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Abstract approved

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Past research has categorized animal rights groups into three main categories; conservative, moderate, and radical. While a few studies exist on the animal rights movement as a whole, none have focused specifically on the radical groups. This research project uses an ethnography of communication approach to examine how language constructs notions of radicalism inside a small grass roots level animal rights group. The basic theoretical foundation guiding the study is that language constructs social reality and is thus inherently linked with culture. Using Del Hyme's (1972) ethnography of communication as a theoretical and methodological guide, this research takes into an account the importance of analyzing language and communication as something that forms the cultural landscape of animal rights subculture.

This thesis explores the four main cultural themes of animal rights activism at the local level; (1) the centrality of activism in the lives of the informants, (2) the frustration of being labeled and not being taken seriously, (3) the centrality of radical action, and (4) the national movement as a source of further frustration but also as an important element of the activist identity. Furthermore, based on the informant data I identify four main issues within the public discourse, which the activists find problematic. Critical Discourse Analysis is used in order to explore the ways in which radicalism is constructed in the media coverage of animal rights issues.

The Role of Radical Action in the Animal Rights Movement

by
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Katja Pettinen, Author

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The Role of Radical Action in the Animal Rights Movement

1 ANIMAL RIGHTS ACTIVISM

1.1 INTRODUCTION

“There never has been a social movement without civil disobedience. We know this is the way it works and that we have to do this in order to bring people to the table” (Interview with an animal rights activist)

Animal rights activism as a social movement emerged in the US at the end of 1970s, soon after Peter Singer published his book *Animal Liberation* (Guither 1998). Since the birth of this movement, activists have invented many ways to communicate their ideals of an alternative social order to the larger public. Some of the actions generally performed by the movement activists include protesting with signs and calling out chants, handing out flyers, writing editorials to newspapers, participating in hunger strikes, holding candle light vigils in memory of dead animals, or locking themselves into an authority figure’s office in order to force him or her to pay attention to their demands.

The activist groups use a variety of information channels to send out their message about the status of animals in our society. While one aspect of this communication is to transfer information to others (to tell them the “facts” about a particular research institution or how being a vegan, not consuming any animal derived products, is healthier than traditional diets, for example) these actions can also be regarded as rituals that can offer us an insight into the subculture of animal rights activism. On a broad level, the purpose of this research is to understand the cultural rules that govern the communication tactics of animal rights activists by using the ethnography of communication framework developed by Dell Hymes (1972).

The more specific focus of this study is to examine the role of radical action in the animal rights movement. While overall the movement has many approaches to activism, radical action has always been a central part of animal rights (Guither 1998), partially due to the fact that chaining oneself in a president’s office attracts more media than simply handing out flyers (Oliver & Myers 1999). On the other hand, these radical strategies are

often considered to be very extreme by the general public (Perez 1990). For example, in a recent local *Gazette-Times* newspaper article one of the national level organizations, Animal Liberation Front (ALF) was associated with 'other white supremacist groups' that are under FBI surveillance (Cabrera 2000). Clearly, this categorization completely misses the ideological point of the animal rights movement, which argues for equal treatment of *all* living creatures, and simply focuses on the radical tactics of the group.

The highly visible and often illegal actions of the movement have at least partially contributed to its marginalization in the society (Guither 1998:161; Perez 1990:56). This stereotyping and ostracizing, in turn, seems to make it even harder for the activists to change the everyday lifestyles and mindsets of the majority of individuals. Without these changes, the activists cannot attain the equal treatment of all species they seek. Thus, the use of radical action, while helping to achieve certain short-term goals, can ultimately damage the implementation of the activists' longer-term ideals. Even inside the movement some activists argue against using radical forms of action for these reasons (Guither 1998:160).

Through an ethnographic approach this study aims to understand how the notions of radicalism are constructed through language inside and outside the movement, and what specific cultural norms govern the use of radical action. Further, the perception of animal rights activism by the larger public will be discussed through critical discourse analysis of the media. This study will increase our knowledge about the animal rights movement at large and in addition, help us to understand the mechanism through which radicalism (through language) is created and maintained. Further, as Ginsberg has noted in her discussion about the abortion conflict in the US, in order to gain the emic perspective that anthropologists seek in their research, it is crucial to examine the language of activist groups. Ginsberg states that, "[t]o understand the [social] movements...one must listen to the rhetoric activists use to construct their world" (Ginsberg 1989:6), pointing out the importance of communicative aspects in an ethnography of social movements.

1.2 REFLECTIONS

My research question and interest initially emerged from my friendships with a few of the animal rights activists. This happened for the first time approximately two years

ago, as I moved to a new university town to attend graduate school. One of the first campus groups that drew my attention was the Vegetarian Resource Network (VRN). Being a vegetarian mainly for health reasons, I was surprised by the focus on animal rights this organization emphasized. I soon realized the centrality of this belief system in my new friends' lives and became very curious about this type of resistance to more conventional ways of living and the consequences it had on the lives of the activists. I observed the people that I knew chaining themselves in a dean's office, being arrested, or fasting for days in a cage in order to bring forward a new way of thinking about human- animal relationships.

Clearly, this was a very radical group of people, radicalism being something that I had never felt very comfortable with partially because my cultural background is rooted in a politically neutral and extremely homogeneous country where the only visible social movement of the 20th century was a cultural movement for independence. It has been this strong contrast to my personal life and culture, along with my new feminist consciousness, which places great importance for studies of social change that led me to examine this fascinating subculture from an academic point of view. After months of observing this particular cultural group and seeing the remarkable level of dedication, I became very interested in the specific life histories that had led these activists deep inside this movement.

My own position in the community as a vegetarian but not as an activist has helped me to a certain degree to see the animal rights perspective both from an insider's and an outsider's point of view. In many ways I can relate to the experiences of the activists because I do not eat meat and do think that in our current society we have a significant lack of respect towards living and feeling creatures. On the other hand, I do not have the centrality of animal rights in my life, and as a result I do not feel compelled to partake in a hunger strike or a lock down. Because I have not established a true identity as an animal rights activist in this community, I most likely do not have access to all types of communication situations. However, this distance also helps me to easier analyze the community from a more etic perspective. As Bernard (1994) has noted, it is often this play between intimacy and distance that is one of the main challenges of an ethnographer.

1.3 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ideology for the US animal rights movement emerged in the footsteps of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. As result of this social movement, many other groups began utilizing the “rights” rhetoric in order to reach a variety of goals. This era of American social history witnessed pleas on behalf of the rights of women, gays and lesbians, and for the first time, for the *rights* of animals. While animal welfare groups and the Victorian antivivisection movement were established in the 19th century, these movements approached animals from a humanitarian perspective in contrast to the contemporary animal rights movement which at large aims to liberate all animals from human exploitation (Sperling 1988). The animal welfare groups emerged in order to function as advocates against animal cruelty, while the antivivisection movement was established in order to abolish the use of animals in surgical scientific experiments (Perez 1990:26). While the antivivisection movement has diminished, several animal welfare groups continue to exist in the US along with animal rights groups, one of the best known being Humane Society of America.

Peter Singer’s book *Animal Liberation* (1975) is often regarded as one of the founding texts of the contemporary animal rights movement that became visible during the late 70s and early 80s (Guither 1998). While not all the contemporary activists read it (but would certainly be familiar with it), in this book Australian philosopher Singer laid down the basic ideological concepts that are behind the demands for equal ethical consideration of human and nonhuman animals. Singer’s theoretical approach can be described as utilitarianism, one of the two main philosophical approaches for animal rights. The second approach was defined by an American philosopher Tom Regan in his book *The Case for Animal Rights* (1983) and can be described as “natural rights theory” (Donovan 1990:353).

