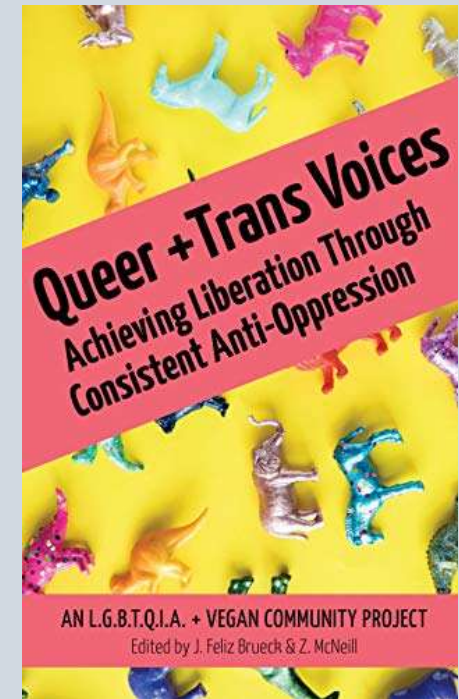
Gender Diversity & Animal Rights

- ❖ Previous study of 300 American vegans
 - ❖ 45% did not disclose gender
 - ❖ Of those who did, 1% identified as nonbinary
- ❖ Animal rights movement slow to respond to gender diversity
- ❖ PETA includes transgender models in 2017
 - ❖ But has history of body-shaming and gender policing



Theory: (Queer) Vegan Feminism

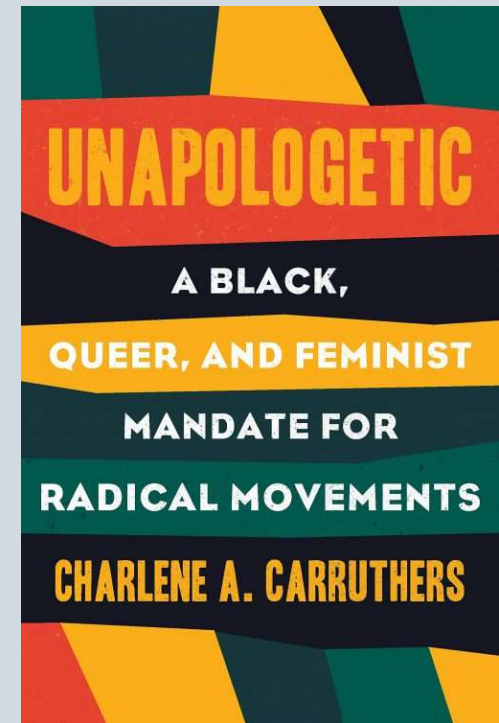
- ❖ Oppression of people with marginalized genders part of a larger matrix of inequality (Gaard 1997, Brueck & McNeill 2020)
 - ❖ Rooted in white supremacy, patriarchy, colonialism
 - ❖ Forced conformity, manufactured binaries
- ❖ Interrogating social constructions of “natural” (Gaard 1997)



Theory: Queer Black Feminism

❖ Black queer feminism is a both an individual, identity-affirming approach to social justice and a collective form of resistance, “with neither being at the expense of the other” (Carruthers 2019: 11)

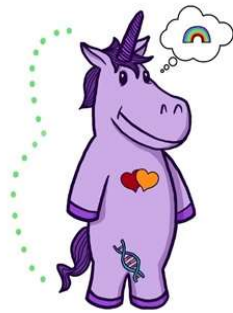
❖ A failure to affirm the complexities of experiences within the activist community is inaccurate and disempowering. “This stuff kills our movement” she writes (Carruthers 2019: 80)



Theory: Queer Black Feminism

- ❖ “without community there is no liberation...but community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist” (Lorde 2018: 18)
- ❖ “In our world, divide and conquer must become define and empower” (Lorde 2018: 19)
- ❖ Difference serves as a “creative function,” and interdependency of different strengths can inform “the power to seek new ways of being in the world,” “courage,” and “sustenance to act where there are no charters” (Lorde 2018: 18)

Methods



Are you a nonconforming animal rights activist? I'm seeking adult participants for an email-based survey of how trans, nonbinary and gender queer folks experience veganism and animal rights. Approx. 10-30 min to complete.

Learn more and complete the survey here:

https://kentsspsr.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3fRIOzqMuOEWmsm

Please share!

