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# Discourses of "Cruelty-Free" Consumerism: PETA, The Vegan Society and Examples of Contemporary Activism

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Discourses of “Cruelty-Free” Consumerism: PETA, The Vegan Society and Examples of  
Contemporary Activism

by

ANDREA SPRINGIRTH

A master’s thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2016

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in  
satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of *Master of Arts*.

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ABSTRACT

Discourses of “Cruelty-Free” Consumerism: PETA, The Vegan Society and Examples of  
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by

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Advisor: Jillian R. Cavanaugh

This paper draws upon the principles of critical discourse analysis in order to examine the production of capitalist and consumerist discourses within contemporary nonhuman animal rights activism. The analysis presents evidence to suggest that the discourses being produced via the websites of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and The Vegan Society are consistently being constructed through market-centric ideologies that treat activists mainly as middle-class consumers. This paper argues that the consistent presence of neoliberal discourse signals an instructive entanglement with broader sociopolitical issues. Specifically, there are concerns as to how this discourse relates to what is thought to constitute and qualify as nonhuman animal rights activism. As shown in the analysis, activism portrayed primarily as an economic activity suggests only those who are capable of contributing financially to the movement’s efforts can participate in advocating nonhuman animal rights. I argue that this model of advocacy is indicative of a mediating role both organizations are putting forth that suggests their supporters need only buy “cruelty-free” products and not worry about exercising any sort of meaningful political commitment. Overall, this paper shows how the reproduction

of consumerist discourses reproduces gender and social inequalities, and reinforces a capitalist system that contributes to and profits off of nonhuman animal and human exploitation. I argue that drawing attention to the discourse practices through which ideologies within mainstream nonhuman animal rights groups are constructed can be helpful in evaluating normative perceptions of and ideological hegemony within contemporary social justice activism.

**Key words:** nonhuman animal rights activism, veganism, neoliberalism, capitalism, critical discourse analysis

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## Section I: Introduction

General tendencies representing social change can be discerned in contemporary institutional discourse. One of these, which goes along with the adoption of the capitalist free market as a model for all kinds of transactions, is a tendency for discourse genres, which were once primarily “informational” to become more “promotional” - they are no longer designed simply to “tell”, but also to sell...framing information in ways designed to appeal to the reader as a consumer  
- Deborah Cameron, *Working with Spoken Discourse*, 2001

### A. Project Overview

A growing amount of literature on the nonhuman animal rights movement and veganism has indicated that nonhuman animal rights organizations are advocating capitalist interests, making the movement about consumerism rather than anti-speciesism (Adamas 2011; Seiter 2014; Wrenn 2016; Yates 2015). Speciesism has been defined by nonhuman animal rights philosopher Peter Singer as a prejudice in favor of the interests of members of one’s own species that allow them to act against the interests of members of other species (Singer 1990, 6). The scholars contributing to this literature have argued that nonhuman animal rights organizations are focusing more on increasing sales of “cruelty-free” products and less on combatting the speciesist attitudes that are responsible for the oppression of nonhuman animals and inherent in a capitalist system that seeks to commodify everything in order to accumulate endless profit. In light of these arguments, this paper critically examines the production of capitalist and consumerist discourses over the last ten years via the websites of two of the largest nonhuman animal rights organizations, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and The Vegan Society. By examining what has happened textually, this study investigates whether or not the two organizations have promoted “vegan consumerism” as a primary form of activism and if their campaigns have shifted ideologically in terms of how they portray activism.

The presentation of my findings demonstrates that the discourses of PETA and The Vegan Society have consistently been produced through market-centric ideologies that treat nonhuman animal rights activists mainly as consumers. However, in drawing a comparison

between the two groups, it became clear there was more consumerist discourse to interrogate on PETA's website than there was on The Vegan Society's website. Therefore, the analysis of The Vegan Society's website material and its comparison to PETA will be presented at the end of the paper.

This paper argues that the consistent presence of such discourse signals an instructive entanglement with neoliberalism and broader sociopolitical issues. Specifically, there are concerns as to how this discourse relates to what is thought to constitute and qualify as nonhuman animal rights activism. As shown in the analysis, activism portrayed primarily as an economic activity suggests only those who are capable of contributing financially to the movement's efforts can participate in advocating nonhuman animal rights. I argue that this model of advocacy is indicative of a mediating role both organizations are putting forth that suggests their supporters need only buy "cruelty-free" products and not worry about exercising any sort of meaningful political commitment. In addition to showing how the reproduction of consumerist discourses produces socioeconomic inequalities, this paper also demonstrates that the discourses may be contributing to the reinforcement of social norms regarding the subordination of women.

Overall, this paper shows how the repetition of consumerist discourse supports and reinforces a capitalist system that contributes to and profits off of structural inequality. I argue that drawing attention to the discourse practices through which ideologies within mainstream nonhuman animal rights groups are constructed can be helpful in evaluating normative perceptions of and ideological hegemony within contemporary social justice activism.

## **B. Definition of key terms**

In this subsection, I will define some of the key terms utilized throughout the paper that are pertinent to understanding nonhuman animal rights activism. Perhaps most notable will be the usage of the term "nonhuman animal" in place of simply using "animal", except

when directly quoting excerpts that do not use “nonhuman animal”. I use this term in solidarity with other scholars and activists writing on nonhuman animal activism who recognize the biological similarities humans share with nonhuman animals (humans, too, are animals) and contend that humans often structure their language in ways that avoid acknowledgement of this fact in order to draw social and moral boundaries between themselves and other species (Adams [1990] 2015, 46; Wrenn 2016, xiv). These boundaries are what help reinforce the historically embedded normalization of human superiority over other species, otherwise known as anthropocentrism. It is in accordance with this principle that the attitude of speciesism exists. People who wish to abolish this notion of superiority and end the use of nonhuman animals for human purposes frequently take up the practice of veganism. Although “the culture of veganism is composed of many different subcultures and philosophies throughout the world, ranging from...people who are dietary vegans for personal health reasons, to people who practice veganism for religious and spiritual reasons” (Harper 2011, 155-158), the definition of veganism implied throughout this paper will be the practice of excluding meat, eggs, dairy and all other nonhuman animal-based products (i.e. leather, fur, wool, etc.), as well as the avoidance of products tested on nonhuman animals, for ethical reasons pertaining to the belief that nonhuman animals have a right to live free from human exploitation and harm. In accordance with the above discussion, the terms “veganism” and “nonhuman animal rights” will sometimes be used synonymously, with the understanding that veganism often does not imply nonhuman animal rights in other contexts.

In response to the commitment by people who wish to become vegan in order to stop participating in nonhuman animal exploitation, various organizations and corporations have used the term “cruelty-free” to describe and label products that have not been tested on nonhuman animals and that do not contain any nonhuman animal ingredients or byproducts. However, no government agency in the United States currently defines the term or sets standards for its usage (“Cruelty-Free Labeling”). As a result, individual companies and nonhuman animal rights groups are left responsible to determine what “cruelty-free” means for

each of their products. For example, some groups have taken “cruelty-free” to mean the complete elimination of nonhuman animal use and suffering while others have espoused that there are certain ways of killing nonhuman animals that are “better” (e.g. suffocating chickens by removing oxygen from their cages has been deemed “cruelty-free” in the past by PETA in comparison to other methods such as throat laceration). In recognition of this term’s ambiguity, “cruelty-free” is placed in quotation marks throughout the paper.

### **C. Brief history of nonhuman animal rights activism**

Before proceeding onto the literature and methodologies that contributed to and informed this research, I will briefly explain the history of nonhuman animal rights activism and provide a definition of advocacy that will be used to shed light on the form of activism being promoted by PETA and The Vegan Society.

Veganism as an ethical stance against nonhuman animal exploitation developed out of centuries of protest against the killing of nonhuman animals. In the early 19th century, prevention of cruelty to nonhuman animals grew alongside humanitarian efforts to advance the rights of slaves and women (David Walls 2014). As the scientific approach to medicine continued to develop in the late 1800s, the opposition to use of nonhuman animals in laboratory research grew, but the focus of the movement quickly shifted to the protection of wild nonhuman animals and birds (ibid.). The first vegan organization to represent the struggles for all nonhuman animal rights and freedom, The Vegan Society, was founded in 1944 in England by Donald and Dorothy Watson (Adams [1990] 2015, 61-63). The Vegan Society became a registered educational charity that established its motto as, “Promoting ways of living free from animal products for the benefit of people, animals, and the environment”. Since its establishment, the group has worked to showcase the vegan way of life mainly through public education, research, business development, and policy change. The creation of The Vegan Society coincided with the end of World War II, whose aftermath saw a decline in agriculture along with the growth of affluent suburbia in the U.S. (David Walls 2014). In the

wake of these events, an increased interest in the protection of companion nonhuman animals such as cats and dogs grew. Under these circumstances, several other protection groups and vegan organizations were quickly founded (*ibid.*).

In her dissertation titled “Rhetorics of Consumption: Identity, Confrontation, and Corporatization in the American Vegetarian Movement” (cited in Harper 2011, 158), Patricia Malesh claims that the mass social movements of the 1960s (i.e. the civil rights movements, the women’s movement, the anti-Vietnam War movement, the environmental movement, etc.) helped propel the nonhuman animal rights movement into full visibility. Since then, various important pieces of nonhuman animal protection legislation have been passed in the U.S., including the Laboratory Animal Welfare Act (1966), the Endangered Species Act (1969), and the Marine Mammal Protection Act (1972) (David Walls 2014).

In addition to legislation, the 1960s and 1970s spawned the ideas of philosophers Peter Singer and Tom Regan, who expanded the intellectual and ethical underpinnings of the movement. While Singer re-popularized Jeremy Bentham’s utilitarian notion that the ability to suffer was reason enough not to harm nonhuman animals, Regan made the case for the abolition of nonhuman animal use based on the premise that they had a natural right to live free from exploitation (*ibid.*). Many other organizations have since been created in dedication to either or both of these ideas, including PETA. Founded in 1980 by Ingrid Newkirk and Alex Pacheco, PETA emerged as a non-profit organization based in Norfolk, Virginia whose motto has been, “Animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on, use for entertainment, or abuse in any other way”. Since its establishment, it has become the world’s largest nonhuman animal rights group with more than 5 million members, and has worked through public education, cruelty investigation, research, nonhuman animal rescue, special events, legislation, celebrity involvement, and protest campaigns to challenge society’s more mainstream and common view that nonhuman animals exist solely for human use.

Today, the movement struggles to agree upon the answers to various philosophical questions regarding nonhuman animals and to define a set of coherent advocacy tactics and

goals. In her book *A Rational Approach to Animal Rights: Extensions in Abolitionist Theory*, Corey Lee Wrenn argues that for several decades, the movement has been channeled through nonprofit professionalized welfarist institutions that effectively quell real social change (Wrenn 2016, 35). Defined as organizations which “have achieved nonprofit status, expended considerable portions of their resources on fundraising, and compromised their tactics in a way that prioritizes self-perpetuation over structural social change”, Wrenn argues that nonhuman animal professionalized welfarist institutions grew out of a new state approach that began during the Civil Rights Era to suppress civil unrest (Wrenn 2016, 28). This approach involves offering certain incentives to social movement collectives through non-profitization and professionalization with the intention of state regulation and moderation (Wrenn 2016, 35). Most importantly, “professionalization makes organizations officially recognizable to the state, foundations, and the public, which qualifies it for funding. It also protects the group from state harassment because it must adhere to state rules and state observation” (Wrenn 2015, 33-34). Wrenn claims, however, that such professionalization can lead to some unfortunate side effects, such as an increased focus on organizational sustainment and survival (Wrenn 2016, 37). She argues organizational preoccupation with self-perpetuation ultimately results in a prioritization of funding over advocacy efforts related to solving structural problems concerning nonhuman animal suffering (Wrenn 2016, 37).

In contrast to professionalized advocacy efforts focused on funding, Wrenn maintains that advocacy should “collectively broadcast abolitionist claims, counter hegemonic ideology, and put pressure on industries, the public, and the state to reconsider the legitimacy of oppressive conventions” (Wrenn 2016, 27). Thus far, what has been defined in the nonhuman animal rights movement as abolitionism has been relegated to grassroots mobilization (Wrenn 2016, 60). Within this faction, central leadership is denounced and advocacy is focused in localized unaffiliated groups and individuals (Wrenn 2016, 60). In his discussion of nonhuman animal rights advocacy, Torres claims “abolitionists ask those interested in advancing nonhuman animal rights to make the commitment to veganism but to also *promote* [emphasis

in original] veganism in ways that utilize their own unique skills and talents” (cited in Wrenn 2016, 42). Furthermore, Wrenn argues the grassroots structure of abolitionism allows space to “challenge prevailing ideologies and to demand meaningful and substantial social restructuring” not offered by professionalized nonprofit organizations (Wrenn 2016, 40).

In view of Wrenn’s argument, this research aims to demonstrate that the discourses being reproduced by PETA and The Vegan Society via their websites suggest nonhuman animal rights activism is not a political undertaking that ardently encourages engaged participation in direct action. Rather, advocacy is being portrayed through neoliberal discourse as an economic activity that should be mediated through professionalized nonprofit organizations such as PETA and The Vegan Society. Certainly, it is important to critically examine the discourses being reproduced by contemporary abolitionist groups promoting large-scale goals of structural change, but such an analysis remains beyond the scope of this paper.

#### **D. Literature review**

In this literature review, I will explore the major themes that constructed the lens of this paper. I will begin by defining Charles Tilly’s theoretical framework of social movement, followed by its relationship to and a description of the two related theories and methodologies of language analysis I used to collect my data: discourse analysis (DA) and critical discourse analysis (CDA). I will then look at the theme of consumerism and its relationship to a capitalist political economic system and a neoliberal worldview that places consumption at the heart of political participation. I will close with an examination of available literature that has taken class and gender into consideration as they relate to the nonhuman animal rights movement and neoliberalism.

One of the main focuses of this project is nonhuman animal rights activism. In its attempts to shed new light on the nonhuman animal rights movement, this paper forms a part of a large corpus of works on social movement theory. Although there are a number of competing frameworks that theorize social movement differently, I am interested in Charles



Tilly's conceptualization of social movement from his article "Social Movements and National Politics" (cited in Morris and Herring 1987, 9):

[A social movement] is a sustained series of interactions between power holders and persons successfully claiming to speak on behalf of a constituency lacking formal representation, in the course of which those persons make publicly-visible demands for changes in the distribution or exercise of power, and back those demands with public demonstrations of support.

Despite the efforts of social movements to challenge dominant social belief systems, Tilly has also claimed that such movements may be fragmented and heterogeneous factions with shifting interests (ibid., 10). In order to understand the complexity and dynamism of social movements within their particular social and historical context, Tilly suggests that analysts must incorporate several key dimensions relating to the political relationships they comprise. Tilly (cited in Morris and Herring 1987, 10) maintains that the task of the social movement analyst is to:

- 1) Investigate the response of power holders to social movements, especially their ability to protect their interests through repression, forming coalitions, bargaining, and cooptation, 2) investigate the dynamics through which movement actors advance their interests by creating the illusion of unity, mobilizing large numbers of supporters, and making strategic choices and 3) combine these two perspectives into a dynamic analysis of collective action.