The main difference between these two ideologies is that Singer’s approach does allow for a possibility to use animals in research, for example, if the situation is absolutely necessary for the well being of humans. Basically, Singer’s philosophy is that humans, as well as other animals, have a right to full life and sometimes humanity as a whole can greatly benefit from the use of animals. If experimenting on few hundred animals will make a break through in a fight against persistent disease, this is a “fair” trade off for Singer, as long as we will minimize the suffering that the animals go through in these

experiments. While utilitarianism considers both the interests of animals and humans, Regan's natural rights theory regards all living beings as having a right of full life without interference. For Regan, every living creature has an absolute value on its own and this value grants the right of life regardless of a "need" from any other creature (Jasper 1996; Regan 1984). As a result, natural rights theory does not allow the possibility to experiment on animals under any circumstances.

Overall, the animal rights movement displays a wide variety of differences in terms of ideology, personal focus and motivation, as well as the strategies for activism. Regardless of these divisions, the basic ideological belief that animals should not be exploited by humans for food, clothing, or experimentation, forms a cultural unity for the movement on a national, and to a certain degree, international level. Perez argues that this basic ideological unity across the differences makes the animal rights movement an "emerging cultural system" and a "contested culture" (1990:2). Because the activists inside the movement constantly negotiate and affirm their beliefs and values in relation to the broader ideology, the movement can be treated as an emerging cultural system (Perez 1990:3). On the other hand, on a broader socio-cultural level the movement itself stands in strong opposition to the status quo of the society, and therefore also fits the later cultural definition. As a contested culture, the animal rights movement "separates itself from mainstream culture through confrontations. In turn, mainstream culture retaliates by attempting to downplay... the movement's legitimacy and importance" (Perez 1990:4).

Besides ideological differences, another way to categorize the activists is based on the type of activism they engage in, which is of utmost importance for this study. Most commonly, the movement is divided into three main categories; conservative, moderate, and radical (Jasper and Nelkin 1992). While all three sub-groups use legal ways of protesting, such as letter writing, phone calls, or handing out flyers about pertinent issues regarding the status of animals, only the radical groups engage in radical action such as lock-ins, hunger strikes, or in the most extreme cases, property damage (Perez 1990:56). Radical groups always function on a grass roots level while conservative and moderate groups often have a higher level of organization. As a result, the larger groups with more structural organization need to be more aware of the possible consequences for each action taken. In contrast to the grass roots level groups or activists that "will risk almost

anything, perhaps even themselves, on behalf of animals,” the larger national level groups “will not risk money, status, or power by becoming directly involved in animal rights or liberation” (Perez 1990:67). While the larger organizations work “within the system” or in the words of my informants engage in “liberal action”, the small scale loosely organized cells seem to turn their backs against the “system” or the status quo.

The purpose of this study is to focus on the small grass roots level activism where radical action is most commonly found. This focus helps to fill a gap of the past research on animal rights, where there has not been a specific focus on radical action groups. Some studies have covered radicalism while discussing the overall range of activism found in the movement but this type of discussion lacks in richness and misses the detailed cultural account that ethnography focusing specifically in radical activism can offer. Without this type of research, which both in focus and in methodology adds to the past studies, it is impossible to have an emic perspective describing the worldview of a radical animal rights activist.

One of the earliest, and so far the only published anthropological study about animal rights activism, is Susan Sperling’s ethnographic account of a San Francisco bay area activist community. This work covers a wide range of activism from large organizations to smaller groups while also placing the movement in its broader socio-historical context. In her book *Animal Liberators*, Sperling (1988) compares the contemporary movement with Victorian antivivisection movement at the end of the 19th century and draws some parallels in terms of cult behavior. She regards both movements as a form of resistance to the scientific separation of humans from the ‘natural’ world where urban, middle class, educated people who feel isolated from the mainstream society strive for “restoration of harmony between humans and nature” (Sperling 1988:128). In her analysis, Sperling explains that the extent to which animals are exploited in today’s society, symbolizes disruption of this harmony for the activists. While Sperling uses an anthropological approach and is able to give a good holistic description of the community at large, her sample size is small especially in relation to the diversity of activism she aspires to cover.

Using a political science perspective, Wesley Jamison (1994) attempted to define the common profile of an animal rights activist through distribution of a questionnaire at an

animal rights march that took place in Washington, D.C., in 1990. Unlike Sperling, Jamison did not find animal rights activists as socially marginal or isolated. Based on his sample of 426 activists, Jamison concludes that “typically, the animal rights activist is white, college educated, middle-class urban or suburban in background, in his or her middle thirties, and most frequently female” (Jamison 1998:60). Jamison argues that because the informants are very actively involved in public life through letter writing, protesting, and other forms of activism they are an integral part of the public arena and therefore he does not regard them as isolated.

1.3.1 The Gendered Nature of Animal Rights

During the 1990s, feminist philosophers brought additional perspectives into the discussion regarding the rights of non-human animals. As a criticism of the movement itself, some feminists pointed out that there are some clear gender discrepancies in terms of communication, representation, and power. Jamison (1998) and Sperling (1988) have both noted, that the typical animal rights activist is female. According to survey research, women encompass approximately 60 -70 percent of the activists (Jamison 1994; Plous 1991). The most vocal spokespersons of the movement however, as Singer, Regan and most recently Peter Wise demonstrate, are men (Donovan 1990). Perez (1990) has noted that the gendered structure of the animal rights movement is similar to that of the labor force in the US, where white middle-class men most often hold the positions of leadership, while women who are present in an organization, encompass the lower ranks and function as more as supporters than leaders. The stereotypes about abilities of men and women in terms of leadership suggest that men are “more respectable and rational” (Perez 1990:69) and are therefore seen as better equipped for being a spokesperson of an organization.

In terms of ideological aspects of the movement, ecofeminism draws connections between different types of oppressions and offers a slightly different strategy for animal rights advocacy (Gaard 1993). This theory is one branch of the broader framework of feminist theories and argues that the oppression of women is directly connected with the oppression of nature. Just like nature, women are seen as dangerous, unpredictable or wild and need to be controlled and ‘tamed’ by men. Furthermore, women are commonly seen as closer to nature, for example, because of their ability to give birth and therefore not as

able to have rational thought. Ecofeminism criticizes this ideology and argues that in order for our society to reach gender equality, also the natural world must be given more respect.

Even though animals clearly are part of the natural world where the patriarchal ideology often places women as well, the issue of animal oppression has not been very central in ecofeminist thought (Gruen 1993). Carol Adams is a feminist philosopher and an activist, who argues that the oppression of animals is extremely central and an important factor in explaining and resisting the oppression of women. In her book *Sexual Politics of Meat* Adams (1991) discusses how the consumption of meat is connected with the oppression of women, animals, and nature. She explains that women in popular culture are often portrayed by their body parts and become “pieces of meat” that can be objectified, consumed, or violated just like animals that are served for food. Adams further notes that in order to effectively fight for any cause, whether it is racism, sexism, or specism, we must consider the interconnected nature of these forces of oppression and incorporate this awareness into our activism (1990).

Rachel Eihnwohner’s (1999) study about outcomes of two animal rights campaigns in Seattle area includes a discussion about gender in relation to effectiveness of the campaigns in reaching their goals. In her article “Gender, Class, and Social Movement Outcomes” Eihnwohner discusses how the fact that most of the activists are female can be a benefit or a block for campaign outcomes, depending on the cultural context in which the campaign is implemented. She studied a group of activists that carried out an anti-circus and an anti-hunting campaign in Seattle area. Besides several years of research among the activists, Eihnwohner conducted interviews with the hunters and circus audience after the protests, and noted that the hunters were much more likely to focus on the fact that most of the activists were female than the circus audience which focused more on the caring attitude of the activists. As a result, the hunters were significantly less amenable to the demands of the activists in comparison to the circus audience.