- ❖ Qualitative, open-ended responses using Qualtrics
- ❖ Aimed for 30
- ❖ Advertised on Facebook and Twitter

Survey Questions

1. What is your gender identity? (open-ended)
2. What is your racial/ethnic identity? (open-ended)
3. What is your age? (open-ended)
4. Where do you live? (open-ended)
5. Do you identify as vegan? (y/n)
6. Do you regularly volunteer for any vegan or animal charities? (y/n)
7. Do you regularly volunteer for any vegan or animal grassroots groups (i.e. student groups or community collectives) (y/n)
8. Are you or have you ever been an employee of a vegan or animal charity? (y/n)
9. Do you think that your gender identity informs your anti-speciesism? If so, how? Remember to avoid sharing information that may identify you if you are concerned about confidentiality. (open-ended)
10. Have you experienced discrimination as a gender nonconforming person in the vegan or animal rights community? Remember to avoid sharing information that may identify you if you are concerned about confidentiality. (open-ended)
11. What issues, if any, do you think are important for the animal rights movement to understand about gender diversity? (open-ended)
12. If there are any other stories, thoughts, or opinions on gender and anti-speciesism you would like to share, please do so here.

Demographic Results

- ❖ **16** participated
 - ❖ 19, but 3 removed for not meeting survey requirements
- ❖ **Gender identity**
 - ❖ 8 nonbinary
 - ❖ 2 gender queer
 - ❖ 3 trans men
 - ❖ 2 trans women
 - ❖ 1 cisgender man sometimes fluid
- ❖ All but one were **white**
 - ❖ 1 identified as a Black-presenting mixed-race person
- ❖ **Ages 20 to 55**
 - ❖ Average age being **23**
- ❖ **United States, United Kingdom, and Europe.**

Activist Identity and Animal Liberation

- ❖ Most found their gender identity **informed their anti-speciesism activism** (all but 2)
- ❖ Two emphasized the mutual need for **equality and respect**, regardless of identity or biological distinction
- ❖ Two specifically pointed to the **social construction** of gender and species
- ❖ Two pointed to the underlying problem of **hierarchal thinking**
- ❖ Activists also noted that both experience **otherization** and may be referred to as “it.”
- ❖ One noted that it inspired greater **empathy** for other animals

Discrimination in Anti-Speciesist Spaces

- ❖ Respondents were divided
 - ❖ 8 reported experiencing it, 6 reported not
 - ❖ 2 denied experiencing it but were aware of it happening to others
 - ❖ 2 more reported disengaging from the movement due to their awareness
- ❖ Several reasons given for disengagement
 - ❖ Misgendering
 - ❖ Dismissiveness
 - ❖ Marginalized gender identities not seen as “real”

Discrimination in Anti-Speciesist Spaces

❖ Overall unease with the movement's **failure to explicitly acknowledge, respect, and celebrate** sex and gender diversity

❖ This awareness creates **discomfort** and **frustration**:

*"...it does concern me how larger groups are not prioritizing consistent anti-oppression and some even state that this can 'hurt the cause' etc. and that the **focus should be 'on the animals'** we need humans to dismantle the systems that we've put into place that oppress non humans, making humans uncomfortable in these spaces limits diversity in their advocacy and further marginalizes communities that are incredibly empathetic, creative, and helpful to animal liberation."*

❖ One noted here that their experience with discrimination was inconsistent with vegan principles:

"There are many transphobic vegans, however I do not believe one can be vegan AND transphobic as transphobia is violence against humans."

How Might We Learn from Gender Nonconformity?

- ❖ Deep consideration of **fairness** and social movement **strategy**
- ❖ Two championed **alliance with other movements**
- ❖ Three highlighted the importance of **consistency** in ethics and goals
 - “I think it is as simple as respecting everyone’s life and identity, like trans/GNC [gender nonconforming] people first and foremost and we are here to save lives and help the innocent.”*
- ❖ Three respondents specifically critiqued **white male centrism** as a primary barrier
 - “I find that the self-appointed leaders of animal rights and veganism in the public eye are predominantly white, hetero as men who use the cause to platform themselves, they may have limited understanding of their own privileges and other human oppression. I suspect they choose animal rights as we don’t speak nonhumans’ language verbally, so it’s easier for them to say their opinions, what is right/wrong etc. whereas if they were allied with other human causes they would have to listen to others and take a backseat rather than platforming themselves.”*

Limitations

- ❖ Small sample
- ❖ Mostly white & Western
- ❖ Survey vs face-to-face
- ❖ Facebook and Twitter
- ❖ Selection bias
 - ❖ Those **already in the know** more likely to respond?
 - ❖ Those with **poor experiences** more likely to respond?
 - ❖ Those who have **exited the movement** less accounted for



Conclusion

❖ Oppression

- ❖ Most noted some level of **consciousness to the connection**
- ❖ Divided experience of **discrimination**, but overall awareness
- ❖ Logically problematic marginalization given the intersectional nature of oppression,

❖ Inclusion & Liberation

- ❖ Gender queer community could be a **key demographic to mobilize**
- ❖ How can **queer black feminism** inspire new ways of thinking about gender in social movements?
- ❖ How to **support** and **make space for** gender queer folks?

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