Undoubtedly, the language reproduced in the marketing materials that are generated by PETA and The Vegan Society make up a large part of the "dynamics" through which both groups advance their interests. This is precisely where Tilly's framework in partnership with critical discourse analysis can inform conversations surrounding social movement actors like PETA and The Vegan Society.

In his discussion of DA in *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*, James Paul Gee describes DA as a theory and a method for studying how language, both spoken and written, enacts specific social activities and social identities, such as ways of being a nonhuman animal rights activist. DA seeks to examine how speakers and writers design their sentences and texts in ways that communicate their perspectives on reality, make certain things significant or not, build certain kinds of relationships they have or are trying to have

with their listeners or readers, and render certain things as “normal”, “valuable”, “good”, or “appropriate” (Gee 1999, 5-12). DA defines discourse as language-in-use or stretches of language, like conversations or stories (ibid., 26). According to Gee, Discourses, with a capital “D”, include verbal and nonverbal expressions, symbols, things, tools, and technologies that articulate certain identities and associated activities of different people, institutions, places, times, actions, interactions, jobs, and so on. Discourses exist as social practices, mental entities, and material realities, and they get people and things recognized in certain ways and not others (ibid., 32). Specific socially and culturally distinctive identities people linguistically and materially enact, often unconsciously, such as “middle class parent”, “working class parent”, or “yuppie consumer”, are called “Discourse models” (ibid., 61). In his discussion of discourse in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (cited in Holborow 2015, 107-108), Mikhail Bakhtin referred to materially and linguistically enacted identities as social voices. Specifically, he recognized that certain “languages” of businessmen, politicians, teachers, and members of other occupations existed. He also argued that these social voices had the ability to “infect with their own intention” and to carry “specific ideological overtones” (quoted in Holborow 2015, 107-108).

A sub-discipline of DA is CDA. As discussed in “Critical Discourse Analysis: History, Agenda, Theory, and Methodology”, Ruth Wodak states that in addition to analyzing how texts are designed to enact social activities and social identities, CDA analyzes how language is used to reproduce certain ideologies in texts. Although there are several different definitions of ideology, in this paper I use the term to mean specific positions, attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives held by a group of people with regard to the social world that guide their interpretation of events, monitor their social practices, and can contribute to the domination of one group over another (Eagleton 1991, 28-31). Like DA, CDA has developed over time as both a theory of and a methodology for analyzing text. It recognizes that language use is a social practice that is determined by social structure, and simultaneously a practice that contributes to the stabilization and change of that structure (Wodak 2009, 7). Unlike DA,

however, CDA plays an advocacy role for socially discriminated groups by producing awareness of certain hidden agendas and linguistic manifestations of hegemony within texts concerning these groups and their interests (ibid., 19). In her discussion of CDA in *Working with Spoken Discourse*, Deborah Cameron notes:

The 'critical' in CDA refers to a way of understanding the social world drawn from critical theory. Within that paradigm reality is understood as *constructed*, shaped by various social forces...the central claim of CDA is that the way certain realities get talked or written about...are not just random but ideologically patterned. These choices do most of the work of naturalizing particular social arrangements which serve particular interests, so that in time they may come to seem like the only possible or rational arrangements. (Cameron 2001, 123)

Bakhtin has claimed that the "naturalization" and hierarchical arrangement of particular social values and worldviews can be found in a critical analysis of the reproduction of different types of linguistic details (Bakhtin 1981).

Another idea that is related to the discussion in this paper is consumerism. Since the 1980s, various disciplines within academia have studied consumerism as a field of social inquiry. The work is intimately connected to and influenced by broader studies of a particular type of social, economic and political system called capitalism. I will review some of the works of a selection of social scientists that have written about capitalism and its various manifestations and implications to help shed light on my data regarding PETA and The Vegan Society. One of the most renowned social scientists to write at length and critically about the capitalist system was Karl Marx. In *Das Kapital*, Marx presented capitalism as an exploitative political economic system that consists of a group of capitalists (or owners of production) who rely on a group of workers to put their labor power at the disposal of the capitalists' interests (Marx 1867). In efforts to accumulate as much profit as possible, the owners commodify and exploit whatever human or nonhuman is deemed necessary to produce a particular product. In doing so, the owners effectively reduce the exploited humans and nonhumans to an imposed economic value and treat them as dispensable means to an end.

Over the years, various adaptations of capitalism have evolved with highly differentiated political economic systems, ideological manifestations and cultural contexts.

One of these, rooted in the principles of free-market capitalism and later termed neoliberalism, came to fruition in the United States in response to the economic crises of the 1970s (Steger 2010, 6-10). In an introductory reader titled *A Very Short Introduction: Neoliberalism*, Manfred Steger reviews the history and ideological principles of neoliberalism. To recapitulate, the 1970s brought a new group of economic liberals who sought a way forward from the economic crises by espousing and disseminating the belief that the worldwide spread of an economic model emphasizing free markets, free trade, and global flows of goods, services, and labor would remedy the situation (ibid.). As an ideology premised on a market-oriented economic system, neoliberalism placed the production, exchange, and consumption of material goods at the heart of the human experience (ibid., 11-12). Although it has come in several different varieties over the last few decades according to specific social contexts, in general neoliberalism amounts to a policy package consisting of economic deregulation, privatization of state-owned enterprises, massive tax cuts, reductions in social services and welfare programs, and government downsizing (ibid., 14). Ideologically, it draws upon the world of business and commerce and celebrates entrepreneurial values such as competitiveness and self-interest (ibid., 12).

In the introduction to *Material Cultures: Why Some Things Matter*, Daniel Miller contends that this marked a historical shift from a time when people constructed themselves through relations with cultural forms in the world of production to a time when people began to identify themselves in relation to consumption and consumerism (Miller 1998, 11). It also marked a historical shift in the way citizens related to their civic responsibility as a moral obligation. Daniel Reichman has, for example, discussed the re-imagined roles and identities of citizens in the global economy as it pertains to the consumption of fair trade coffee. In “Justice at a Price: Regulation and Alienation in the Global Economy”, he argues that through people’s re-imagining of themselves as consumers, “[they] have resorted to individual behavior as the source of political transformation, locating injustice (and the potential for justice) at the most immediate level possible”, such as buying fair trade coffee (Reichman

2008, 9). In other words, the redefinition of civic responsibility does not required citizens to think critically as well as act ethically. Instead, it inspires citizens to simply be “good consumers”. This has opened the door for the promotion of things like fair trade coffee and “cruelty-free” products to be pursued as an end unto themselves.

Building on the reflections of Marx, Steger, Miller, and Reichman, this paper contends that PETA and The Vegan Society have acted to effect political change by treating nonhuman animal rights activists as consumers, structuring the sale and production of “cruelty-free” products and promotion of their campaigns around a notion similar to “fair capitalism” because they accumulate profit in order to end nonhuman animal exploitation. Like Reichman, however, I caution that the idea of “fair capitalism” or “cruelty-free” in the nonhuman animal rights movement is a contradiction in terms given the structural inequity embedded within the foundational principles of capitalism (ibid., 1).

In investigating this issue, I have also drawn upon a related area of scholarship regarding the branding of products that are designed to promote consumer behavior and attitudes. What attracted my increased attention to the similarities between PETA and The Vegan Society as I went through my data was each organization’s process of actively constructing messages that focused on advocacy as an economic activity, for example, by encouraging engagement with a nonhuman animal rights agenda through the purchase and production of “cruelty-free” products. In drawing attention to branding, particularly The Vegan Society’s sunflower logo, I call upon Paul Manning’s analysis of branding in *The Semiotics of Brand*. Manning claims that logos are visible and materialized forms of the values of a corporation or producer that sells the product on which the logos are placed (Manning 2010, 37). In essence, the values that the logos signify (such as a “fair trade” logo on a bag of coffee) are what make the products desirable commodities to consumers. Branding, in this case through the sunflower logo, connects to the neoliberal redefinition of citizenship that inspires consumers to potentially think that they are enacting political change by purchasing products that supposedly conform to their personal values.

In the construction of consumerist discourses, it is likely that certain socially and economically marginalized groups are not addressed. In order to discuss the presence or absence of certain social voices on PETA and The Vegan Society's websites, the analysis of my data presentation will rely upon three scholars whose work on various social issues has been conducted through race, class, and gender-conscious perspectives. As such, they have helped me uncover and organize the social ideologies reproduced and embedded within each organization's online discourse.

Amid many other critical race theorists who argue that ethical issues, like veganism, are also raced issues, stands Breeze Harper (Harper 2011, 156). In "Beyond the Normative White 'Post-Racial' Vegan Epistemology", Harper argues that observations of race-neutrality in contemporary American vegan literature are important to draw attention to because it often assumes that all people in the USA start from a universal social position, "universal" being a coded term for "white middle-class experience", and in doing so, "upholds the larger system of racism by denying its existence" (ibid.). Contrary to a universalist and post-racial perspective, Harper contends that (specifically) Black Americans' relationship with veganism is greatly affected by various social factors such as environmental racism - the lack of access to public transportation to get to healthier food options, and the placement of dumps, truck depots, fast-food chains, and liquor stores in close proximity to their homes (ibid.). Harper also links racialization to class and argues that class determines who gets to live where in relation to healthier environments (ibid.). She concludes that the absence of any race and class-consciousness in the popular vegan literature she studied is proof that the nonhuman animal rights movement has been largely associated with whiteness (ibid.,155). Consequently, the voices of less privileged people have been excluded from the mainstream conversations concerning the movement (ibid.). In this paper, I recognize that the absence of class-consciousness via the websites of PETA and The Vegan Society supports Harper's point that race is relevant to and implicit in the discourses being reproduced by mainstream nonhuman animal rights organizations. Nonetheless, such an in-depth racial analysis goes beyond the

scope of this particular project and requires further examination. Therefore, this paper will discuss how PETA and The Vegan Society have perceived nonhuman animal rights, veganism, and advocacy through a class-conscious lens.

In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Carol Adams claims we live not only in a racist classist world, but in a patriarchal one in which the mistreatment of women is intimately connected to the mistreatment and consumption of nonhuman animals (Adams [1990] 2015, xxvi-xxvii). She argues that the consumption of meat is part of a “cultural mythology of maleness” that associates meat eating with virility (ibid., xxviii). Inspired by a vast collection of advertisements, articles, images, and speeches that “animalized women and sexualized and feminized animals,” Adams theorizes that the oppressions of women and nonhuman animals are interrelated through a cycle of objectification, fragmentation, and consumption (ibid., xviii). She contends that it is through the process of objectification in which an oppressor renders a subject into an object, that the subject is permitted to be violated, fragmented, and ultimately consumed (ibid., 27). Consumption, she claims, is the “fulfillment of oppression and the annihilation of will” (ibid.). In sum, Adams’ feminist-vegetarian critical theory renders women and nonhuman animals as “similarly positioned in a patriarchal world, as objects rather than subjects” (ibid., 157). In consideration of this viewpoint, this project will explore how the language on specifically PETA’s website upholds the cycle of objectification, fragmentation, and consumption of females, as well as nonhuman animals.

In contrast to the view that sexualizing women is always a patriarchal attempt to oppress them, some feminists have argued that we should revalidate normative feminine qualities (i.e. sexuality and girliness) (Lazar 2009, 381). In response to this more recent understanding of feminism, which is part of a much broader phenomenon known as post-feminism, Michelle Lazar has examined contemporary texts that have adopted this view. Whilst post-feminists argue that females should unabashedly celebrate “all things feminine”, Lazar critically analyzes the post-feminist identity. She argues that at the same time that it celebrates femininity, this way of thinking also repudiates feminism and reinstalls normative

gendered stereotypes that associate women with passivity, subservience and dependence (ibid.). She also contends that post-feminism “contributes to fostering a culture of post-critique, which numbs resistance and deflects criticism” (ibid., abstract). Despite its presumed “pro-women-ness”, post-feminism pulls on a neoliberal script that celebrates an “It’s all about me!” ideology, and assumes that feminist struggles have ended, that men and women are treated equally, and that women today do not have to worry about how certain representations of them in popular media may negatively affect women as a whole (ibid., 371-372). Informed by Lazar’s feminist critical discourse analysis perspective, this paper will examine the ideology of post-feminism that has been present over the last ten years within the discourse of PETA’s website.

#### **F. Methodology**

Throughout the spring and summer of 2016, I gathered and analyzed a large set of data through an online archival analysis of PETA and The Vegan Society’s websites from 2006 to 2016. For the sake of time, ten years seemed like a reasonable time period to study. With the advent of widespread Internet use beginning only twenty or so years ago, the evolution of this marketing medium has undoubtedly undergone many shifts. Going back further in time would be helpful and should be taken seriously as a future research possibility, though discussion of this is outside the scope of this paper. I chose to do an online archival analysis because the material with which the research questions were concerned was most easily accessed digitally - both websites have open-access to the public. To strengthen my analysis, I chose to look at and compare the websites of two of the largest and most widely recognized nonhuman animal rights organizations, PETA and The Vegan Society. Both organizations represent a wide spectrum of nonhuman animal advocacy beliefs and produce a large amount of discourse devoted to nonhuman animal rights. In addition, both have a mission to support nonhuman animal rights and veganism versus a more moderate approach promoting welfare and “humane” treatment of nonhuman animals, and their campaigns provide a variety of advocacy pieces



aimed at the public. In brief, selecting these groups was a strategic choice to make the case that the mainstream philosophy of nonhuman animal rights advocacy and veganism can be found in popular literature produced by groups like PETA and The Vegan Society.

The data processor Internet Archive Wayback Machine enabled me to access, sift through, and carefully examine each organization's website from 2006 to the present in a preserved state. The data set comprise mostly of written text (e.g. articles, newsletters, mission statements, pamphlets, stickers, vegan starter guides, and several other documents), but some videos and images (e.g. photographs and artwork) from the websites were also examined. The data set represent primary sources because they were taken directly from the organizations.

Each year, PETA's website has undergone various changes, though its use of vibrant and colorful photos and text has stayed consistent. The group's motto and logo have remained at the top of the page and a large number of links to various webpages, articles, and videos have always followed. The tabs directly beneath the group's motto have somewhat changed, but in general they have included titles such as "Home", "Features", "Videos", "Action", "Blog", "Living", "Shop", "Media Center", "Donate Now" and "About PETA". Larger tabs titled "Make a Donation" and "Become a Member" have almost always been placed underneath these tabs. In contrast to PETA's website, The Vegan Society's website has undergone very few changes over the last ten years. One website modification occurred around 2010 and another significant modification occurred around 2015. Prior to 2015, there were very few photographs and images on the website. The tabs running across the top of the page included titles such as "Home", "Food", "Facts", "Nutrition", "Lifestyle", "Animals", "Environment", "Shop", "Trademark", and "Support Us". In 2015, the website transformed from a page mainly dominated by text to a page dominated by large rolling colorful photographs. The tabs at the top of the page changed to titles that included "What's New", "Go Vegan", "Take Action", "Resources", "Your Business", "About Us", "Shop" and "My Account". In general, the content

has stayed the same, but the visual display and organizational structure of the website's material underwent substantial changes.