Eihnwohner explains that because traditionally hunting is such a male-centered and masculine activity, hunters perceived the animal rights activists in contrast to this cultural environment and categorized them typically as female, irrational, and overly emotional. As a result, the hunters felt that the activists had nothing legitimate or reasonable to say about hunting as an activity. The circus audience, on the other hand, did not focus on the

fact that the majority of the activists were female and were much more sympathetic to their cause (even though this was the very same group of activists as in the hunting campaign). They commonly described the activists as gentle, sweet, and caring (Eihnwohner 1999:69). While these are typically feminine characteristics, the circus audience did not describe the activists specifically as women, like the hunters did. Eihnwohner concludes that the circus campaign was far more successful than the hunting campaign because the activists' identities (such as caring) were more appropriate in terms of the social context (family vs. masculine oriented context) in which they were presented.

A further factor impacting the perception and success of activism in this case could also be the gender of the targets. Eihnwohner points out that most of the hunters were male while the circus audience consisted both men and women. As past research has shown, women show greater support for the animal rights cause overall, and therefore another explanation for the circus campaign's success could be the higher number of women within the target group.

It seems that gender would also be a relevant factor in the perception of a protest depending on what specific form of activism is used. As women are expected to be more passive and docile, while men are given more lenience for their behavior (especially in the public realm), it is likely that male forms of radicalism receive a different type of attention than female ones. It seems that a female activist who engages in civil disobedience, for example, is clearly stepping out of the boundaries of her assigned gender role whereas for men this type of activism would be a violation of law but not so much a violation of a gender norm.

Another study that has examined the gendered aspects of the animal rights movement was conducted by sociologists Peek, Bell & Dunham (1996). This study attempted to re-examine some of the assumptions about why women are so much more active in the animal rights movement. Past researchers have mainly focused on the early childhood socialization differences between men and women, which are thought to produce different ethics of care in general (Chodorow 1978; Gilligan 1982) and these attitudes, in turn, would make women more active in the protection of animals (Donovan 1990; Adams 1994). Peek et al. (1996) point out the essentialist thinking within this line of reasoning that assumes that there indeed is an inborn (or very early on established) *difference*

between men and women, and argue that we also need to account for a more structural level explanation that has socially constructed an observable difference between male and female behavior.

The authors use cultural and socialist feminist theory and point out that the oppressed position of women in our hierarchical society “make them more disposed to egalitarian ideology, which creates [a greater] concern for animal rights” (1996:464). In other words, groups that face oppression and discrimination throughout their lives, and gain awareness about these systems, are more likely to notice the same principles applied to other creatures and act out against this. The study further uses statistical measures to test this assumption but there are no significant findings to support the structural explanation. The authors conclude that we should focus on the interaction of both explanations and once again, that more qualitative research should be conducted to explore the question why animal rights activists so commonly are women (1996:475).

1.3.2 Moral Shocks and Struggle Over Meaning

Previous social science research on animal rights activism has also been able to identify some of the material forms that are central in the movement. Jasper and Poulsen (1995) examined the recruitment tactics of animal rights activists and discovered that in contrast to many other social movements, this movement relies heavily on the use of “moral shocks” expressed through symbols such as a picture of a laboratory animal used in an experiment. This symbolic nature of the movement seems to be a very important element that can be explored through ethnography of communication, which in its analysis includes the symbolic nature of communication (Carey 1975; Hymes 1972).

Furthermore, because the research by Jasper and Poulsen was conducted mainly through the use of questionnaires, the authors note that “moral shocks, condensing symbols, and other cultural devices need to be studied in more detail as key ingredients in movement recruitment” (1995:509). My research will take this suggestion into account as it focuses on the communication of animal rights activism on a micro level and locates radicalism within the broad cultural context of this speech community. In contrast to a quantitative approach, through holistic analysis this study will be able to give a thick

description (Geertz 1973) of the role of radical action in the animal rights community, located in a Western college town.

Another evident aspect in the previous research is that while the animal rights movement has been approached from a multitude of disciplines using a variety of research methods, none of the past studies have specifically focused on the communicative aspects of the movement. Clearly, it is important to include this perspective in order to more fully understand the emergence and future directions of this movement. Especially in today's modern society, communicative aspects are key in the formation of activist groups and in their attempts to further the group's agenda or recruit new members. As Gamson has noted in his discussion about social protests, "because mass media play such a central role in modern societies, social movements are increasingly involved in a symbolic struggle over meaning and interpretations" (quoted in Rucht, 1991:31).

It seems that this struggle over meaning is very central for a protest movement like animal rights, as it heavily relies on symbolic communication based on a strong emotional reaction (McAllister Groves 1995). One measure of success for the movement is if its symbols are able to invoke a strong emotional reaction in the public. This reaction can obviously be a very aversive one, but the people that are moved closer to the movement tend to rapidly change their life styles to be in accordance with other activists (e.g. becoming vegan) (Herzog 1993). It is specifically this emotional "awakening" that many activists report that got them involved with the movement in the first place (McAllister Groves 1995). This wakening also seems to set a certain sense of urgency for activism which can easily contribute to a person's decision to engage in radical or illegal actions.

1.4 JUSTIFICATION

This thesis offers a methodological contribution to the body of knowledge about animal rights activism. While during the recent years there has been an increase in the scientific and humanistic studies examining different aspects of the movement, none have specifically focused on the communication aspects. It also fills a gap in the research focus about animal rights activism, as none of the past studies have examined radical action groups through a qualitative approach.

Finally, because of its focus on a radical action group, the contributions of this study will also have ramifications on a larger macro level. As Perez has noted, the animal *rights* is becoming an increasingly global movement that crosses the “sociocultural, geographical, and political” boundaries (1990:10). When this movement, unique to American social history (Perez 1990:23), expands to other countries that do not have a history of civil rights movement which was a significant factor in the formation of animal rights ideology and rhetoric, these countries are often faced with a very “foreign” notion of activism. In the case of Finland (Luukka 1998), it is likely that specifically the radical aspects of the movement are adopted first. In order to better understand the global broadening of the movement, it is crucial to have research conducted on how radicalism is constructed and operates inside the movement.

2 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK: SPEAKING AS AN ACT OF CULTURE

2.1 THEORY

The main theoretical principle guiding this research is the “premise that language constitutes our social realities and through language humans produce meanings and values that are available for others to hear and interpret” (Ruud and Sprague 2000:56; Stewart 1995). Through language use the animal rights activists express their ideals of the social world for the society at large and construct cultural rules for their own community. At the same time, the resistance to this alternative morality constructs and reaffirms the cultural values that justify the use of animals in our culture for human comfort. As a contested culture, the animal rights movement “separates itself from mainstream culture through confrontations. In turn, mainstream culture retaliates by attempting to downplay...the movement’s legitimacy and importance” (Perez 1990:4). It is specifically within this discourse where the conflict between animal rights and the mainstream culture becomes a reality. Thus, it is “imperative...to explore the various linguistic properties and/or strategies of diverse groups as they advance their particular set of interests” (Ruud and Sprague 2000:56). At the same time, it is important to examine the public response to the activist’s ideals in order to understand the full complexity of the discourse.

Because speaking is something that surrounds us constantly it is often taken for granted without a closer examination of its ritualistic nature. Cultural studies examining a variety of social groups have not been exempt from this tendency. As Philipsen (1992:12) points out, many observers of culture have lacked in focus the patterned and structured nature of speaking that largely sets the parameters of behavior for social life. This study shares the following assumptions that Philipsen further makes about the nature of speaking and its connection to the cultural life of any distinct social group: 1) speaking is governed by a set of rules that the participants might not always rigidly follow but are always aware of. This is to say that an observer of a culture can find a structure of speaking in any speech community but that the interlocutors also constantly negotiate this structure as “play is brought into structure just as structure is brought into play” (Philipsen 1996:10).

2) The structure of speaking varies from community to community just as any display of culture is a distinctive expression of a particular social identity. Therefore, any cultural group (such as animal rights activists) is likely to have its own linguistic code for communication that can be examined through analyzing the cultural expressions inside the community.

3) Speaking is a social act that constantly creates and recreates the nature of social reality. When successfully participating in communication that is governed by distinct rules, the interlocutors of a given speech community acknowledge the cultural landscape they are part of and through this maintain and create this social reality further.

As Carey (1975) has noted, traditionally the academic studies focusing on communication, have treated it merely as a means of transmitting information from a person or group to another. While information certainly gets transmitted in most of our communicative situations, there is yet another dimension to communication, at least of equal importance that this study particularly focuses upon. When examining the public protests, letters to the editor, or the buttons, pins, and stickers that animal rights activists wear on their clothing, we can look beyond the words that are being used in persuasion of this new moral order and see a “projection of [the animal rights] community ideals and their embodiment in material form” (1975:6) My research takes into account Carey’s (1975) approach in order to examine what these verbal and nonverbal cultural expressions tell us about animal rights activism at large, and more specifically, what they tell us about the role of radical action in this community. By using the ethnography of communication approach, this study will ensure that the examination of a cultural life will include analysis of speaking as suggested by Philipsen (1992). Further, as a communication study, the framework ensures that cultural patterns, instead of simply information sharing aspects of (verbal and nonverbal) communication, are included in my research focus.

In accordance with Carey’s (1975) argument about communication as a cultural form, many scholars have noted the intertwined nature of communication and culture (Hymes 1972; Philipsen 1989). Cultural communication occurs within a set of rules that are known among all the participants of a given culture (Carbaugh 1988). As a result, speaking is a “deeply cultured process” and the researcher must deeply immerse herself with the subject matter she wishes to study in order to gain an emic (or experience-near)

perspective of the cultural group (Philipsen 1989:7). Further, as Briggs (1996) has noted, ethnographic research is needed before the researcher can even ask the right questions in an interview.

2.2 METHOD

Thus, with the above in mind, the first step in the research process was to examine the general themes of animal rights activism in the local area and to identify the key communication styles and situations (Briggs 1996:94). This was achieved through participating in the activities of the group, for example, attending the weekly group meetings, helping out with tabling for animal rights issues, or attending group protests and marches. While participating in these actions, the other important task of a researcher is to not only participate but also at the same time carefully observe each communicative situation (Spradley 1979). While participating in an event, I attempted to write down as many notes as possible in an unobtrusive manner, and within 24 hours transcribe and expand these field notes.

The background research was also essential in order to be able to make any generalizations about radical action as a communication strategy for animal rights on a broader national level. By learning ideologies, motivations, and hierarchies of local activists and comparing these with the past research, I was able to make some conclusions about the representativeness of this specific group of activists in relation to the broader national movement. If the local activists seemed to differ from the past research findings, my research on the role of radicalism will not be generalizable to the movement at large but will still increase our understanding of animal rights activism.

The second step of the research process was to continue examining the local group through participant observation, and based on initial data collection, to evaluate whether they indeed did form a distinctive speech community. The goal here was to identify whether the activists 1) share a linguistic code and, 2) have distinctive rules for interacting and interpreting speech (Braithwaite 1990:146).

After the initial broad approach which ensured holistic understanding and thick description, the third step of the research process was to systematically focus on data collection categories identified in the Hyme's (1972) SPEAKING framework.

Ethnography of communication is both a theoretical foundation as well as a methodological approach that directs the researcher to the key components of any speech situation (Dollar 1999:102). The framework consists of 8 main components that can be used to guide the data collection process; scene, participants, ends and outcomes, act sequence, key or tone, instrumentalities, norms, and genres. When applying the ethnography of speaking framework in a research setting, the components that are most relevant to the research question at hand will be used instead of rigidly following each of the categories (Braithwaite 1990:159). Also, each speech situation varies in how much and what exactly can be observed and as a result, each ethnography of speaking will have a slightly different way of collecting and analyzing the data.

As a result of the qualitative approach this study used, I was able to follow Carbaugh's recommendations about how and what type of data to collect in an ethnography of communication. To paraphrase Carbaugh (1988), using Hyme's SPEAKING framework (1972) in my data collection I focused on terms and categories that; 1.) the activist have an attached emotional meaning to, in other words, the term/category is "sensed collectively as an instance of...a complex moral order (Carbaugh 1988:39). 2) Terms that are meaningful for the activists themselves (emic perspective). 3) Finally, terms that are available for all members of this speech community, while they might not be used by all members.

The analysis of data was done using Carbaugh's (1985) framework for organizing data on cultural communication. This analytical approach includes the five following phases; 1) locating recurring symbols; 2) locating other symbols that are associated with the recurring symbols; 3) describing opposing symbols; 4) examining the data for sequential and patterned use of symbols; 5) organizing symbols in relation to their moral weight for the informants (adopted from Dollar, 1999:106).

Chapter four will examine public discourse surrounding animal rights issues in the media using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). For the purposes of exploring the way animal rights activism is portrayed in the media, I use CDA as a methodological tool to

deconstruct the dialogue surrounding this issue. One of the main goals of this theory is to examine the public discourse and see who would ultimately benefit from the way the discourse is framed. In other words, whose views are presented as value neutral, or factual, and are therefore more likely to be accepted at a face value (Riggins 1997)?

A starting point for CDA is to examine how the discourse ‘others’ certain groups or viewpoints while presenting a viewpoint (of the dominant group) as value neutral and/or ‘factual’. The term Other originates from psychology, contrasting it to the term Self. While Self is the observer, the Other is the observed. Other is seen as separate and different from the Self (me), especially in the Western cultures which are heavily focused on individualism. The process of othering, then, is separating ‘me’ from ‘you’ by focusing on the (perceived) differences of the observer and the observed. While othering certainly occurs on an individual level, the most important aspect for the purposes of this chapter is the way this process expands to separate ‘them’ from ‘us’.

The process of Othering also occurs on a continuum where I can see myself as separate from my brother but when we (my brother and I) are in a group of people, we can feel a level of connection and see the people around us as ‘them’. As Riggins (1997) notes, “The external Other should thus be considered as range of positions within a system of difference” (4). When faced with a group that challenges a hegemonic frame (e.g. eating meat), the ‘us’ group can unite itself across differences which in other social contexts would be divisive.

When applying CDA as a method, I focus on the newspaper coverage of animal rights activism and examine these texts in the light of this theory. Mainly, this will entail counting the speaking space (number of words directly quoted) of each group, examining how the author refers to people (use of first names, labels, anonymous references), and what type of (and how much) information does the reader learn about the groups represented in the text. In other words, the method entails taking a set of questions to a text in order to find out who or which group would benefit from the way the information is presented.

My goal in chapter four is to a) present main issues that the informants identified as problems within the public discourse by giving examples from the media and b) to examine these media texts in the light of CDA in order to hypothesize about the way these

texts construct our understanding of the animal rights movement in the US. Riggins has noted that when using CDA to examine the nature of discourse, “it may not be essential to verify all the claims to truth that [a text] makes... Instead, the analysts may speculate about the social impact of a text, asking the question: Which group in society is likely to benefit from the opinions expressed in this text” (1997:3).

2.3 ETHICS

To ensure confidentiality of information, all names used in the research are pseudonyms. No quotes that included detailed information about the individual informants were incorporated in the final paper. Before selecting any quotations to use in the paper, all informants were assured of confidentiality and given the opportunity to confirm, edit, or deny any quotes credited to them. The informants were also given an opportunity to discuss and address any ethical concerns they might foresee and all these were taken into an account while writing the final product.

3 THE WORLD ACCORDING TO THE ACTIVISTS: AN INSIDER'S VIEW TO ANIMAL RIGHTS

This chapter explores the worldview and life of the activists through a description of the local speech community based on Hymes' (1972) SPEAKING categories. After this, four main ethnographic themes are further presented to represent the emic worldview of the informants.