As aforementioned, the analysis was informed by two related methodologies: discourse analysis (DA) and critical discourse analysis (CDA). DA asks that researchers think about what kind of discourse, Discourse models, and social voices are being used in a text, how frequently they appear, and whose interests they serve. It asks that analysts reflect upon what sorts of texts, media, experiences, interactions, and/or institutions could have given rise to the discourse, and how the discourse is helping reproduce, transform, or create social, cultural, institutional, and/or political relationships (Gee 1999, 92-93). DA invites analysts to ask questions like: What sorts of keywords and phrases are being used consistently and what situated meaning or meanings are reasonable to attribute to these words and phrases considering the point of view of and discourse used by the "author" and potential readers? Different points of view bring different values, norms, perspectives, and assumptions to the discourse. Discourse models, situated meaning(s), keywords and phrases, and grammar comprised the linguistic and semiotic material I analyzed in this study.

Although related to DA, CDA typically asks analysts to look at a variety of linguistic details that stick out from a text in order to examine how they are being used to reproduce certain ideologies. Such linguistic details can include word order, tense, punctuation, metaphorism in language and in images, idioms, sayings, clichés, symbolism, argumentation strategies, intrinsic logic and composition of texts, context, implicit implications and insinuations, references (e.g. to the sciences), sources of knowledge, and key words (Wodak 2009, 28). Keywords, in particular, provide pathways into ideological analysis and critique (Holborow 2015, 124). "Keyness" refers to the frequency of use of certain terms relative to how much more frequently they are used in comparison to other words. The frequency of use of such words has social-cultural significance; it presupposes "not only a particular referential content, but also the community which stereotypically interprets this content", and "helps to justify and secure dominant interests" (ibid.). Following this, the analyst's task is to then look

for regular patterns or themes, propose an interpretation of them, and demonstrate their ideological significance (Cameron 2001, 137).

A discourse analysis is not based on all of the physical features present in a set of data (Gee 1999, 106). It is impossible to deal with every relevant linguistic detail within a text. Nonetheless, throughout my data collection, I strived to pay “close and systematic” attention to nearly every aspect of each website over the past ten years (Cameron 2001, 138). CDA required that I ask questions such as: What aspects of the text stand out for me? What is interesting, problematic, confusing, or suggestive? Equally important in uncovering the values that drive texts was to ask what they appeared not to find interesting” (Harris 2006, 63). In other words, CDA required that I ask what issues got brought up and what issues did not get brought up on each of the group’s website. Following this, I looked for patterns and links within and across the texts in order to form hypotheses about “what was meaningful to the author(s) and what was not” (Gee 1999, 118). Determining what did and did not go into the analysis, however, was ultimately based on what I found to be most important in relation to the particular issue being addressed. Therefore, in looking through my set of data to uncover hidden (and unhidden) themes and agendas, I paid particular attention to the discourses that appeared to have been reproduced through a neoliberal ideology. It is important to note that although both websites displayed a lot of information regarding other vegan issues such as health and nutrition, the environment, slaughter, and the mistreatment of nonhuman animals, the analysis demonstrated that they paid more attention to framing these issues in ways designed to appeal to the reader as a consumer or producer of “cruelty-free” products.

By investigating what kinds of discourses were being reproduced by PETA and The Vegan Society over the past ten years, my endeavor throughout this project has been to uncover any covert social assumptions and ideologies embedded within the texts. Although I recognize that PETA and The Vegan Society are raising awareness for a socially discriminated group of beings, my main argument is that the way in which they are doing so upholds a social political economic system that heavily contributes to nonhuman and human exploitation.

Cameron has argued that texts do not simply support “*any* reading the analyst might care to produce” (Cameron 2001, 138). Nonetheless, variations in interpretation are inevitable depending on the background knowledge of each analyst (Cameron 2001, 139). Therefore, I strongly encourage others interested in this topic to validate, dispute, or simply add to my claims. As previously mentioned, the discourse on both websites can easily be accessed digitally and my analysis remains open for further discussion.

The following research questions guided my data collection and analysis:

- How are PETA and The Vegan Society selling nonhuman animal rights as an idea and a cause? In other words, how are nonhuman animal rights being marketed within these two groups?
- How does each organization reproduce and reinforce a nonhuman animal rights activist identity?
- Who is included in and excluded from these identities?
- What discourses are being reproduced within the text?
- What social voices are present or absent from the text?
- What implicit values and ideologies do PETA and The Vegan Society reproduce in relation to the nonhuman animal rights movement?
- What implicit ideas, especially those rooted in a neoliberal worldview, are expressed about the relationship between nonhuman animals and humans?
- What other prominent agents, actors, entities, or beings participated in/are affected by this process?

In order to physically capture my answers to these questions, I created separate Word documents for each organization for every year (e.g. PETA 2006, The Vegan Society 2006, PETA 2007, and so on), and used a combination of handwritten and typed notes to mark any pertinent findings and patterns. As I read through both websites, I recorded anything that jumped out at me, making sure to highlight and reflect upon any prevalent themes with either

one or both of the organizations. As I thought about the themes that emerged, I related them to my hypothesis, paying careful attention to the similarities and differences between the organizations. Then, I organized my analysis so that the material I had developed argued for the final main points and issues I chose to address. The forthcoming presentation of examples represent what I believe are the main themes found within the discourse on the websites of PETA and The Vegan Society.

### **E. Relevance of the study**

My veganism had a lot to do with the impetus of this project and its relationship to other issues such as capitalism, neoliberalism, class, and gender. Over the course of this project and my studies at the City University of New York, specifically within the Anthropology department, it became clear to me that these issues, which had for a long time appeared to be isolated concerns, were in fact considerably interconnected. In examining contemporary nonhuman animal rights activism and consumerism, I intend to honor these connections and in doing so, recognize overlapping oppressions. Although it only looks specifically at these two organizations, drawing our attention to the discursive practices through which ideologies within mainstream nonhuman animal rights groups are constructed, this research is informed by and critically tied to all other social justice movements, viewing the fight against nonhuman animal exploitation as part of a wider struggle for a more just, inclusive, and peaceful world. As a critical discourse analyst, I am interested in contributing, in terms of understanding and intervention, to important issues within the nonhuman animal rights movement (Gee 1999, 8).

One of the most important goals of the study and interpretation of discourse is that it provides a set of analytical tools for exploring the ways in which people and organizations construct, shape, and reshape their perceptions, identities, and beliefs (Shenhav 2015, 5). Adams argues that these beliefs have material consequences; “they create subjects who act in certain ways - through dominance or through equality” (Adams [1990] 2015, xx). Identifying the patterns within and the ways in which the production of text of two of the largest

nonhuman animal rights groups contribute to and reinforce certain perceptions, identities, and beliefs in different ways, some of which are interrelated, can be helpful in evaluating normative perceptions of and ideological hegemony within contemporary social activism. Although the production of text in social activism discourse presumably does not intend to reinforce messages of sexism, classism, and speciesism, that does not mean such messages are not there. Therefore, it is important to examine the ways in which such messages get reproduced and in turn help create bigger storylines that have material effects upon the world.

Moreover, it seems to be the case that there is insufficient research carried out with critical discourse analysis regarding the nonhuman animal rights movement. Despite the fact that there have been previous studies on texts produced via the media presence and marketing materials generated by nonhuman animal product industries, as well as research on nonhuman animal rights groups and their characterization of the parties responsible for the oppression and abuse of nonhuman animals, critical discourse analysis has been a framework typically applied to a corpus of texts in countering racism and sexism (See Freeman 2010, Williams 2012, and Stibbe 2001). This paper seeks to draw upon this critical analytical tool in order to contribute new ways of the thinking to the study of nonhuman animal rights activism.

In addition to informing social activism and contributing to the large corpus of work on critical discourse analysis, this research has relevance in different disciplines such as critical animal studies, linguistic anthropology, sociology, feminist studies, and critical race studies.

## **H. Paper outline**

The following section provides a very detailed presentation and analysis of my data. In the first subsection of the analysis, I offer examples of the consumerist discourses being utilized by PETA to demonstrate that the organization consistently promotes a particular model of advocacy that is largely based on shopping and consuming “cruelty-free” products. Such promotion of consumer-based activism is problematic for the nonhuman animal rights

movement and reveals an ideology of advocacy that is centered on disempowerment, neoliberalism, and anthropocentrism.

The second subsection examines PETA's self-promotional language and demonstrates that the focus of its discourse is not solely on selling "cruelty-free" products, but on selling itself to potential supporters (i.e. donors). In particular, I draw attention to its constant use of words like "victory" and "effective" to show that its celebratory discourse pits PETA against other nonprofit organizations. I then trace these words to a certain ideology that abides by a competitive neoliberal form of social activism intended to attract more donors.

Drawing from these conclusory remarks, the third subsection considers the consumerist discourses being utilized by PETA to promote donations-based advocacy. I argue that the group's emphasis on donations may contribute to the reinforcement of social norms regarding the subordination of socially marginalized people. In addition, I argue the discourse relies on a neoliberal ideology of activism and characterizes PETA as the only faction of the movement responsible enough to carry out direct advocacy efforts and properly manage activist resources.

In continuation of the discussion regarding the reinforcement of social inequality, the fourth subsection examines PETA's use of nudity and sexualized language. Rather than nurture a liberatory message of social justice, I argue that PETA utilizes an ideological discourse of oppression and exploitation - misogyny, violence, patriarchy, post-feminism, neoliberalism, and anthropocentrism - to "sell" nonhuman animal rights by objectifying and sexualizing human bodies (mostly female ones) on its website.

The final two subsections explore the interconnections between PETA and The Vegan Society's discourse. In addition to demonstrating that The Vegan Society also embraces consumer-based activism, I examine the group's emphasis on the production of vegan products through the "sale" of its registered trademark. I contend that this emphasis renders nonhuman animal rights activism no more than a capitalist lifestyle choice revolving around middle-class consumer interests.

In the third and final section of the paper, I recap my findings, make suggestions for further research on this topic, and conclude by reiterating why critical discourse analysis of contemporary social activist groups like PETA and The Vegan is a necessary undertaking.



## Section II: Data Presentation and Analysis

### A. “Cruelty-free living”: PETA and consumerism

Following the critiques of nonhuman animal rights advocacy laid out in the introduction, this subsection will examine various passages and quotes from PETA’s website to demonstrate that the organization’s discourse consistently reflects a particular model of advocacy that is largely based on shopping and consuming “cruelty-free” products. This subsection argues that the group’s use of consumerist discourse reveals an ideology regarding advocacy that is centered on disempowerment, neoliberalism, and anthropocentrism.

“Consumer activism” looms large in PETA’s website presentation of its success as a nonprofit organization. In “A Brief History of Consumer Activism”, Tim Lang and Yiannis Gabriel defined “consumer activists” as people and movements setting out to promote the rights, consciousness, and interests of particular groups through consumerism and consumption (Lang and Gabriel 2005, 33-34). In 2012, PETA declared that unlike previous nonprofit organizations, “[Our] founders sought to give caring people something more that they could do and to provide them ways to actively change society. They wanted to promote a healthy vegan diet and show how easy it is to shop cruelty-free.” Over the last ten years, however, PETA has equated the ability to consume and buy “cruelty-free” products with the defense of nonhuman animal rights. In 2006, its “Cruelty-Free Living” webpage claimed that by purchasing only cruelty-free products, supporters could help save rabbits, mice, guinea pigs, rats, and other nonhuman animals from being poisoned, blinded, and killed every year. The same page included a link titled “Buy Cruelty-Free” that directed viewers to another one of PETA’s websites called Caring Consumer ([www.caringconsumer.com](http://www.caringconsumer.com)). Its headline stated, “Attention shoppers: Put your money where your heart is”, and was followed by a list of cruelty-free companies from which to purchase various products. The page also had a link to a page titled “Join the Animal Savings Club” where readers were encouraged to “save lives with wise buys” and “turn [their] concern for animals into a shopping spree”. It went on to state that helping dogs, rats, cats, and others was “as easy as swiping a credit card when you buy cruelty-free”:

Each time you shop, your money can take or save lives, so why not choose from the many wonderful businesses that use animal-free testing methods? ...It's like voting for compassionate business policies - **your dollar is your ballot**. You can be an animal advocate simply by saying "yes" to progress when you open your wallet...[it's] extra easy to save animals and ease your conscience. All you need is heart! [emphasis added]

In 2007, PETA's online "Action Center" stated, "Become a caring consumer...It's as easy as swiping a credit card...Shop peta.org". The same year, one of PETA's anti-dairy campaigns depicted milk-drinkers as "disgusting pus-eaters", and encouraged nonhuman animal activists to continue to try and "piss off" the dairy industry by "[checking] out the [PETA] merchandise, which has made them especially irritated". It went on to say, "Feel free to buy some stuff to spite them...peta2 Café Press...features lots more fun shirts and other merch". Presumably, buying PETA merchandise could "piss off" the dairy industry so much that it would stop exploiting nonhuman animals. PETA's "Café Press", another online PETA store, urged supporters to "Help put a padlock on factory farming: show where you stand on animal abuse". A display of apparel, drink ware, buttons, and several other purchasable items immediately followed. PETA Prime - a PETA webpage with photos, blogs, book reviews, financial advice, and more - featured a post in 2014 titled "Swipe Cruelty Away While Shopping", which narrated a hypothetical story about an activist whose use of a PETA credit card while shopping prompted a nonhuman animal rights discussion:

After patiently waiting, you find yourself at the front of the line, face to face with a lanyard-clad sales attendant with a smile. A bit of chitchat passes between you while she rings up your items, ending with, 'Debit or credit?' Opening your wallet, you reach for your preferred method of payment. You remove the PETA credit card that features attractive animals...She says, 'Is that a PETA credit card? I love animals, too!' - and just like that, a dialogue about a shared support for animal rights ensues...A portion of all purchases made goes to support PETA...Shop on avid shopper. Shop on.

Furthermore, peta2, the organization's website aimed at high school and college-age young adults whose motto has been "Eat, shop, relax, repeat", claimed that the "simple" daily actions, like buying vegan shoes and PETA "merch", has had a bigger impact on nonhuman animals than the any other activist tactic: "When they say, 'Where'd you get your shoes?' or

‘Being a vegetarian is too hard,’ that’s when you show them that being cruelty-free is all about easy choices”.

Despite PETA’s assertion that anyone on any budget can shop “cruelty-free”, the organization partners with high-end fashion designers to promote vegan products. In 2013, PETA Prime featured an advertisement for the accessories fashion brand Michelle Leon Vegan: “Michelle Leon Vegan proves that high fashion can create a powerful statement about living vegan...Here’s your chance to embrace the company’s slogan ‘Wear Your Awareness’”. Michelle Leon Vegan handbags range from \$780 to \$1,200. The organization’s “Shop” page also featured a \$400 vegan purse that was preceded by the words “Carry your compassion”. Similarly, an article in PETA Prime titled “12 Novelty Bags that you need Right Now” advertised a series of photos and item descriptions of “must-have” vegan bags. The article maintained the claim that merchandising nonhuman animal rights was an effective form of activism:

We love animals, and we love food. We also love purses. So we’re in full support of the trend that combines vegan purses with food and animal images. Whether you’re going back to school or want to make your coworkers jealous, here are 12 vegan bags—for ANY budget—that you must have to make a statement any time of the year!

Phrases such as, “Put your money where your heart is”, “All you need is heart”, “It’s as easy as swiping your credit card”, and “Eat, shop, relax, repeat” demonstrate the presumption that vegan consumerism might be a more effective form of advocacy than nonmonetary advocacy. Telling people “being cruelty-free is all about easy choices”, and then advertising \$400 vegan bags also demonstrates the presumption that only those who can afford to buy cruelty-free products can help liberate nonhuman animals and “put a padlock on factory farming”.

By dissuading advocates from thinking critically about their participation (“Relax!”) and instead urging them to purchase expensive “must have” jewelry pieces and vegan purses, PETA’s discourse suggests advocacy should primarily be seen as an economic activity. As such, the organization’s repetitive use of consumerist discourse works to exclude supporters who have little or no financial access to such “cruelty-free” products and thereby caters to a limited group of people in its efforts to enact social change. Notably absent from PETA’s

discussion of shopping is anything that explicitly reflects how class might affect the ability to obtain these products, which might also indicate a lack of awareness regarding the link between class and racial specificity. Harper argues that the majority of the vegan movement is made up of a white middle-class demographic that collectively never has to think about how class, racism, food deserts, or poverty influence how one engages in veganism (Harper 2011, 162). She claims environmental racism (e.g. the placement of dumps, truck depots, big industry farms next to the homes of minoritized communities) happens at an astronomical rate to communities of color, and that this “racism also induces socio-economic class inequality, creating unequal access to any type of healthier lifestyle, vegan or not” (ibid., 164). The absence of class awareness might suggest PETA’s consumerist and promotional discourse is defaulting to the mainstream white middle-class identity group. The organization assumes that saving nonhuman animals is “all about **easy** choices” [emphasis added], yet it encourages advocates to buy expensive handbags. Effectively, PETA markets activism as something elite and disempowering, and equates it with writing checks, er- swiping your PETA credit card (“Your dollar is your ballot!”), and consuming.

In addition to reinforcing socioeconomic inequalities, PETA’s efforts to promote consumer activism also work to undermine and decenter the interests of nonhuman animals. Consider the group’s heavy focus on human interests such as fashion. PETA’s homepage in 2009 featured a video narrated by fashion consultant and television personality Tim Gunn. The caption underneath stated,

Want to have a killer look without killing animals? Tim Gunn will help you “make it work”...Gunn wants you, the consumer, to know what animals endure in the name of fashion so that you can make informed decisions before buying clothing and accessories made from fur, wool, and leather. Gunn has become the latest celebrity to lend his voice to animals.

In 2011, PETA’s “Living” tab congratulated visitors on choosing a cruelty-free lifestyle, emphasizing again not only how easy it is (“Sit back!”), but also how beneficial buying cruelty-free “killer” outfits is for humans, the Earth, and (lastly) nonhuman animals:

Congratulations on choosing to live a lifestyle that is healthy for you, easy on the Earth, and kind to animals! Living cruelty-free has never been easier, and we have everything that you need to get started right here. Mouthwatering vegan recipes, a searchable database of cruelty-free personal-care products...information on how to put together a "killer" outfit without harming a hair on a bunny's head...and more are all at your fingertips. So sit back, relax, and have fun exploring the countless ways that you can live a better life while making the world a kinder place for animals.

The "Living" tab also dedicated an entire section to fashion that claimed shopping could decrease nonhuman animal suffering:

Fabulous animal-friendly fashions have never been easier to find. The people behind designer labels and everyday brands alike are getting the message that savvy shoppers want to be stylish without making animals suffer. So, (as if you needed more reasons to go shopping!), get out your credit cards and give your wardrobe a makeover while helping animals at the same time.

The same section added: "Vegans can love fashion and animals...so throw on your virtual stilettos ladies!" Over the last decade, the group continued to include more articles on "15 Must-Have Jewelry Pieces for animal lovers" and "Must Have Beauty Items for 2013". In 2014, the "Features" webpage included an article titled "Holiday Shopping Made Easy" that promoted 16 PETA products, each featured with its own pun-filled and emotion-laden item description. In this particular article, the descriptions invited activists to:

Warm someone's heart this holiday season: PETA Mug o' love gift basket: [It] will warm the heart of whoever sips from the mug for years to come.

Make the world a sweeter place for animals: Sweet Anthem Handmade Perfumes.

Go ahead give cruelty some lip: Holiday Lip balm 3 pack: Cosmetics don't have to take a toll on animals and winter doesn't have to take a toll on your kisser. So take a bite out of animal testing and Old Man Winter the festive way with this...

Classy and cruelty-free PETA ties: earn a kiss under the mistletoe by surprising the men in your life with ties they'll actually want to wear...each tie features an animal pattern representing a major focus of PETA's lifesaving work.

For the compassionate guy: PETA logo wallet.

The "Living" section continued to illustrate PETA's focus on fashion. It recommended "13 Vegan Fashion Essentials" and urged activists not to "shy away from faux-leather and fur-free fashions", and to instead "release [their] inner fashionista and check out [PETA's] top 13 vegan essentials for fall". As the examples indicate, PETA repeatedly insists that it is through the

consumption of “cruelty-free” products and wardrobe makeovers that one can save nonhuman animals. However, the group’s heavy reliance on phrases and words that insist the purchase of its “cruelty-free” products can make people feel good and look good suggests nonhuman animal rights advocacy is primarily an activity which serves to benefit consumers rather than nonhuman animals. Recall the injunctions to the activist: “Eat, shop, relax, repeat”, “Sit back, relax, and have fun”, and “Release your inner fashionista”. In promoting such benefits, PETA encourages an “It’s about me!” activist identity not unlike the post-feminist identity Lazar argues has seeped into contemporary beauty ads for women. According to Lazar, “‘It’s about me!’ is an identity supported by a consumer culture, which satisfies women’s needs and desires through commodity consumption. It is an entitlement to live a self-absorbed, hedonistic and narcissistic lifestyle based upon consumerist values” (Lazar 2009, 375).

PETA’s discursive fixation on shopping and its celebration of an activist lifestyle based upon consumerist values reflects an economic shift over the past several decades “in which people have constructed themselves or have been constructed by others increasingly through relations with cultural forms in the arena of consumption, not production” (Miller 1998, 11). In response to this historical shift from production to consumption, normalized under the heading of a neoliberal worldview, people have gone from understanding their political participation as vote-driven to being consumer-driven (ibid.; Nevradakis 2016). Within this neoliberal way of thinking, markets are viewed as the basis for all political, economic, and social decisions (Steger 2010, 15). As a result, people are motivated to prioritize themselves over all other participants, and identify themselves in relation to voting with their dollars (“Your dollar is your ballot!”). Therefore, when PETA presents consumerism as the standard of nonhuman animal rights advocacy and vegan identity, it utilizes a neoliberal script. In 2006, PETA’s webpage “Animal Activist” featured a post titled, “Great Ways to Promote Animal Rights” that included consumer activism. It stated, “You have consumer power! You flex your muscle when you vote with your wallet to encourage a more animal-friendly world” and then went on to urge activists to purchase vegetarian restaurant gift cards, cookbooks, vegan chocolates, fancy

vegan clothing, and cruelty-free toiletries from the PETA Mall to give to vegans and non-vegans alike. Its homepage in 2008 included a link to a page titled “You Can Help!” that featured information on the organization’s magazine *Animal Times*, a motivational publication that shares news of PETA’s campaigns and victories with its members “so that they can see how their donations are being used to help animals”. In the magazine, “readers are encouraged to vote for animals every time they pull out their wallets - by buying vegetarian foods, non-leather clothing, cruelty-free cosmetics, and other animal-friendly products”. Moreover, one of the “cruelty-free” companies featured in the PETA Mall in 2013 was described as such:

CauseUrGood: Clothing company with a message...Do good: when you purchase items from CauseUrGood, you help raise awareness and money for worthy causes...Look Good: These trendy designs reflect the great causes to which the company donates...Feel Good: When you look good, you feel good. And you can’t beat the feeling of knowing that you’re helping a great cause and raising awareness for social issues.

The top of PETA’s online shopping catalogue in 2015 stated, “Help spread the word and save animals. Shop now”. Phrases such as “Flex your muscle when you vote with your wallet”, “Your dollar is your ballot”, “Be an animal advocate by saying yes to progress when you open your wallet”, “Vote for animals every time you pull out your wallet”, “Do good when you purchase items...you help raise awareness and money for worthy causes”, and “Help spread the word and save animals. Shop now” are used frequently on the group’s website and demonstrate that advocacy is being portrayed as a personal benefit to the consumer. The message that the discourse conveys is that supporters can help other nonhuman animals by buying more PETA “merch”, and they can feel good about themselves because their purchase power is (supposedly) equivalent to their political power.

Nonetheless, by focusing on buying products, participants are being removed from having to challenge speciesism. PETA’s consistent emphasis on consumerism and their promotion of a capitalist lifestyle effectively render speciesist injustice invisible. In addition, it reinforces the neoliberal idea that the potential for political transformation lies in the consumption of material goods. This leaves little room for advocates to think critically about whether or not buying “cruelty-free” products is the best way to help nonhuman animals.

Speciesism was made especially invisible in 2008 and 2009 when PETA paradoxically celebrated and supported Burger King and KFC for improvements to their efficiency in killing chickens and their new veggie burgers. The homepage from 2008 featured PETA's 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Proggy Awards as its headline story. Each year, the Proggy Awards "recognize animal-friendly achievement in 21<sup>st</sup> century culture and commerce. The winners have helped people discover, access, and explore delicious vegan food options, trendy nonhuman animal-friendly fashion, and outstanding cruelty-free beauty products and household products". In addition to "humane" product winners like "Slugsaway" that keeps slugs and other nonhuman animals out of gardens with spurts of water, PETA also awarded Burger King for being the "Best Improved National Food Chain" for the removal of electric immobilization slaughter techniques and the introduction of controlled-atmosphere killing (CAK), a process that removes oxygen from the birds' atmosphere and kills them while still in their transport crates. In 2009, the homepage highlighted the organization's 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Proggy Awards, which celebrated Prizm Income Fund as its "Company of the Year":

Prizm Income Fund operates most Canadian KFCs and works with the company that coordinates purchasing for *all* Canadian KFCs, stands out from its competitors for the progressive animal welfare policies it recently adopted. Thanks to PETA's negotiations, all KFCs in Canada will phase in chicken purchases from suppliers that use the least cruel slaughter method available. In addition, Prizm will encourage companies that supply chickens to Canadian KFCs to move away from cruel factory-farm methods and will form an animal welfare advisory council. And the best news for hungry Canucks: Most KFCs in Canada have now added vegan faux-chicken sandwiches to their menus!

Celebrating Burger King and KFC would seem to suggest that increasing consumption of, in this case "less cruel", products from exploitative companies is equivalent to increasing advocacy effectiveness.

PETA's advocacy encourages people to "save lives with wise buys" and put together "killer outfits" in order to make the world a better place for humans and nonhuman animals. Ultimately, the repetition of this kind of rhetoric creates a nonhuman animal rights discourse based on consumerism and consumption. Interestingly, though the organization continually places a strong emphasis on shopping and "wearing your activism", PETA Prime's "Health"



section in 2012 featured an article titled “Pinkwashing has me Seeing Red”. It quoted Timothy Seiter of the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University who pointed out, “Awareness does not equal commitment...When people purchase a pink item, they often feel that they’ve done their part to beat breast cancer. We need less pink and more action.” Although Seiter is referring to breast cancer advocacy, the fact that this post appeared on PETA’s website suggests that saving nonhuman animals may not be “as easy as choosing stylish cruelty-free clothing”, as it has previously claimed: “Saving animals is as simple as choosing stylish cruelty-free clothing, which is available in every price range and at all kinds of retail outlets, from discount stores to high-end boutiques. With so many...options...there is no excuse for wearing any animal skins.” Instead, it would appear to be suggesting that the nonhuman animal rights movement needs less stylish cruelty-free clothing and more direct action. A careful analysis of its website, however, indicates that the group repeatedly utilizes a consumerist and anthropocentric way of thinking about advocacy. As a result, the discourse does little to challenge the systems of oppression that reinforce speciesism. PETA’s discourse suggests veganism and nonhuman animal rights are not being portrayed through social justice claims making. Rather, advocacy is being commodified through consumable “cruelty-free” products and repackaged in a way that reflects a disempowering, neoliberal, and human-centered approach.

As such a large nonhuman animal rights organization with an immense international presence, PETA has the ability to dominate advocacy rationale and have a huge influence on defining activism. Thus, it wields the discursive authority to characterize nonhuman animal rights as a social movement intended to sell products and increase sales. It also wields the authority to tell people that social justice and nonhuman animal rights are things you can buy.

#### **B. “We are truly winning”: PETA selling itself**

Throughout the past decade, as PETA has grown and taken in an ever-increasing number of donations, another leitmotif on its website has been its self-aggrandizement. In this

subsection, I discuss the self-promotional language used by PETA and demonstrate that the focus of its discourse is not solely to sell “cruelty-free” products, but to sell itself to potential supporters (i.e. donors) as a victorious and effective nonhuman animal rights organization that is superior to other nonhuman animal rights groups. I argue that the consistency of the language is evidence to suggest a concerted discourse strategy that has been devised by PETA, a powerful social actor in the nonhuman animal rights movement, which seeks to convey a certain ideology that abides by a competitive neoliberal form of social activism in order to attract more donors.