3.1 SCENE AND SETTING

The cultural scene in which this speech community operates is the state of Oregon which has a long history of environmental activism related to the lumber and salmon industries. Because of heavy lobbying and public relations work from these industries, public opinion and state legislation reflect an antagonism toward activists in general. On a local level, Oregon State University (OSU), located within Benton County (population 76,700) and the city of Corvallis (population 51,100), is one of the governmental land grant recipients, which encourages research in agriculture, forestry, and animal husbandry. The general atmosphere at the university favors development of the meat and dairy industries, and as such is distinctly opposed to animal rights philosophy and activism. The total student body is currently 16,788 students (total enrollment as of fall 2000) and those supporting animal rights are few in comparison to the dominant community mentality. Comparable to Jamison's (1994) conclusion about the typical profile of an animal rights activist, these activists are not marginal in the sense that they are very active and visible members of the university community, but as Sperling notes (1988) it is their ideological beliefs that are marginal.

Perhaps as a result of being a minority with a specific ideology, in opposition to the use of any animals or animal products, the animal rights activists in Corvallis have a very close-knit community. Several of the activists share a household, take classes together, and have other shared interests. The informants have known one another and worked together for several years. They funnel a majority of their activism through a campus group called Vegetarian Resource Network (VRN), but do not limit themselves to actions sanctioned by this organization. VRN is an organization that gives the activists

access to the campus community but also limits the type of activism that they can engage in while representing this organization (e.g. civil disobedience).

The specific physical setting for VRN weekly meetings is on the OSU campus, in the Women's Center building. The building is an old wooden house located next to the Valley Library and Milne computer center. It has one main room open for a variety of organizations to meet at their scheduled times. The main room furniture includes four big couches set around a coffee table in a square. Besides the weekly meetings, VRN also has an electronic listserver that is used for announcements of animal rights related events, to post minutes of the meetings, and for general discussion about animal rights ideology.

3.2 PARTICIPANTS

In all the VRN meetings that I observed (total of 22), the number of participants varied from two to 18. The average number of participants (mean) was 6.3. The participants reported that while relatively few people come to the meetings on a regular basis, more people are involved with animal rights activism in the community. For example, in an interview a member stated that: "these days there are less people directly involved [with VRN] than in the past but there's still been quite a lot of people that come to the vigils that we had this year. I think the listserver has over a hundred people on it" (3/5/2001).

Currently, based on my observations, the core group of activists in the area consists of approximately ten people. Besides this, throughout my observation, there has been consistently approximately between ten and twenty people who seem to strongly support the cause of the animal rights movement but do not regularly participate in the actions performed by the core group. However, occasionally these members come to demonstrations or participate through the electronic listserver. The server has 83 people subscribing to it (as of 6/2001) but during the past three months of observation (6/2001-9/2001) 27 different individuals posted messages on it. In terms of gender, most of the activists are female (80 -90 percent), which seems to be representative of the animal rights on a national level as well (Sperling 1988; Jamison 1994; Herzog 1992).

Neither VRN nor the activist community at large has an organized hierarchy. There are no elected officials or leaders and the goal is to work through collaboration on all

levels. The informants specifically resist a hierarchical structure because this is seen as part of the reason why oppression exists in our current society. The activists see hierarchy as being inherent to patriarchy or "the white-male system" and want to actively resist this ideology by not having a hierarchy in their organization.

In a more informal sense, it seems that the members who have the most experience with activism, and especially those who have engaged in civil disobedience or other forms of radical action (e.g. a hunger strike), are seen as informal "leaders" by the newer or less active members. For example, in the group meetings where none of the core members attended, comments like "I guess nobody else is coming" or "where is everyone" are commonly made even though there are at least an average number of people present (field notes, group meeting, 2/20/2001).

The core members of VRN and the activist community have all participated in radical action during recent years. The main focus of the activist community has been to protest against OSU's College of Veterinary Medicine where live terminal surgeries on cats and dogs are performed every year. Within the past three years the local activists have organized two lock-ins in the dean's office, besides several marches, protests, and a hunger strike. The group has been very active in using radical action especially in protest of a small animal surgery class offered by the college of veterinary medicine.

In terms of physical appearance, many of the activists wear "vegan" patches on their clothing or bags, have shaved their heads at one point, display body or facial piercings and/or tattoos, and very commonly wear black clothing. Other common slogans that the activists had on their clothing, bikes, cars, or bags included "Feminists for Animal Rights," "No one is free as long as others are oppressed" or "Animal Liberation." As I observed new members joining the group during my observation, the ones who seemed to become part of the core group often went through a fairly rapid transformation in terms of appearance (e.g., shaved their head and/or got a facial piercing).

3.3 ENDS AND OUTCOMES

On a national level, the animal rights movement aims to end the use of animals for human purposes. At the core of this goal is to expand people's awareness about (1) why animals should be given a moral consideration and (2) the degree to which animals are exploited by humans.

While some ideological differences exist in the movement, the informants reported on many occasions that any use of animals to benefit human life is unacceptable. Animals exist for the sake of their own life and from an animal rights perspective, they have a *right* to this just as humans have rights to control their own lives. When asked about the ideology of animal rights, one activist stated that, “we as humans don’t have any right to test drugs on animals because the drugs only benefit human life and only exploit the lives of animals” (field notes, group meeting, 2/2/2001). On a personal level, the activists also stated in interviews that the reason they are involved with an organization like VRN is to help the lives of animals. This ideology is very much aligned with that of Regan’s *natural rights* theory (1983).

On the other hand, several activists that I interviewed de-emphasized the importance of these nationally known philosophers and their works in the personal lives of the activists. While all activists are familiar with names like Singer or Regan, many noted that they actually have not read much of their work. As one informant stated, “I don’t like to spend my time or energy reading philosophical arguments when there is so much work to be done. I don’t need to read *Animal Liberation* in order to know that it is wrong to hurt animals and instead of spending my time on reading philosophy I’d rather *do* something that helps the animals directly.”

The specific goal for VRN as an organization can be found in their weekly ad placed in the campus newspaper, *The Barometer*: “Come learn about vegetarian/vegan issues. We are a group of people dedicated to raising awareness on animal rights, environmental and nutritional aspects of the vegetarian/vegan diet.” As the ad states, one of the key goals for the activists is to raise people’s awareness. When visitors to the group meeting were leaving, one of the activists said to them, “thank you for coming and educating yourselves about these issues” (field notes, group meeting, 2/13/2001). As an interesting contrast to de-emphasizing the importance of philosophical works in their

individual lives, the informants would often recommend these works for the new potential members. The activists would, for example, make statements like, "a good starting point is to read *Animal Liberation*" or "there are some books that are really important...if you read these books they'll change the way you see your life" (field notes, 2/07/2001).

It is important to note that part of the animal rights ideology at the local level is to challenge oppression on all fronts (sexism, racism, homophobia etc.) and the goal of raising peoples' awareness goes beyond what many people would define as simply an animal rights issue. As one of the activists noted on the VRN listserv:

It is...not extreme for me to say that animals [human and non-human] should have rights regardless of species, breed, color, ability, sexual preference, gender, transgender status, nationality, religion, monetary value, and so on and so on (1/25/2001).

Another activist added to this discussion about how important it is to look at the interconnection among all different types of oppressions:

Try to picture me or someone else only thinking about animal rights when I'm getting bashed for kissing a girl because I look like a girl, or getting denied something I need because I am of color or because I don't have the right income...and then I think it's clear that I'd have to be insane!!!!!! (listserv, 1/26/2001).