One of the key components of PETA’s self-promotional discourse is its repetitive use of the word “victory” and phrases that consistently emphasize the extent to which PETA is “winning”. An embedded assumption in the consistent listing of their victories may be PETA’s attempt to associate their organizational triumphs with benefits to the nonhuman animals they have dedicated themselves to protecting. But what exactly is PETA winning? At the end of each of the past ten years, PETA compiled a list of all of its “victories for animals”. Consider some of the following headlines of these lists:

PETA’s 2007 End of the Year Video: From huge victories for animals to exciting new celebrity campaigns, 2007 was a big year for PETA

Hope you’re celebrating all of the victories for animals in 2010! XO  
Top PETA Victories for Animals in 2011: The year 2011 was an amazing one for PETA as many important victories for animals were scored

Celebrate a year of victory for animals. We did it!...There are far too many victories, large and small, to list all here...Break out your giant foam finger and get ready to celebrate excessively

In 2013, thanks to PETA’s undercover investigations, the following abuses were revealed and victories won

This year, we won major victories...PETA made important strides

The victories keep pouring in, or should I say, roaring in

Various individual “victories” were also paraded around PETA’s website throughout each year: “Victory! Tea company Unilever stops testing tea on animals”, “Victory! Angel’s Gate Founder Charged”, “Victory! Lions win big at MGM Grand”, “Victory! United Airlines Stops All

Shipments of Primates to Laboratories”, “Victory! House of Lords Rejects ‘Torture in a Tin’”, “Victory! Obama Signs Defense Bill that Will Save Animals’ Lives”. Moreover, they were accompanied by phrases that made sure to give PETA the majority of the credit such as, “Major Victory Won with PETA’s Help”, and “These victories are the result of PETA’s campaigns”. By repeatedly reading this kind of discourse, it became easy to feel as though “major” change was taking place for nonhuman animals. Consider the following example, a statement PETA made on its website in 2007:

Realize that we are truly winning...honestly, we are winning, and we’re winning at a rate that is lightning fast by comparison to any previous social justice movement...Indeed things are changing...Animal activism in the developed world has never been stronger or more effective...the 21<sup>st</sup> century WILL be the one to usher in animal liberation.

Holborow claims that the ubiquity and spread of keywords are significant and indicative of certain forms of thoughts and beliefs (Holborow 2015, 116). I argue PETA’s use of “winning” and “victory” engender immense ideological significance within the nonhuman animal rights movement. For one thing, the vocabulary signals a discourse model centered on “warfare” that is used across a wide spectrum of domains in our society. In his discussion of DA, Gee claimed that discourse models signaled by words relating to warfare are evidence of a form of thought which regards personal, political, and institutional relationships as battles or contests (Gee 1999, 84). This would suggest that the metaphors utilized by PETA treat nonhuman animal rights activism as a battle and a contest (e.g. “winning”, “victory”, “revolutionary”). The vocabulary and phrases being used by PETA also suggest that by focusing on smaller, single-issue campaigns (i.e. preventing tea companies from testing on nonhuman animals) rather than challenging the bigger social institutions (i.e. capitalism) that help to maintain the exploitation and oppression of nonhuman animals, PETA can “win”. However, the question once again arises, “What is PETA ‘winning?’” A closer look at some of the other self-promotional text on PETA’s website provides us with an answer.

PETA markets itself on its website as a preeminent nonhuman animal rights organization in relation to other nonprofits. In 2008, it claimed it “received more votes than

Red Cross and Habitat for Humanity combined” and declared itself to be the “#1 overall non-profit organization that 13-24 year-olds in North America would volunteer for”. PETA’s mission statement in 2013 declared, “And not to brag, but we are the largest youth nonhuman animal rights group in the world - maybe even the universe...winning campaign after campaign for animals”. Furthermore, PETA Prime featured an article titled “Blinding them with Science” that claimed,

With more scientists on staff than any other animal rights group, PETA has become the single most successful organization in replacing animal tests with superior non-animal methods...Thanks largely to PETA, a sea change has occurred in the area...We are the only organization willing to...Other groups saw the problem as insurmountable and wouldn’t touch it...PETA is fearless...Our power comes from working on...a variety of tactics.

The same section featured a post from PETA’s director of youth outreach and campaigns who declared,

PETA has been cited as the most popular social-change organization among young people...we really pay attention to what young people like and what they do...We create ‘missions’ that we think will appeal to them. We make things fun. Also, we always respond...We try to make interacting with PETA seem like hanging out with a friend. And we always answer their questions...Kids have told us that they feel valued by us...Another key to our success is that we’re everywhere...both real and virtual, where young people spend time.

Many socially conscious members of modern American society would likely see such statements as a source of inspiration. This might suggest that PETA understands the values of American families and youth and seeks to incorporate them in their mission. Undoubtedly, this invites new participants into PETA’s annual programming and market presence. However, a group that claims to be the number one nonprofit organization is a group that abides by a competitive neoliberal form of social activism. In other words, it is a group that sells itself as “the best” in pursuit of self-interest over anti-speciesism. Its effect is to divert attention away from nonhuman animals and the greater causes of systemic violence against them, and to strengthen donor and activist commitment to PETA, who is, according to its website, winning “campaign after campaign”.

As a nonhuman animal rights organization focused on selling “cruelty-free” products and collecting as many donations as possible, PETA commodifies nonhuman animal rights and ideologically justifies capitalism. And in pitting itself against other nonprofits as the most “popular”, it also conceives of nonhuman animal rights through a market-oriented perspective. In this way, PETA represents itself mainly as an income-generating organization in competition with, rather than in an alliance with, other nonprofit groups. This would explain, in part, why PETA declares itself superior to other groups, and why it constantly talks about all of the victories it wins. It would also explain PETA’s insistence that they are “extremely successful” and “very effective”.

If competition is the name of the game, then it is no wonder PETA regularly uses words like “effective”, “popular”, and “revolutionary” to describe itself. By way of illustration, PETA posted a testimonial in 2006 on its “About PETA” webpage that stated, “PETA is currently one of the most effective lobbying organizations in the world. Its campaigns get front-page coverage in various publications...and force big-name animal abusers to clean up their acts.” In 2007, it used words like “groundbreaking”, “successful”, “colorful”, “innovative”, and “influential” to describe itself, while also claiming that it was “revolutionizing the way that the world views and treats animals”. A very telling example of the same rhetoric came from PETA’s website in 2010:

Our efforts in this area have been extremely successful: We’ve pushed many...to make significant reforms...We’ve long promoted veganism...Our unique food service outreach program has been very effective...We use the media and the Internet like no other group...We did over...had more...created more...Our website...receives nearly 3 times more traffic than other animal organization’s site. We’re the fifth most popular nonprofit page on Facebook, and our daily blog...is in the top one-half percent of all blogs in the world...our team’s expertise and hard work, PETA is succeeding...we’re as tenacious as ever. Some of our victories have been achieved in just an hour or two while others have taken years...we don’t give up.

The group continued to utilize this rhetoric when it declared, “PETA has made groundbreaking advances for animals and...has been the driving force behind many of the large successes for animals”. In addition, PETA’s founder and CEO Ingrid Newkirk touted, “The Daily Meal acknowledged PETA’s success in fighting the factory-farming industry when it included me on

its list of '50 Most Powerful People in Food'...My essay...was published by the New York Times as one of the top five essays of thousands submitted.” In 2014, the group’s homepage featured an article with all of the website’s top blog posts from the previous year that reemphasized how popular the group had become: “ ‘You like us! You really like us!’ PETA’s blog garnered more than 4.5 million views in 2013, our blog posts were also ‘liked’, shared, and tweeted thousands of times”. The organization continued to repeat its use of words like “groundbreaking” and “innovative” in an article titled “What did PETA do in 2014?” The caption to the article stated, “2014 has been PETA’s best [year] ever. Watch PETA takes on the biggest animal abuses with eye-catching tactics and groundbreaking innovations”. In a recap of the year 2015, the homepage included a link titled, “Watch: How PETA Changed the World in 2015...PETA’s 35<sup>th</sup> year of working for animals brought major accomplishments”.

The strongly repeated use of words such as “effective”, “successful”, and “victory”, and phrases that praise PETA for all of its accomplishments has a purpose: to foster a particular way for supporters to see themselves in the nonhuman animal rights movement, namely as donors of PETA and consumers of its “cruelty-free” products. The recurrent discourse also fosters and contributes to a particularly neoliberal construction of the nonhuman animal rights movement that encourages competition with other non-profits and defines “success” by the number of single issue campaigns it “wins”, the amount of media coverage it gets, the number “likes” it receives on social media, and the number of donors it attracts. The aim of the content on its website is to enhance PETA’s image so it can appeal to funders and compete in the nonprofit industrialized market for donations. If we return to the question, “What exactly is PETA ‘winning?’”, the examples from the organization’s website demonstrate that it is “winning” single-issue campaigns, attention from the media, and popularity on social media. But if we turn to PETA’s annual financial report from 2015, we see that it is also “winning” over 45 million dollars in donations each year (“Financial Reports”). This, I argue, is largely due to the type of language PETA uses. Potential donors expect regular “victories” so that

they can feel as though their money is going towards something that is actually working. So, “victory” - at least discursively - is exactly what PETA gives its readership.

### C. “Change lives with your change”: PETA and donations

Drawing from the previous discussion of PETA’s self-promotional discourse, this subsection considers the discourse PETA uses to encourage donations-based advocacy. An examination of various examples allows detailed knowledge to be gained of the group’s main means of asking for donations and of the implications this scheme has for PETA’s ideology regarding nonhuman animal rights advocacy. I argue that the repetition of phrases intended to encourage activists to donate signals a neoliberal ideology of activism that treats PETA as the only party that can properly manage advocacy resources while the group’s supporters “sit back” and “relax”. I also argue the discourse is evidence of a strategy to address only those who can contribute to the movement financially, which thereby excludes people who cannot participate in this way from activism.

PETA’s use of neoliberal discourse is indicative of a particular mediating role the group is enacting. Seldom encouraged to engage in critical ways with nonhuman animal rights, activists are instead urged by PETA to donate to them as much as possible. As one example of this theme, the organization frequently insists that supporters donate their estates when they die. An estate is the net worth of a deceased individual, which could include bank accounts, houses, cars, and any other smaller assets, or property a person owns or controls (“Duhaime’s Law Dictionary”). In 2006, the website stated,

To remember animals in such an enduring way is quite possibly the most powerful gift that a person can make to stop animal suffering...every dollar means an extra chance to an animal in need!...Your estate plan represents your beliefs, your life, and a way to continue your compassion into the future...make animals a part of your legacy.

The same section also included a message from (now deceased) actress and comedian Bea Arthur regarding estate plan donations:

Making lasting gifts for animals in our estate plans is perhaps the single most important thing we can do to ensure animals have the strongest possible voice for their

protections...It would be the ultimate honor and invaluable in saving animals and reaching the most people with messages of compassion and respect for all living beings.

In 2012, PETA Prime notified website visitors that it was “National Estate Planning Awareness Week”, warning them that if they did not have an adequate plan in place for after they die, their wishes to support nonhuman animal rights activism would go unfulfilled:

Isn't it important that your money and other assets speak for your beliefs - that they represent your core values regarding helping animals?...[After you make PETA the beneficiary], kick back and congratulate yourself for a major accomplishment: You will be saving animals for generations to come!...A significant portion of PETA's lifesaving work to help animals is funded by bequests, making this an important source of revenue for the organization.

The organization also urged advocates to donate their life insurance policies, old vehicles, stock, properties, jewelry, and artwork, claiming in 2009 that it was the “perfect opportunity to benefit animals and qualify for a tax deduction [as] the proceeds directly benefit [PETA's] work to expose and stop cruelty to animals”. The website contained assorted phrases highlighted in bright yellow such as “Make a lifesaving donation to help animals today”, “Moved by what you see? Make a monthly gift”, “Stand up for animals...Make your generous donation”, “Donate now”, “Make a monthly gift”, “Only hours left to donate”, and “Donate \$25, \$35, \$50, or \$100”.

Membership, like the purchase of PETA products, is another form of donation the organization urges supporters to consider. The website repeatedly insists advocates “Become a member today!” and “Renew your Membership”. PETA's 2006 homepage stated, “We need your financial support in order to put a stop to animal cruelty”. It also claimed, “Alone we can accomplish little. Together, we can make the world a better place for all beings. Your donation will go to work instantly to help animals suffering and dying...Members receive a FREE year's subscription to...*Animal Times*”. According to an article on its homepage from 2013, donating to PETA “should be at the top of everyone's list [because] PETA puts animal rights on the map and continues to be the most effective at uncovering injustice, putting pressure on animal exploiters, and helping us all to be better, kinder, and more compassionate people”.

These phrases, along with the discourse intended to encourage activists to donate their



estates, remained much the same over the past ten years. Holborow suggests the frequency of use of such phrases has social-cultural significance; it presupposes “the community which stereotypically interprets this content”, and “helps to justify and secure dominant interests” (Holborow 2015, 124). When PETA insists that estate donations are “the most powerful gift” and “single most important thing” a person could do to stop nonhuman animal suffering, and that donating IRAs, vehicles, jewelry, and life insurance is the “ultimate honor”, it affords incredible privilege to advocates who have the financial capability to participate in this way. The message that is being promoted and emphasized by PETA suggests activism is equivalent to donating, to the exclusion of other forms of participation available to advocates who cannot contribute financially.

PETA did not restrict financial contributions to memberships, estates, old vehicles, and personal items, however. In 2007, the group’s “Get Active” webpage stated,

Working together we can make a big difference for animals...Along with your voice, we need your financial support. Your generosity allows us to help animals suffering and dying in laboratories, factory farms, circuses, and the fur and entertainment industries.

It went on to promote a long-distance phone program, which allowed 10% of subscribers’ monthly bills to go to PETA so advocates could “help animals every time [they picked up their phone]”. The same section also suggested supporters “use PETA checks”, “join PETA’s workplace giving campaign”, and “make a monthly gift”. In 2009, PETA Prime’s “Health” section urged advocates to “Donate to PETA Pack Marathon Team and educate yourself at the same time”. In addition, the organization made it possible for people over the age of 70 to “use [their] IRA to support PETA’s lifesaving work for animals and reduce [their] tax liability at the same time”, as well as make PETA the beneficiary of their life insurance:

Why PETA is the beneficiary of my life insurance: No group in the world fights harder for animals now and will in the generations to come than PETA, and I want to support that fight. We see progress every day, but this important work will surely not be finished when I am. And I want my money to stand for what I stand for...We can’t beat death, but donations to PETA are tax deductible. And we can continue to save animals beyond our lifetimes.

PETA also suggested supporters spend their tax refunds on making donations. They claimed,

“Wanting to help others is a gut instinct, and when acted upon, it can create an internal sense of well-being known as helpers high! Doing something for animals can actually improve your mood and boost your immunity!” The post ended by urging readers to “Donate now!” On its “Action Center” webpage, the readership was encouraged to “Become a PETA change-maker today and share your passion for animals while helping support PETA’s vital efforts to end suffering and abuse” by creating a personal PETA fundraising page. By 2014, the organization started to suggest advocates “consider asking for donations [for Christmas] to be made to organizations to help animals (\*cough\*PETA\*cough\*)”.

Pursuing the theme of donations-based advocacy, PETA Prime’s “Money” section in 2011 stated, “Change animals’ lives with your change: Like to help animals but don’t have much time? Want to donate to PETA but aren’t sure of your finances from month to month? Now, it can be as simple as swiping your debit or credit card! PETA is now a featured charity on swipecard.com”. This language - become a “change-maker” with your “change” - continues to address only those who have the economic means to contribute to the movement financially and thereby works directly to exclude those who cannot. This provides another example of PETA’s lack of understanding of how class might affect one’s participation in social activism. PETA’s discourse suggests that donation giving is one of the most important aspects of advocacy and a normalized point of reference upon which nonhuman animal rights activists should be measured. This might lead one to presume that PETA believes socioeconomically dominant groups are the most receptive to making positive changes for nonhuman animals.