In terms of reaching the goal of awareness raising and therefore improving the status of animals, central question for the activists is to find new members who will embrace their worldview. As noted earlier, this movement relies mainly in the use of "moral shocks" in contrast to, for example, trying to locate potential members through pre-existing social networks (e.g. family members or friends). This seemed to be true at the local scene as well. When sitting in an informational table with the informants, we would have a wide variety of informational leaflets and brochures ranging from "Your right not to dissect" to nutritional aspects of veganism. When people approached the table, the activists would usually be very guarded in terms of engaging in dialogue with them. The activists were always aware that their worldview was considered as rather "extreme" and that it is rather impossible to persuade people directly. Rather, they would ask people if they were interested in a specific issue, and if not, say "help yourself to anything you'd like" or "you're free to look over all the information and take some stuff with you" (field notes, 4/2000). This aspect seems consistent with some of the past research, where

McDonald has noted that when educating people about vegan issues, the activists in her study, "had learned through experience that dialogue was usually ineffective as a method of teaching others" (McDonald 2000:9).

3.4 AN ISSUE OF CONFLICTING WORLDVIEWS: SMALL ANIMAL SURGERY CLASS AT OSU

One of the key issues that the local activist community has been focusing on during my observations is to protest against a veterinary medicine small animal surgery class (VM 757) at OSU offered by the school of Veterinary Medicine (VM). This class is offered once a year during the winter term. The VM newsletter describes it as:

An elective course [aimed] *to provide* advanced, hands-on training in a number of procedures in a controlled environment, under the close supervision of board-certified surgeons. *The animals* are completely anesthetized during the procedures and *are euthanized* before they return to consciousness (Oregon State University Veterinary Journal, spring 2000).

The activists protested against the course for a number of reasons. For one, several VM schools around the nation use other means than terminal surgeries to teach surgical skills to students, and therefore, the activists saw this class as exploiting animals for efficiency reasons. Just because it would require time, money, and effort to establish alternatives to the course, the activists felt that VM would rather continue this "outdated" model of teaching instead of moving towards alternatives. They regarded this practice as unnecessary and felt that if ethical considerations were in place within the department, the program would be modified to not include terminal surgeries at all. For example, the activists noted that, "top-notch vet schools, such as Tufts University, have recognized that terminal surgery courses using *live, healthy animals* are *out-dated* and *inhumane*" (Gazette Times, 02/01/2001, emphasis added).

In a letter to the editor, two local activists described the small animal surgery class in the following way,

VM 757 is an elective course offered through the college of veterinary medicine at Oregon State University. The course is *intended* to develop students' surgical skills. Students practice surgical procedures on *live, healthy dogs and cats*. At the conclusion of each surgery, *the animals will be killed* (Gazette Times, 2/01/2001, emphasis added).

This letter demonstrates the use of moral shocks so commonly used in the animal rights movement. In order to reframe the issue from a more traditional cultural point of view the activists emphasize in their text: (1) that the course is only intended to advance learning, therefore suggesting that this might not be the case or that at least, this is not the only way to teach surgical skills; (2) that the course uses dogs and cats in contrast to a general category of "animals", in order to give the reader a mental image to sympathize with; (3) that these cats and dogs are healthy; and (4) that the animals are "killed" instead of using the more clinical term "euthanized."

The progression from more moderate ways of protesting the class to the use of radical action (discussed soon after) was explained by one of the activists in the following way,

The project with VM 757 has been going on for over a year now. Of course, we started out with letter writing and public awareness campaigns, but because these would be ignored we had to use more visible strategies that force them [the school authorities] to listen to us. Last year we did a lockdown and as a result we were able to have lots of publicity and negotiations about the issue. The lockdown is not a VRN project because it is illegal. Some members just felt that they really had to do more than writing letters and making phone calls. But regardless of everything, Ved Med continues to kill these cats and dogs and we need to continue fighting for this issue. At this point we're basically very frustrated for the lack of response we've had through the year (field notes, interview 3/2001).

3.5 THEMES

After analyzing the ethnographic interviews with key informants and incorporating notes from participant observation the following four themes emerged;

- I. Through a gradual process of increased awareness, animal rights activism is incorporated into all areas of one's life and eventually becomes a way of life with a distinct ideology that establishes authenticity of an activist identity.
- II. Being labeled and not taken seriously by the authorities and media are main sources of frustration for the activists who have devoted their lives to fight for animal rights.
- II. Radical action is seen as the most important means of voicing the group's opinion and it is viewed as a sign of higher commitment to activism.

- IV. The national level animal rights movement provides important support for identity as an animal rights activist but is also a source of further frustration because of the perceived ideological differences in the movement.

I. Through a gradual process of increased awareness, animal rights activism is incorporated into all areas of one's life and eventually becomes a way of life with a distinct ideology that establishes authenticity of an activist identity.

Having a lifestyle that matches the activist ideology is seen as crucial to the informants. At the core of this lifestyle is veganism; not to utilize or consume any animal products including honey, silk, leather, meat, dairy, or eggs. Another important element of the activist lifestyle is to be a conscious consumer and to boycott any products that have been tested on animals, including traditional medicines. The informants seemed to reach this level of personal activism gradually. All had first begun by abstaining from eating animal flesh and from there progressed into a stricter vegan way of life. For example, Lisa Hanson describes how she became involved with activism,

I started gradually learning more about animals and how they are treated...I also began to learn to distance myself from this taken for granted idea of eating animals and in college I became a vegetarian...at one of the meetings...there was this woman...who pointed out that the abuse of dairy animals is just as severe as eating them. So after this revelation I gradually started becoming vegan. I also started activism big time (interview, 2/13/2000).

Just as becoming vegan marked a new level of activism and involvement for Lisa, another informant, Sarah Nelson, who until few years ago was an activist, stated that when she quit being vegan she felt that she no longer was able to truly speak for the animal rights. Sarah told me that,

When I gave up veganism, I started getting separated from the [animal rights] movement...I couldn't associate myself with the movement anymore because felt like I wasn't going all the way anymore. I still feel that I do work for the improvement of animals in our society but I don't identify as an animal rights activist like I used to. (interview, 3/15/2000).

The lifestyle of animal rights activism is largely based on an ideology of having equal respect for all. Part of this respect is to be aware of the different forms of oppression

facing other marginalized groups. Tina Evans described her experiences with other forms of oppression and activism,

I started out by doing other types of activism, like women's rights, some work with political prisoners. And throughout all this activism that I've been involved with, I have become aware of the connections that are there among different types of oppressions. But I see the oppression of animals as the most extreme degree of oppression so I have chosen this to be my priority... I still do other activism too...but I really focus most of my energy on animal rights activism and that is really the core of my activism. I am aware the most of the way animals are oppressed and abused in this society (interview, 2/19/2000).

While all the informants were active in several different types of activism, including women's rights, gay rights, or environmental activism, like Tina they saw the oppression of animals as the most important issue to stand up for. This was the case for two reasons. First, animals were seen as having no voice to speak for themselves unlike oppressed groups of humans. The activists saw themselves as giving a voice to a group that was not able to defend itself against the abuse of humans. This ideology became evident from the interviews with the informants but common examples could also be found from animal rights listservers. Many of the emails are signed in the name of the animals, for example, in the following manner: "I encourage everyone to use this ...sample letter and fill up [their] mailbox[es] with our voices, *the voices of animals*" (field notes, 3/25/01).

The second reason for the centrality of animal rights for these informants is that very few individuals are willing to consider the possibility of standard consumption of any animal products as unethical or cruel, because of the potential ramifications or inconvenience to their personal lifestyle (see above). Therefore, those who regard this form of oppression as a real issue feel obliged to a certain degree to visibly stand up for their beliefs. In a certain sense, as past researchers have noted, once the activists reach this awareness that humans are unjustly exploiting animals and realize how few people see this as a problem in contrast to other social issues, they feel even more compelled to focus their energy on animal rights activism.

Furthermore, as noted earlier, the motivation of becoming an animal rights activist commonly involves a moral awakening and the activists on one level seem to feel they have reached a higher awareness compared to other social activists or people who focus on

a single social issue. Even though these activists mainly focused their energies on animal rights issues, in their worldview the informants see themselves as fighting against a systematic oppression that is based on the “white-male system” (field notes, 10/2001).

While the lifestyle of veganism and activism was reached through a gradual progression as a whole, many informants did describe very specific experiences, again relating to the use of moral shocks in the movement, which had marked their decision to take upon this cultural identity. For example, Shannon described this aspect of activism in the following way,

When I was 16 I saw this ALF [Animal Liberation Front] video at a friend’s house and that was a definite marking point for me to become a vegan. I had already been thinking about animal rights because a good friend of mine just went vegan before that. So I’d been think that’s something I want to do but at the same time, I was like, I really love cheese [laughs]...but the video really made me realize that I have to take responsibility for my actions. No matter how big of a difference it would make I just couldn’t be anything else [than vegan] after that (field notes, 12/2001).

II. Being labeled and not taken seriously by the authorities and media are main sources of frustration for the activists who have devoted their lives to fight for animal rights.

All of the informants had faced some frustration throughout their experiences with activism. Being labeled and not taken seriously were the main causes for this frustration. Being labeled was regarded as problematic because it usually involved stereotyping and false assumptions about the character of the activists, and ignored the underlying ideology of the movement. These stereotypes repeatedly belittled the commitment and involvement of the informants, which in relation to the first theme is a substantial misconception, and as a result function as a major source of frustration. Past researchers have also documented the centrality of animal rights in the activists’ life.

Psychologist Harold Herzog (1993) carried out a qualitative study of 23 activists focusing on the impacts that activism has had on the interviewees’ lives. His results indicate that the animal rights movement is an extremely central part of the activists’ life, as one of the activists in his study stated, “[the movement] *is* my life” (Herzog 1993:110). In contrast to this centrality of activism in one’s life, being not taken seriously clearly

marks the experience of animal rights activism as a marginal movement and is likely to contribute to radical action. Tina discussed this aspect of activism and noted that,

Being labeled in a certain way-the assumptions that come with the labeling really piss me off sometimes. People do not realize the level of involvement that is behind every action that we do. And media has its impact on this. It never talks about the letters or any other forms of liberal action. The only time they acknowledge us is when we're locked in somewhere (field notes, 10/15/2000).

When observing media attention devoted to the actions of the group during my participant observation, it seemed that the very selective representation by the media often resulted in being stereotyped as a group who just seeks shock value and attention. Often their views were not even heard or acknowledged in the media's coverage of their actions. One informant commented on the media coverage and noted that, "the media will always pigeonhole us into a one category and portray us as some crazy irrational lunatics!" (field notes, 2/2002). Another informant discussed different forms of activism, in this case letters to the editor, to inform people about animal rights issues, and stated that "of course [the paper] would rather print cartoons making fun of us than the letter" (field notes 2/2000).

Some of the most common labels attached to animal rights activists in the media are "extremist" and "radicalist," and it was specifically these two labels that received sometimes contradictory reactions from the informants. To a certain degree, the activists seemed to value these labels as something that elevates their ethical stance and dedication to the cause. For example, one of the informants stated that she didn't think it's necessarily bad to be an "extremist" noting that she thinks this is a rather relative term. Soon after, she added that,

If someone calls me an extremist because of my beliefs, so be it, they can either ask me about my beliefs, listen to what I have to say, and then tell me why they think I'm an extremist, or they can remain ignorant. But I am not going to compromise my ethics so that I wouldn't be given a *nasty label* (field notes, 2/2001).

Another activist discussed the issue of labeling and how it frustrates her but also noted that each social movement in history had been considered "radical" at some point in time, and that these people (using Martin L. King as an example) still continued fighting for their cause. The informants felt that because their ideology is so marginal, it is

inevitable that when making the issues visible, they will be regarded as radical. Tina pointed out that “someone has to first push the issue out further, and has to be seen as extreme, otherwise [the issue] will never get acknowledged” (field notes 3/2000).

Not being taken seriously was another problem that these activists commonly faced. This was often expressed in the stereotypes that were used by the larger society to characterize the group as irrational. Lisa, who had been involved with animal rights for several years, stated that,

The sad thing is that a lot of people don't take these issues very seriously. And of course they definitely don't take us seriously. They laugh at us and call us silly, and tell us that plants are alive too. It's very hard to try to engage in a meaningful dialogue with people who just laugh at you! (interview, 2/13/2000).

Overall, it seemed that the activists were frustrated with the four following problems in terms of media coverage and general resistance towards animal rights activism; (1) being labeled, (2) not having their ideology or viewpoint heard or accurately presented, (3) being portrayed as irrational, and (4) media's tendency to cover only radical action while ignoring other forms of activism. These four issues will be discussed in more detail in chapter four.

III. Radical action is seen as the most important means of voicing the group's opinion and it is viewed as a sign of higher commitment in the movement.

Radical action incorporates mainly illegal actions that are guaranteed to draw attention to the issue that the activists wish to focus on. The informants also referred to this type of activism as "direct action" which seemed to be used interchangeably with the term radical action within the community.

An example of radical action was a “lockdown” at the office of the dean of Veterinary Medicine in protest of the small animal surgery class. In this action the activists linked their arms together with pipes in order to form a circle, sat down, and refused to leave the office until the authorities promised to negotiate with the activists. With this case that took place in February 2000, the activists had to be separated from each other by the police using saws, and were arrested after spending nearly 12 hours in the office. This is an action that obviously exemplifies extremely high levels of commitment

to the movement. All of the activists were charged with criminal trespassing and missed all of their classes, not to mention the exhaustive experience of being chained together for so long.

The most important aspect of radical actions such as the lockdown is that it is considered the only thing that “brings people to the table.” Tina discussed the role of radical activism and noted that,

There has never has been a social movement without civil disobedience. We know this is the way it works and that we have to do this in order to bring people to the table...it is the role of radical action to force the people in power to listen to us and really face the issues (field notes, interview, 2/19/2000).

All of the informants agreed with Tina and regarded radical action as the most important means of bringing forward their issue. Past research on media coverage of public events further supports what the activists above note about radicalism its ability to draw public attention to the issue at hand. For example, Oliver and Myers (1999) examined what types of public events received media coverage in newspapers, and note that when conflict is involved, a protest is much more likely to receive media coverage.

In contrast to radical action there is liberal action, which includes all legal means of protesting, such as letter writing, legal protesting, phone calls, and vigils. The role of liberal action is considered complementary and equally important to the use of radical action. However, it was clearly noted that there are very few people who are willing to go so far as to risk being arrested, having a criminal record, and facing a possibility of police brutality. Tina further explained that, “there are so few people who are concerned about the issue. And especially who are willing to work for it...I feel that there are so few people who are willing to get arrested...that I really need to be doing this” (field notes, interview, 2/19/2001). In this sense radical action is a marker of a higher level of commitment or authenticity of activism. With awareness comes a feeling of having a responsibility to do the type of activism that so few would be willing to do. It also seemed to be the case that by engaging in radical forms of activism, the activists increased their prestige in the community (e.g. regarded as informal leaders).

In many cases, radical action also had a strong symbolic dimension in terms of relating to the suffering of the animals. For example, in a statement about the lockdown

one of the activists categorized the protest against the class as an "act of compassion" and further stated that,

As we sat in negotiation, the students were actually in surgery...killing more animals. Though we were excited about the outlook for the future, our hearts were with the animals being killed right now. This is why we stayed in lock down until we were cut from our pipes and carried out. It was emotionally a very exhaustive experience (field notes, 2/2000).

While their activism always had a stated goal of improving the treatment of animals, on one level the activists in certain types of protests, like in the example above, seemed to associate themselves with the pain of the animals.