Phrases like “Change lives with your change” and “It’s as simple as swiping your debit or credit card” also suggest that PETA’s beliefs about activism are motivated by a neoliberal worldview. As a non-profit organization in a competitive market whose bureaucratic success and continued growth largely depend on its capacity to attract donations, it makes sense that PETA would try to attract the support of a wealthy group of potential donors. However, the reproduction of discourse on its website that emphasizes donations-based advocacy suggests the group is more interested in organizational financial growth than it is in addressing

speciesism. This would mean that the group utilizes the mechanisms of capitalism to challenge speciesism despite the fact that nonhuman animal exploitation is, to a large extent, fueled by the capitalist logic of economic growth. Given the size and influence of PETA, the reproduction of discourse on its website that emphasizes donations-based advocacy might compel advocates to assume social change requires the establishment of a capitalist political economic system. Not only does this naturalize contemporary forms of capitalism, it also erases the possibility to critique the very system that helps maintain nonhuman animal oppression.

PETA's adoption of a neoliberal discourse is also indicative of the belief that social change is an individual economic activity that advocates can exercise by donating money or personal property and feel good about ("Stand tall as your donation goes right to work to end animal suffering") despite the probability that several advocates are unable to participate in this way. Interestingly, however, the prioritization of individual financial participation removes the ability of activists to control the distribution of their money. When all that is required of an activist is to swipe a credit card or click a tab to donate, PETA maintains the right to determine how to distribute such resources. PETA tells donors to "stand tall" while they "kick back", write PETA a check, "make a phone call", and "congratulate" themselves for ending nonhuman animal suffering. Such lack of direct participation removes activists from critical engagement with the process of nonhuman animal liberation. This might suggest that PETA endeavors to take on a mediating role and dominate the movement's political direction through resource management. If this is the case, "working together" simply implies donors hand over their money to PETA because "no group in the world fights harder for animals".

By and large, PETA's website consistently claims people can rely on dollars to stop nonhuman animal exploitation. However, the idea that giving money equates to the defense of nonhuman animal rights suggests PETA relies on a neoliberal worldview of activism to the exclusion of supporters who cannot contribute financially. The idea also suggests advocates can buy nonhuman animal rights by donating to PETA without ever having to do anything else.

#### D. “Sex sells”: PETA campaigns

Accompanying PETA’s consistent emphasis on financial giving is a striking display of sexually explicit advertisements, images, and campaigns that are also indicative of a neoliberal worldview. In this subsection, I examine the group’s use of nudity and sexualized language on its website over the last ten years. I argue that PETA utilizes an ideological discourse of oppression and exploitation - misogyny, violence, patriarchy, post-feminism, neoliberalism, and anthropocentrism - to “sell” nonhuman animal rights by objectifying and sexualizing human bodies in its campaigns.

Year after year, PETA’s discourse sexualizes nonhuman animal activism. Interestingly, however, PETA’s “About PETA” section featured an essay in 2007 titled “Effective Advocacy: Stealing from the Corporate Playbook”, that listed several different ways for advocates to participate nonhuman animal rights activism. It stated that in order to be the best possible advocates “we should look presentable so that our appearance does not distract from our message: the suffering of animals...It is never in animals’ interests for you to say something disrespectful in a discussion of animal rights or veganism.” Nevertheless, the group claimed in 2008 and 2011 that its own display of “colorful” demonstrations and campaigns (i.e. activists stripping to go naked instead of wearing fur) succeed in selling social justice because they “consistently grab headlines”. Both years, they acknowledged how controversial and sexually explicit their ads were and explained that their use of nudity got the nonhuman animal rights message “to as many people as possible”. Far from looking “presentable” so as not to “distract from their message”, PETA claimed,

We will do extraordinary things to get the word out...because...the media, sadly, do not consider the terrible facts about animal suffering alone interesting enough to cover. It is sometimes necessary to shake people up in order to initiate discussion, debate, questioning of the status quo, and, of course, action. Thus, we try to make our actions colorful and controversial...grabbing the headlines...and spreading the message of kindness to animals to thousands. This...has proven amazingly successful.

It went on to say it is the biggest nonhuman animal rights group in the country and then listed some of its accomplishments, including the assertion that the “I’d Rather Go Naked than Wear

Fur” campaign was “hugely successful” because it was “featured in nearly every major newspaper...major magazine and television show”. PETA’s insistence that the group has to use sexually explicit marketing materials in order to spread the nonhuman animal rights message is in stark contrast to its demands that the group’s readership look “presentable” and not “distract from the message”. The discourse in these example serves to uphold the mediator position I argue PETA is enacting within the movement between its constituents and itself. In other words, the discourse suggests PETA should be permitted to advocate in certain ways while its supporters should not.

Despite the group’s insistence in 2007 that advocates remain “presentable” while PETA parades advertisements of naked models and celebrities, its website regularly features various “sexiest vegetarian” contests for its supporters. By way of example, PETA Prime named a lawyer “sexiest vegetarian” of the year in 2011 and at the end of 2015, accepted nominations for “sexiest vegan over 50”. In addition, PETA consistently urged advocates to speak up for nonhuman animals by participating in the organization’s “I’d Rather Go Naked than Wear Fur” campaign because “animals always need more lovely ladies and gorgeous guys who can draw attention to PETA campaigns by dressing up as Lettuce Ladies and Broccoli Boys...bare some skin to help save animals’ lives”.

Despite the inclusion of both male and female advocates in the group’s campaigns, the discourse, imagery, and videography on PETA’s website suggest activist roles – and the ways in which they are portrayed via media representation – are different depending on one’s gender. In particular, female activism is described and portrayed as something “sexy”, “voluptuous”, and “angelic”. For example, PETA’s 2007 homepage included a headline article titled, “Famke Janssen is an Angel for Animals: The sexy star of the X-Men films ‘swings’ into action for animals in a stunning new ‘Be an Angel for Animals’ ad”. Throughout the article, Famke was described as a “stunning”, “voluptuous”, “angelic” “femme fatale”, “sexy super heroine”, “sexy star”, and “sexy actor”. As another example, Yvonne Strahovski was named an “Angel for Animals” in 2011 as part of PETA’s “Adopt, Don’t Buy” campaign. The ad featuring Yvonne

showed her wearing a revealing, sparkly gold dress with angel wings, and posing alongside her two rescued dogs. In 2009, PETA posted an ad titled, “Make your stock rise with PETA’s sexy banker” that featured a former Cowboys cheerleader lying naked in front of two men dressed as “bankers”. The ad stated,

In this falling economy, everyone seems to be losing their shirts. Just look at Bonnie-Jill Laflin....[who] recently lost her shirt (and the rest of her clothes) for PETA’s hot new...ad. The sizzling ad is a playful reminder that even though it might now be the best time to grow your wealth, it’s the perfect time to grow your health with a plant-based diet!

In encouraging readers to “just look at Bonnie-Jill Laflin” as she lies vulnerably in front of two men who are also pictured in the ad, PETA invited male viewers to gaze at her voyeuristically and “make their stock rise” [emphasis added]. In *Colored Pictures: Race and Representation* (quoted in Adams [1990] 2015, 188), Michael Harris draws on the work of David Lubin who argues that this kind of invitation to participate as voyeur to a vulnerable and sexualized female body allows men to “experience, re-experience, or experience in fantasy their virility and all the potency and social worth that implies” (ibid.). Additionally, Adams argues:

Consuming images such as these provide a way for our culture to talk openly about the objectification of women without having to acknowledge that this is what they are doing. It is a way that men can bond publicly around misogyny whether they know it or not. It makes the degradation of women appear playful and harmless: “just” a joke...These issues are “in our face” all the time. We do not perceive them as problematic because we are so used to having our dominant culture mirror these attitudes. We become shaped by and participants in the structure of the absent referent. (ibid., xxvii)

In the ad featuring Bonnie-Jill, her body appeared controlled, vulnerable and objectified (ibid., 195). The two men featured in the ad were placed in positions of dominance while she was placed in a position that would presumably allow her to be dominated.

The displays of nearly naked women in conjunction with the use of hyper-sexualized and super-feminized language in these ads draws upon scripts of patriarchy that strip women of their subjectivity and objectify female activists for male consumption. In doing so, the advertisements reinforce traditional gender roles and symbolically disempower female activists (ibid., 185). By encouraging women to take off their clothes so that they can “sell” nonhuman

animal liberation, PETA associates female activism with pornographic exploitation and makes other types of activist roles invisible. Characterizing female participation in the nonhuman animal rights movement in this way not only distorts activist agency by prescribing specific engendered roles; it also degrades women and men. It positions both men and women within the same historically normalized system of oppression in which women are oppressed and men are oppressors. In this way, PETA subverts everyone's subjectivity.

The degradation of female participation can also be seen in the series of online games PETA's website offers its viewers to play. Throughout the last ten years, the games have ranged from shooting tomatoes at "old hags" who wear fur to shaking "Hairy Kate and Trashley Trollsen" in a virtual snow globe as hard as possible while recordings of violent screams play in the background. Additionally, PETA's 2015 website included two games titled "Breasts, not Animal Tests" and "Commando Chicks: Stick-a-Chick". The first game required players to grab as many female breasts as possible without accidentally grabbing any nonhuman animals. In the second game, players had to keep a "flying" packaged chicken from entering into their grocery cart; otherwise, the player's family would die of salmonella. It is unclear in these games how aggressively shooting tomatoes at women<sup>1</sup>, physically harming Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen, grabbing women's breasts, and making sexually violent references suggestive of rape ("Stick-a-Chick") can help liberate nonhuman animals. Nonetheless, the literal meaning embedded within the metaphorical titles and tasks of these games suggests that PETA believes referencing violent acts against women (hitting, shaking, grabbing, and raping) is an effective way to promote nonhuman animal rights. In other words, it appears that PETA uses the oppressions women face as marketing mechanisms to get viewers to play its online games, the use of which are presumably vehicles meant to ultimately help dismantle nonhuman animal oppression. Ironically, Adams argues that drawing on these oppressive images normalizes the violence against women and nonhuman animals because they reference the same set of violent

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<sup>1</sup> The term "hag" is defined in Merriam Webster's dictionary as an ugly *woman*.

sounds, images and practices present within the nonhuman animal product industry (Adams [1990] 2015, 202).

In addition to the normalization of violence against women implicit in PETA's ads and games, sexism is obvious in a large number of the group's videos, which frequently feature choreographed pornographic performances by predominantly young women. Consider the following examples: In 2009, PETA posted "Milk Gone Wild 2: At the Carwash", a parody of the infamous "Girls Gone Wild" infomercials from the mid-1990s. The video captured a group of young women dressed in jean shorts and t-shirts washing a convertible automobile being driven by a middle-aged man. A few seconds into the video, the women lift up their wet shirts to reveal "life-like" cow udders strapped to their chests. They then proceed to squirt the milk from their "udders" onto the car and the man driving it. In 2012, PETA posted a video titled "Veggie Love", in which several young women wearing revealing bikinis and high heels walked into a living room and were asked by the *men* recording the video to choose their favorite vegetable from the table and show it "some love". What followed was a montage of the women sucking on different vegetables suggestively and rubbing the vegetables all over their bodies. PETA claimed on its "Video" webpage in 2015 that one of its "secrets" to success is its belief that "sex sells": "For the sake of animals, we're saucy and provocative...this cause needs all the attention it can get". Wodak has claimed that the repeated use of a set of specific images is indicative of the reproduction of certain worldviews and beliefs (Wodak 2009, 28). In sexually objectifying women in these videos under the assumption that "sex sells", PETA participates in the normalization of patriarchy, misogyny, and the consumption of the female body (ibid., 199). The use of such videos suggests that the group believes it can dismantle the system of nonhuman animal exploitation by oppressing its own female advocates.

Another example of this belief can be found on PETA's 2014 homepage, which featured an online quiz called "Learn your ABCs with PETA's Sexy Striptease" in which website visitors had to answer questions regarding spaying and neutering nonhuman animals. Those who chose the correct answer got to see a real woman take off an article of clothing. The quiz ended



when players had answered all questions correctly and the woman had almost completely undressed. Ads and games like this symbolically strip female participants' subjectivity and is an act of reassurance that objectification and voyeurism are okay (ibid., 195).

Exhibiting female advocates this way also suggests female participants are complicit in their own oppression by objectifying their bodies in order to challenge the objectification and oppression of nonhuman animals (ibid., xlv). According to Wrenn, women's voluntary participation in these ads may unwittingly reinforce a post-feminist ideology. In a post-feminist social order, Lazar claims, "women proudly and enthusiastically embrace conventional codes indexical of 'femininity'" (Lazar 2009, 381). The tenet that the core problems of sexism have already been addressed (e.g. wage inequality, sexual harassment, domestic violence, and so on) would explain why several of these codes have been taken up by PETA in their advertisements and campaigns. Sex appeal, "hotness", and representations of women as angels are all stereotypically associated with normative Western-centric femininity. Sex appeal in particular, through a post-feminist lens, could be associated with open-mindedness, empowerment, and confidence. Yet the constant reinstantiation of female sexuality reinforces historical patriarchal control over the construction of women's gendered identity (ibid.).

The post-feminist celebration of female sexuality and conventional codes of femininity in PETA's campaigns is also indicative of the adoption of an "It's all about me!" attitude that tends to place great value on individualism, which invokes a neoliberal worldview. A critical discourse analysis suggests the constant reproduction of female sexuality is an indication that PETA's female advocates participate in the construction of femininity that might negatively impact women. Examples of this ideology abound on PETA's website. The group's "I'd Rather Go Naked" featured actresses Eva Mendez, Alicia Silverstone, Christian Serratos, Bethenny Frankel, and Dita Von Teese, porn star Jenna Jameson, girl band Danity Kane, Miss USA 2014, and *Dancing with the Stars* judge Carrie Anne Inaba in nearly naked displays. In 2011, PETA featured an "All Animals Have the Same Parts" PSA with actress and model Pamela Anderson in

a nearly naked pose, as well as a racy ad of The Lingerie Football League with a caption that stated,

These bombshell athletes teamed up with PETA to use their fame and fit figures to show the world that fur should be permanently cut from the roster...to draw attention to the millions of animals who are abused and killed for their skins each year. Tackle cruelty: Bench Fur...Click here to see a naked behind-the-scenes photo.

In her discussion of CDA, Wodak stated language use is a social practice that contributes to the stabilization of certain social structures (Wodak 2009, 7). It is my contention that the reproduction of hyper-sexualized images and discourse on PETA's website, and the voluntary participation of female advocates, help to normalize and stabilize attitudes toward sexism because going naked is presented in the group's campaigns as something empowering for both women and nonhuman animals. This is in spite of the fact that sexual objectification facilitates the consumption of females and a system of violent oppression.

Apart from the sexualization of nearly naked women in PETA's ads, the group's discourse also suggests that being a nonhuman animal advocate is a means of attaining a thinner body and a more satisfying sex life. In 2010, peta2 told its younger nonhuman animal rights supporters that veganism is about the benefits of being "cool", "hott", "sexy", compassionate, and thin without explaining how these particular characteristics benefit nonhuman animals:

All the cool kids are doing it (the list of stars who shun animal flesh is basically a 'who's who' of today's hottest celebs)...[this is] just a handful of the super-sexy vegetarians who regularly appear in People magazine. Check out our recent 'World's Sexiest Vegetarian' for more hot, compassionate celebs, look sexy and be sexy...Vegans tend to be thinner than meat-eaters and have more energy, which is perfect for late-night romps with your special someone.

Harper suggests that the saturation of representations of conventionally thin beautiful white women in mainstream vegan literature is intended "to lure omnivores into veganism" (Harper 2011 165). The universal assumption of this, she argues, is that:

1) All straight men (regardless of race) would want to have sex with these "perfect 10s," but the caveat is that these types of women would only have sex with them if they were to go vegan and; 2) women should become vegan because it means they too can save animals and obtain the white racialized aesthetic of beauty which is becoming

skinny and “modelesque,” while simultaneously appealing to the heteronormative white male gaze. (ibid.)

In addition to promoting veganism as a way to attain a conventionally “sexy” beauty aesthetic, PETA also claimed that men who do not eat meat have the benefit of “lasting longer” in the bedroom. Apart from having a “bigger heart”, the group claimed that “your lover will be glad you’re vegan” because your “equipment” will work better due to more efficient blood flow, you will be more fertile because your sperm quality will be better, you will taste better (quoted by a former porn star), and you will last longer during sex. The “Features” section on its 2014 homepage warned meat-eaters of potential bedroom crises that would befall them if they did not become vegan:

Another Cuban missile crisis across this great nation, guys are lasting a minute, sometimes less. It’s a problem so severe that not even imagining Fidel Castro during sex can help...maybe it’s something they ate. It turns out that eating meat isn’t good for your *meat*. Studies show that vegans actually last longer than meat-eaters.

Adams argues that “male genitalia and male sexuality are at times inferred when ‘meat’ is discussed” in this way because it carries resonances of male power (Adams [1990] 2015, 28). Thus, the example above upholds the same ideology and representational structures of patriarchy that are embedded within the aforementioned marketing materials, namely that maleness should be associated with meat and virility despite the fact that the group is trying to promote a way of life which completely excludes meat.

In contrast to female activists, male activists are characterized by PETA as anything but “angelic” and “voluptuous”. Instead, the discourse on the group’s website directed towards male participation is marked by an admonition to behave in a traditionally masculine way. In 2015, men were told to eat vegan bacon, “man the F\*\*\* up”, and “rise up and assert [their] manliness”. PETA’s “Living” section in 2015 also called men who take pride in eating meat “pretty fucking pathetic” - “burgers and steaks are actually the food of wimps”. The post went on to list a series of vegan athletes from the UFC, NFL, and Strongest Man competition. The examples demonstrate that PETA is, albeit unwittingly, repeating the tired cliché that associates meat eating (in this case, *vegan* bacon) with manhood and muscular

strength (ibid., 184). This is ironic because they employ the very masculinizing discourse that they think they are eschewing.

Despite the absence of “real” meat, the patriarchal myth of masculinity remains on PETA’s website, though in a modified form: men are strong and assertive and need to eat vegan *bacon* (Adams [1990] 2015, 11). In his response to *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Matthew Calarco called upon Derrida’s term carno-phallogocentrism to add to Adams’ commentary on the association between meat eating and maleness. He stated that the term carno-phallogocentrism was “an attempt to name the primary social, linguistic, and material practices that go into becoming and remaining a genuine subject within the West” (quoted in Adams [1990] 2015, xix-xx). The term suggests, “in order to be recognized as a full subject one must be a meat eater, a man, and an authoritative, speaking self” (quoted in Adams [1990] 2015, xix-xx). In a similar vein, Derrida maintains “meat eating is not a simple, natural phenomenon, but is irreducibly linked in our culture to masculinity along multiple material, ideological, and symbolic lines” (quoted in Adams [1990] 2015, xix-xx). The discourse and imagery on PETA’s website suggest that the historical construction of the male subject as strong and domineering cannot and should not change, even if he consumes vegan meat (ibid., xx).

The presumption embedded within PETA’s discourse that sex can “sell” the nonhuman animal rights cause is likely a powerful one given the influence, presence, and financial success PETA has had in the movement. However, the discourse reproduces violent and exploitative visual and linguistic representations of female advocates that silence them and deny them other activist roles. In addition, the group’s online advertisements, PSA’s, and videos reproduce the post-feminist ideology that embraces normative feminine stereotypes, which help to maintain a gender dichotomy and uphold patriarchal assumptions of female social roles. In doing so, female activists are textually and visually positioned as desirable and consumable subjects who welcome the male gaze and adhere to conventional beauty standards. In addition to the objectification of women via historically informed social norms, men, too, are

positioned in such a way as to reduce them to sexual performers and consumers of the female body. Ultimately, the reproduction of neoliberal and sexist discourses suggests PETA is attempting to dismantle an oppressive system of nonhuman animal exploitation by way of an oppressive patriarchal system. Rather than promoting nonhuman animal liberation through social justice claims making, PETA's discourse suggests that nonhuman animals can be liberated by treating advocates not only as consumers of sexy advertisements, but also as sexual objects that can be consumed.

#### **E. "The power of your purse": The Vegan Society and consumerism**

As with PETA, I initially hypothesized that the further back in time I went in the online archives, the less I would find The Vegan Society promoting consumer activism. Interestingly, although I discovered that the group focuses on being an "educational charity" that seeks to teach others about health, nonhuman animals, and the environment, I found that The Vegan Society also embraces consumer-based activism. Through a series of extracts from the group's website over the past ten years, this subsection argues that The Vegan Society promotes a particular form of nonhuman animal rights activism based on the consumption of vegan products that equates advocacy to a capitalist lifestyle choice.

Like PETA, The Vegan Society features an array of purchasable vegan products on its website in order to establish its market presence. The group has had an online shop since at least 2006 that sells a variety of vegan products such as sunblock, lip balm, soap, drums, music by vegan artists, books on plant-based nutrition and health, cook books, its own publications, condoms, World Vegan Day t-shirts made from fair trade cotton, and Veg 1, a health supplement specifically designed for vegans, among other items. It also showcases its partnerships with companies like Ecotricity ("How to instantly benefit yourself, the environment and The Vegan Society") and Triodos Bank ("Save money ethically and support The Vegan Society at the same time") to encourage people to "shop ethically" while simultaneously contributing financially to The Vegan Society. In addition, the organization

urges supporters to use the website “Give as you Live” when buying products that are not available on its online store. “Give as you Live” is “a shopping and price comparison website that gives The Vegan Society a percentage of every purchase customers make through their website.”

In my analysis of PETA, I argued that social justice is being portrayed as something one can buy. In his discussion of CDA, Gee maintains patterns and links across texts help the analyst to form hypotheses regarding what is meaningful within a text and what is not (Gee 1999, 118). This would suggest The Vegan Society’s consistent emphasis on shopping is indicative of the same neoliberal worldview embedded in PETA’s discourse. In one of the group’s online publications titled “Why Vegan?”, The Vegan Society stated,

You have the choice to use **the power of your purse** to take control - to raise your hand and say ‘enough is enough’. What you buy and the way you live has a direct impact on the way the world works, and it’s time to make a conscious decision that that impact will be a positive one. By choosing to live a life free from animal products, you choose a path that is kinder to people, animals and the environment. [emphasis added]

The group’s online shop stated that in addition to funding the organization’s various projects, purchases of “great vegan merchandise” allows buyers to “take action” and “proclaim [their] veganism to the world”. In 2015, The Vegan Society claimed, “The more we demonstrate demand, the more likely it is companies will provide us with increased vegan options”. The group’s website also stated, “With such exponential growth in vegan businesses responding to demand for vegan products, it is clear veganism is now a mainstream trend”. In both of these statements, The Vegan Society encourages and celebrates vegan consumerism. The examples suggest that the group’s determination “to make veganism mainstream” might in turn signal the intent to make “vegan consumerism” mainstream as well. However, the phrase “use the power of your purse to take control” is indicative of a neoliberal worldview that echoes PETA’s claim that one can “swipe cruelty away”; “all you need is heart” and, according to their messaging, money.

When I discussed PETA, I claimed that its emphasis on shopping and financial contribution addressed a limited demographic of supporters who were capable of contributing to the movement financially and thereby excluded people who were not able to participate in this way. My analysis of The Vegan Society's website suggests the same occurs in its reproduction of consumerist discourse. The Vegan Society's claim that veganism is "easy" because of all the "affordable and easily-sourced alternatives" to non-vegan products looms large on its website. In 2015, The Vegan Society launched a campaign called "Love Vegan", which claimed, "You don't have to be vegan to love vegan things". The campaign also claimed that once people begin to replace their non-vegan items with vegan products, "the transition will be a breeze". It went on to say,

We know you care about animals, the environment, and your health. The great news is that vegan living is getting easier and easier...But if you're not about to go vegan anytime soon, don't let that stop you from bringing the vegan products you know and love into your life more regularly. Then, when the time comes to try going vegan for real, you'll make it look easy.

The group also declared, "Being vegan does not stop at what you eat. It is about what you drink, what you wear, what you write with, and what you use to make yourself look good". Defined in this way, veganism would appear to be a consumer-driven form of political participation. The discourse suggests that The Vegan Society is inviting its supporters to identify themselves in relation to consumption. And thanks to the 18,000 products and services registered with The Vegan Society's trademark, a sunflower symbol accompanied by the word "vegan", purchasing vegan products is now "easy". However, The Vegan Society's claim that veganism is "easy" suggests the group does not critically think about the ways in which class might influence how one accesses vegan products or engages with social activism. This has led me to conclude that both nonhuman animal rights organizations centralize middle-class socio-spatial epistemologies of veganism, reflecting the collective history of (mostly white) middle-class people's privileged relationship to consumption, spaces of power, and production of what is ethical (Harper 2011, 159).

According to The Vegan Society, “consumer activism” is intended to end nonhuman animal exploitation. However, the group’s goal to create “a world where humans do not exploit nonhuman animals” becomes lost with the lack of commentary concerning nonhuman animals and speciesism and profusion of text regarding people and “vegan consumerism”. In 2007, the organization claimed that “as well as buying non-cruelty products, [shoppers] are also helping [The Vegan Society] convert the world to a lifestyle that is for the benefit of all - people, animals and the environment”. It is linguistically significant to note that while shopping vegan is for the “benefit of all” - the term “people” appears before “animals” in the list. This is one of several times throughout the past ten years that The Vegan Society’s discourse put “people” before “animals”. By sheer dint of repetition - “people” then “animals and the environment” - it would appear that the discourse downgrades nonhuman animal suffering by placing it as an afterthought to “people” issues.

Instead of confronting the bigger institutional and societal barriers that reinforce the exploitation of nonhuman animals, which include capitalistic values and norms, it would appear that The Vegan Society embraces them. In its attempts to make veganism “mainstream” and “easy” by offering an enormous selection of vegan products and encouraging supporters to purchase them, the organization’s discourse promotes a culture of consumerism and a capitalist lifestyle. In addition, the consistent emphasis on people and celebration of vegan consumerism and lack of discussion regarding nonhuman animals suggests the group centers its agenda on humans (“what you eat, what you drink, what you wear, what you write with, and what you use to make yourself look good”). Overall, promoting a capitalist lifestyle, whether it is vegan or not, does little to challenge the “exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose” because it reinforces the processes of structural inequality inherent in the objectification and commodification of nonhuman animals.



## F. “Consumer confidence = increased sales”: The Vegan Society and production

In addition to discovering that The Vegan Society promotes a particular form of activism based on consumption, I also found that the organization places a strong emphasis on the production of vegan products through the “sale” of its registered trademark, The Vegan Society’s sunflower logo. In contrast to PETA, which would appear to address its supporters strictly as consumers, the discourse on The Vegan Society’s website suggests the group also markets itself to manufacturers. In this subsection, I argue that the group’s emphasis on the production of vegan products unwittingly encourages the exploitation of nonhuman animals.

Throughout the past ten years, The Vegan Society’s website proclaimed that one of group’s main aims is to encourage manufacturers to offer more vegan-friendly goods and services. Its “Business” page has repeatedly included phrases like, “We exist to promote products that everyone can enjoy” and “It is our job to promote great vegan products and services”. In 2007, the homepage stated that The Vegan Society “provides expert advice to the media, doctors, dietitians, caterers, and food producers”. The theme of World Vegan Day in 2008, one of the major annual events sponsored by The Vegan Society, was “improving the quality and availability of vegan food”. Since then, the group has focused a large portion of its advocacy on “chain restaurants, universities and other catering establishments to get more good-quality vegan choices onto menus”. Similar to PETA, the group has also hosted an annual Vegan Society Awards ceremony that honors “people and companies making a difference to people, animals and the environment” through the production and sale of vegan products such as, fair trade chocolate, fishless fishcakes, organic ale and so on.

One of the ways the organization continued to convince various kinds of producers to create more vegan products was through the promotion of its sunflower trademark, which according to The Vegan Society is “the gold standard when it comes to veganism. It lets vegans know that a product is vegan and it helps to build confidence in that product”. As of 2015, the sunflower logo was registered in Europe, the USA, Canada, Australia, and India, and has been used on over 18,000 products. To be eligible for The Vegan Trademark, the website claims all

products and services must undergo “stringent checks to meet [their] high standard” because the trademark guarantees that products and the manufacturing processes are free from nonhuman animal products, by-products and derivatives, and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) that include nonhuman animal genes, and are not tested on nonhuman animals. Oftentimes, however, their message to various types of producers places more emphasis on the benefits afforded to humans rather than those afforded to nonhuman animals by way of increased demand for vegan consumerism and lack of any mention regarding nonhuman animals. In 2009, they encouraged the supply of vegan products and advertised the registered sunflower logo as follows:

High-quality vegan food is a great solution for caterers because it appeals to just about everyone - it's tasty, healthy, ethical and planet-friendly. It will open up your establishment to meat-reducers, vegetarians, people who have cut down on animal products for health reasons and people whose religion encourages them to forgo all meat, certain types of meat and/or eggs, e.g. Sikhs, Muslims, Jews and Hindus....As well as bringing in new customers most vegan food has the bonus of being cheap with big profit margins.

That same year, the organization stated that registering for the trademark “could be the key to unlocking your sales potential in an expanding and dynamic market”. In other years the group stated, “The logo represents the international standard for authentic vegan products [making it] a must for any company seeking to widen its appeal, extend its marketing and increase sales”. In 2013, The Vegan Society’s website featured a blog post titled “Free From”, which emphasized the opportunity for producers to make more money: “The scheme is growing as more and more manufacturers understand that ‘Free From’ means ‘freedom’, and see vegan products as opportunities to expand their businesses.”

In addition to attracting vegan consumers with the sunflower logo, the trademark registration comes with other perks that have the potential to increase a producer’s profit margin. The Vegan Society’s “Business” section repeatedly emphasized that once registered, producers can “latch onto [The Vegan Society’s] media and publicity openings” and benefit from trade show, magazine, website, and social media promotion. The organization also stated that producers can “exploit” the valuable relationship it has with editors and journalists

to increase its product publicity. Furthermore, The Vegan Society features registered products on its website, which “attract thousands of visitors a week...reaching numerous potential customers and increasing exposure”. Registered products can also be made a special feature in *The Vegan*, the organization’s “full color” magazine. According to the website,

More and more people are discovering that healthful, animal-free products can benefit people, animals and the environment - we want to help you benefit from it too...Many companies have found that the combination of increased trust from customers, and the expansion in possibilities by joining this market, have secured a place for their product or service.

Its “Magazine” section went on to state, “We can help you use this resource to increase sales and gain recognition within a rapidly expanding consumer group...There has never been a better time to latch onto the rising animal-free market.” In addition, producers with registered products are permitted to use the logo on its own marketing materials and online media, and can benefit from the trademark’s international recognition.

The profusion of text regarding the group’s efforts to promote its trademark along with the lack of discussion regarding nonhuman animals might suggest that The Vegan Society is less interested in combatting nonhuman animal exploitation and more interested in the production of vegan goods. This was made apparent in the organization’s consistent use of phrases encouraging producers to register for the trademark such as “consumer confidence = increased sales” and “Customers will see at glance that your business produces quality, ethical products.”

Notably, the head of The Vegan Society’s Business Development, “George”, pointed out in 2015 that the purpose of manufacturing and promoting more vegan products through the sunflower trademark is to increase global interest in veganism and save nonhuman animals:

Our registered logo gives veganism even more exposure on high streets, in restaurants and on websites all around the world. When a product is successfully registered with our trademark, it encourages their competition to match their vegan credentials, which ultimately creates more vegan products...By purchasing products registered with the Vegan Trademark, you are investing in the future of a market which is free from animal products and free from animal testing, which in turn has the potential to save the lives of millions of animals around the world.

Nonetheless, any type of business can register for The Vegan Society's Trademark: "It doesn't matter who you are. Manufacturers, retailers, suppliers, caterers and restaurateurs, across food, drink, toiletries, healthcare, etc." Furthermore, like consumers, "You don't have to be vegan to love vegan things". In other words, it makes no difference whether or not a company that produces vegan products also produces non-vegan ones. The Vegan Society simply wants them to sell as many suitable vegan products as possible: "'Not all of my products are vegan' No problem...you can still register all of your suitable products".

In addition to manufacturers benefitting financially from an increase in the production of vegan goods, it is important to note that The Vegan Society itself also benefits from the trademark registration. Aside from having more products to "shout about and to prove how easy it is to be vegan", The Vegan Society receives money from companies that wish to register for the use of the sunflower logo, is likely a major source of revenue for the organization. While it could be argued that buying vegan products is better for nonhuman animals than buying products made from them, it would seem that The Vegan Society is driven by a neoliberal logic of advocacy that assumes nonhuman animal liberation can be bought. Notwithstanding the fact that the group's website has repeatedly used the word "market" to describe the group of vegan consumers it encourages manufacturing companies to target, its emphasis on "increased sales" and its self-proclaimed ethos "we exist to promote products" is indicative of a neoliberal worldview not unlike PETA's - one that sees veganism as an identity based on consumption and consumerism. In other words, The Vegan Society's discourse has suggested that they exist to promote products rather than nonhuman animal rights. More importantly, manufacturing companies do not even have to be vegan to register for the trademark. As a result, it is possible that vegans purchasing these "animal-free" products are contributing directly to nonhuman animal exploitation and suffering by giving their money to explicitly non-vegan companies. In light of this, it could be argued that The Vegan Society may have unwittingly encouraged the exploitation of nonhuman animals in order to sell its own registered trademark.

In order to understand why the trademark has the potential to increase sales, it is important to recognize what The Vegan Society's sunflower means to producers, and more importantly, to consumers. According to the organization, the sunflower logo is a symbol that stands for "authentic" veganism: "Get your products or services registered with us so you can start using our international symbol of authenticity". In other words, the sunflower logo does not stand for the producer or the "craftsman" of the particular product. Rather, it stands for The Vegan Society's belief that "veganism is a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose". Thus, in addition to symbolizing "authentic" veganism, the logo also stands for "the goodwill associated with [The Vegan Society], in essence functioning as a guarantee of quality" and ethics. This transforms the logo into what R.J. Foster in *Coca-Globalization: Following Soft Drinks from New York to New Guinea* has called "a visible or materialized form of goodwill" (quoted in Manning 2010, 37). The positive imaginings of a cruelty-free world that the logo signifies makes the purchase of such products desirable for potential consumers.

Like the "fair trade" system that encourages consumers to "enforce a transnational standard of economic justice by paying a premium for products that have been certified as 'fair'", The Vegan Society's trademark inspires consumers to effect political change by purchasing "animal-free" products, rather than legal mechanisms, to enforce standards of justice (Reichman 2008, 1-2). Reichman has argued that products like coffee have shifted over the last several decades from being staple commodities to "highly symbolic expressions of social identity" that have allowed people "to fashion themselves according to their own values" (ibid., 8). Similarly, The Vegan Society's discourse seeks to convince consumers that products showcasing the registered sunflower logo represent their shared values of an anti-speciesist world.

Reichman, however, has noted that "tying one's identity to the fruits of the capitalist market can lead to profound contradictions...Relying on commodities to express oneself can

provoke ambivalence if the objects of desire are contradictory to the values people use to define themselves” (ibid.). In other words, notwithstanding the fact that the logo intends to guarantee the goodwill associated with The Vegan Society (“By using the logo...customers will see at a glance that your business produces quality, ethical products”), it also erases who the producer may actually be - a non-vegan company that may well exploit nonhuman animals in the production of its other non-vegan products (Manning 2010, 38). In essence, what is being portrayed as a benefit to nonhuman animals may not really be helping because the other non-vegan products these companies produce do not support change. Nonetheless, the symbolism behind the logo serves to unify consumers and producers. It tells vegan consumers that the producers have their same value of not wanting to harm nonhuman animals (ibid.). Finding out whether or not the manufacturer is truly vegan or not, however, is up to the consumer.

According to Manning, brands (in this case the branding of vegan products through the use of The Vegan Society sunflower) “can interpellate consumers as citizens within...neoliberal models of consumption and governmentality” (ibid., 45). Foster (cited in Manning) claims that the model of aspirational consumption associated with brand becomes a sign of participation in universal normative models of desire. Therefore, not responding to the model of aspirational consumption becomes a diagnostic of uncivilized backwardness (ibid.). Assuming The Vegan Society genuinely wants to liberate nonhuman animals, Foster’s understanding of the desire to participate in a normative model of governmentality could help to partially explain The Vegan Society’s co-optation of a neoliberal discourse that encourages consumer activism (“Use the power of your purse to take control”) in order to make vegan product availability more “mainstream”. In other words, The Vegan Society’s discourse might suggest that the group believes that if they forgo a “mainstream” market-oriented logic of activism, then their organizational efforts to defend nonhuman animal rights will be seen as “backwards”. If this is true, then The Vegan Society fails to recognize how such logic might reinforce a capitalist system that hinders the realization of a world free from nonhuman animal cruelty.

### Section III: Conclusion

Through an analysis of PETA and The Vegan Society's websites over the last ten years, this paper analyzed how the discourses of these two groups adhered to capitalist and neoliberal forms of thought. In order to understand what lay underneath those discourses, to understand the structure of those discourses, and to make the tensions with those discourses visible, I conducted a critical discourse analysis. My examination and analysis of the specific linguistic details and patterns in the discourses produced by PETA and The Vegan Society uncovered evidence to suggest that the claims set forth by the literature that initially sparked my interest in this topic are supported for these two particular nonhuman animal rights groups. I have shown that neoliberal discourse has repeatedly been reproduced via social media campaigns and other promotional website material by these organizations over the last ten years. The consistent presence of this discourse, I argue, signals an instructive entanglement with broader sociopolitical issues.

In shedding light on some of the implications of adhering to a capitalist logic of activism, I have not tried to "take down the system" so-to-speak. Rather, I have offered a cautionary tale about the discourse PETA and The Vegan Society use, not denouncing them but warning them of their neoliberal leanings that suggest veganism is primarily an economic activity for middle-class consumers. By constructing advocacy this way, both groups set themselves up as mediators within the nonhuman animal rights movement. Whereas PETA critiques and negotiates with exploitative businesses on behalf of its supporters, The Vegan Society offers a registered trademark and certification process for various manufacturers. Regardless of how each group enacts these roles, the mediating positions both organizations put forth suggest activists do not have to do anything except buy "cruelty-free" products.

Unfortunately, the purchase of vegan products does not equate to nonhuman animal rights advocacy in and of itself, especially when it serves to uphold a capitalist system that helps maintain speciesism and the exploitation of nonhuman animals. Furthermore, taking a few moments to swipe your credit card or buy a "cruelty-free" product keeps the power of

social change in the hands of professionalized organizations and almost completely removes the participant from the process of advocacy that was laid out in the introduction. Recall Wrenn's declaration that advocacy should "collectively broadcast abolitionist claims, counter hegemonic ideology, put pressure on industries, the public, and the state to reconsider the legitimacy of oppressive conventions", and promote veganism in ways that utilize the unique skills and talents of various individuals (Wrenn 2016, 27). Thus far, what has been suggested in the discourses being used by PETA and The Vegan Society's is a far cry from any admonition to "challenge prevailing ideologies and demand meaningful and substantial social restructuring" (Wrenn 2016, 40).

Overall, the discourses of both groups suggest they have failed to make the connection that matters of class, gender, and species are all interrelated issues and rooted in the same struggle to identify and dismantle centers of oppression. Adams argues that part of the objectification women face is the objectification experienced by nonhuman animals; both are caught in the overlapping structure of oppression (Adams [1990] 2015, 129-130). Yet, this oppression, though unified by a patriarchal structure that renders them absent as subjects, is left unexamined by PETA. What is worse, they exacerbate this oppression by perpetuating the historical objectification of women, which states that women should be constantly available for viewing pleasure because "sex sells" (ibid., 158). Additionally, PETA's postfeminist discourse that says their nearly naked female volunteers are "saucy and provocative" for the sake of nonhuman animals can be argued to deflect critique of their sexist advertisements. In a culture of post-critique, Lazar argues, the political force of feminism gets silenced and women's struggles for liberation from patriarchy are seen as already won (Lazar 2009, 396).

The silencing of women by rendering them as sexual objects to be consumed by viewers of PETA's ads is related to the silencing of advocacy efforts available to those who cannot afford to donate estates or buy \$400 vegan purses. PETA and The Vegan Society's focus on the achievement of human pleasures by way of purchasing and selling vegan products renders nonhuman animal rights activism an "It's all about me!" anthropocentric capitalist pursuit.



The analysis suggests the “It’s all about me!” attitude, along with the repetitive use of neoliberal keywords and phrases such as “vote with your dollar”, are indicative of a competitive, market-oriented conception of nonhuman animal rights activism that ideologically justifies capitalist imperatives and understands advocacy to be an economic activity (Holborow 2015, 115). The adoption of the capitalist, free-market ideology as a model for both groups is expressed not only through the positioning of the activist as a consumer for whose business the group must compete by drawing attention to its ‘selling points’ (e.g. PETA’s “we’re truly winning” rhetoric), but through the sale of a registered trademark to companies that are not even vegan (e.g. The Vegan Society’s sunflower). However, there are concerns as to how this relates to what is thought to constitute and qualify as nonhuman animal rights activism. As shown in the foregoing analysis, veganism and nonhuman animal rights activism are being portrayed as identities based on consumerism and donations. PETA and The Vegan Society have produced texts that presume this identity is available to all people, when in fact it is a luxury afforded primarily to the middle-class and up, who have the means to access healthier food options and nonhuman animal-free retail products. Apart from class, it is highly likely that the production of this kind of activist identity is limited also in terms of racial and ethnic background, though further examination regarding PETA’s discourse and matters of race remain outside the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, the lack of mention of these issues on each website has led me to conclude that these organizations’ targeted audience is a (most likely white) middle-class consumer.

Looking at these patterns and their consistency over time has demonstrated how securely entrenched their attitudes about activism have been. I find this problematic given the heavy influence and dominance both groups have had in the nonhuman animal rights movement. The normalization of such ideologies expressed through language may have serious consequences, not least being the possible transformation of a very specific sociopolitical activist identity based on consumerism into an identity perceived as “natural” (Bakhtin 1981).

While there may be certain pressures towards conformity to the attitudes and assumptions of PETA and The Vegan Society's discourse, the growing literature that has appeared over the last few years critiquing contemporary nonhuman animal activism suggests that these discourses are being challenged. It may be useful to look at nonhuman animal rights organizations that are challenging the neoliberal assumptions embedded within the texts being reproduced by PETA and The Vegan Society and defining activism in different ways. Now that I have looked at these two groups over the last ten years, it may also be useful to look at their discourse prior to 2006, perhaps by investigating the written material that existed before they had websites. In addition, it is my belief that this analysis would be enriched by going beyond written text and exploring how people (activists, other organizations, vegans, and so on) talk about nonhuman animal rights activism and enact certain activist identities in an ethnographic context. Looking at alternative discourses and the emergence of new kinds of discourse within the movement could be indicative of social change happening on a much broader scale.

Without a doubt, some of the problems this discourse analysis has pointed to are so deeply rooted in society that they would require significant social and institutional efforts to change. Will interpreting and shedding light on these discourses substantively challenge issues like sexism, classism and speciesism in our society? Unaccompanied by other interventions, probably not. But that does not mean we cannot or should not do anything. Clearly there are benefits in the coming together of academic research and social activism, not least being the considerable knowledge activists can gain from academic theory and the attention it draws to social justice movements. It also creates opportunities for academics to collaborate with local instantiations of their research and theories.

By critically evaluating PETA and The Vegan Society, I suggest that academics do not have to be detached from social justice movements, but can serve as critical friends to activists. The examples presented in this paper could provide a starting point for groups like PETA and The Vegan Society and other nonhuman animal rights groups to address why and how class, sex, neoliberalism, and capitalism shape their conceptions of activism and social justice.

It could also provide a starting point for nonhuman animal rights organizations to ask what the costs might be of addressing activists primarily as consumers. How might this affect the various actors, entities, and beings that constitute or are influenced by the nonhuman animal rights movement, such as activists from different socioeconomic and gendered backgrounds, nonhuman animals, other contemporary social justice movements, and political economic systems like capitalism? While social activism is central to social change, we cannot assume that it operates without political and ideological influences. Discourses have real effects on the world, as well as on people's ideologies and how they act. As critical thinkers, it is our responsibility to understand what lies beneath those discourses and interrogate them.

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