IV. The national level animal rights movement provides important support for identity as an animal rights activist but is also a source of further frustration because of the perceived ideological differences in the movement.

Being part of a national level movement helps support the identity of being an animal rights activist by expanding individual or local activism into a broader social movement with its own distinct history and support system. Making connections with other people in the movement was often mentioned during the interviews and seemed to be considered an important aspect of the development process of becoming an authentic activist. Being able to recognize and speak about the famous activists or central figures in the movement was one element of communication competency at the local scene. In addition to this, the national movement as a whole functioned as an important resource for several actions of the group. For example, the campaign against small animal surgery class required the activists to collaborate with several other organizations in order to receive needed legal information and documents.

On the other hand, there were perceived divisions within the movement and as a result, the informants expressed frustration with the movement as a whole. One reason for this might be that in the local activist community gender identities were played out in a very non-traditional manner. All of the informants identified as feminists which was one main factor separating these activists from the national level animal rights movement or several smaller scale organizations, which commonly display more traditional gender divisions (McAllister Groves 1995:455, Perez 1990:69). This was one factor making it

harder for the informants in this study to really feel that they were part of a *movement*.

One activist explained that,

The bad thing about...the movement is that there are still a lot of people who are engaging in other forms of oppression. Like several times on the list servers I've gotten a lot of really sexist shit that has made me want to get the hell out of this movement. People just don't see the interconnections...and that's really depressing (interview, 3/2001).

A specific example of reasons for resisting a national level organization comes from the way one activist commented on People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). PETA is one of the largest national level organizations but was regarded to "have sold out the feminist animal rights activists by constantly putting up half naked women's bodies on billboards or ads to forward their agenda" (field notes, 12/2001). An example of PETA's ads is a picture of two women naked with a title: "I'd rather go naked than wear fur." This type of activism causes ethical dilemmas for my informants on multiple levels. Primarily, feminists in the movement feel as though they are alienated from the national scene. If they were to formally work with PETA, they would have to compromise their feminist beliefs. There is also a strong sense of disillusionment with large-scale animal rights organizations such as PETA that consistently objectify women or maintain more traditional gender roles in terms of using mainly men as spokespersons, in order to forward their animal rights agenda. Possibly due to the broad diversity of beliefs that the activists at large hold (Plous 1991) and sometimes the conflicting nature of these attitudes, as shown by the above example, the overall nature of activist organizations in the US is somewhat fragmented.

However, as Perez (1990) has documented, regardless of these divergences, the movement does have a significant amount of agency when actors come together to resist a specific issue and put aside those differences that would be divisive in other social contexts. For example, when the informants collaborated with other movement activists in protesting the small animal surgery class, they would not emphasize their personal feminist perspectives or hold a lack of this ideology against other activists. In a symposium organized at the University to explore ethical issues related to use of animals in research, the informants had fairly clear-cut views of which speakers would present their desired viewpoint and were therefore regarded as "cool" "or to be "on our side". In this case, all

that was needed for a speaker to be positively viewed was resistance to the use of animals in research, particularly terminal surgeries performed at OSU.

On the other hand, in order to be accepted into the local activist community more ideological unity with the group was required, specifically a more radical feminist perspective. For example, the informants had worked with several community members who supported animal rights ideology but were regarded by as not having a broad enough consciousness. When the informants organized a women's rights protest at the university, one of the community members wrote a letter to the editor stating that she did not support this action. When the activists discussed this letter, one of the activists expressed how disappointed she was with this response; "Geez, I just hate it when you think someone is totally cool and then they go and do something totally stupid! Why is it so hard for people to get it!" (field notes, 4/2000).

In order to achieve a certain goal through political action, the feminist ideology could be set aside and unity would emerge with activists from a variety of different backgrounds. At other times, this community seems to differ from the past research, especially in terms of their gender identities. In relation to the quote from Lisa Hanson, a past animal rights activist who felt that she could not identify as an activist after being "only" vegetarian, the feminist aspect further elevates the exclusive nature of this community.

4 “BUT PLANTS ARE ALIVE TOO!” PERCEPTIONS OF ANIMAL RIGHTS ACTIVISTS

4.1 COUNTER MOVEMENTS

The goal of this chapter is to give the reader a contrast to the emic perspective of the activist’s worldview presented in chapter three through examining public media discourse over animal rights issues. I will focus on discussing the main problems the local activists experienced in terms of misrepresentation in the media. First, I will discuss dynamics of movement-counter movement interaction and how this relates to language and power issues in the case of animal rights movement.

When actors of a social movement are able to break into the public consciousness through the use of political action, one measurement of success is the amount of resistance the movement faces. As Munro has noted, “the appearance of adversaries represents both a sign of success and an important test of the original movement’s effectiveness...in short, a counter movement signals that the social movement is doing it’s job” (1999:2). On a national level, social movement researchers have recognized that since the early 1990s, a recognizable counter movement against the animal rights movement has emerged in the US and elsewhere to “contest [the] moral capital” of animal rights claims (Munro 1999:1). Munro further argues that in the field of social movement research it is crucial to examine these counter movements in relation to the original movement, in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the discourse around a given ethical issue. After all, from the moment of its emergence, any social movement will be largely shaped by the rhetoric of opposition it faces. Through language and communication style choices the movement actors make in response to this resistance, they further construct and redefine their specific cultural identities. As a result, it is crucial to examine the movement-counter movement rhetoric in order to gain a thicker cultural description about the role of radical action in the animal rights movement.

4.2 LANGUAGE AND POWER

As many sociolinguists have noted, language holds significant power in terms of its ability to define culturally acceptable frames and boundaries. Lakoff has noted that it is specifically the groups in power who have the most ability to (through language) control what is defined as ‘normal’, ‘natural’ or ‘factual’ in our current society. In her book *Language War* (2001), Lakoff further notes that,

The exnominated group assumes a set of shared interests that are reflected in decisions about what kinds of discourse will be taken seriously. And because those taken seriously embody the “neutral” status quo, automatically... [they] have an edge in any argument: they don’t have to make the case that their side is reasonable, or socially responsible, or normal: that’s just a given. But the other side has to argue that change-the move away from the familiar and the comfortable, out of frame and toward the marked, is worth the cognitive and social fragmentation that it necessarily entails (57-58).

Not only do marginal groups hold less power within the public discourse to express their meaning, they are inherently in a linguistically weaker position because they are arguing for a frame that is not common, familiar, or comfortable for most people. Most people in the US eat meat or wear leather (McDonald 2000); to argue that it is not ethical is to suggest a very new and ‘foreign’ frame.

What then are some means through which the countermovement discourse marginalizes animal rights activism in today’s society? In the following I will use Critical Discourse Analysis in order to explore the way this marginalization takes place. In the past CDA has been used mainly to examine how public discourse reinforces and maintains racism, classism, heterosexism, and/or sexism, for example. I do not, however, suggest that animal rights activists as a group is discriminated against in a same way as, for example, people of color, but that the same principles are used to marginalize and downplay *any* ideology challenging the hegemonic status quo. The theory is especially useful here because as chapter three shows, one of the dominant themes for activists is the way their viewpoints are marginalized in the media.

4.3 MAIN ISSUES

The media discourse surrounding animal rights activism entails responses from a variety of perspectives. Throughout my observation, the local media included letters to the editor, if not directly supporting the movement, at least sympathizing with the dedication of the activists. Further, not all news reporting is blatantly biased in its coverage of animal rights protest or issues. However, from my participation in this community it was clear that in emic terms “media” is a significant cultural term in this community because of the perceived problems the activists experience with it. Again, my goal here is not to quantitatively measure what the media portrayal of animal rights is, but to explore the ways in which local media constructed the notions that these informants found problematic. Overall, the following four themes emerged from the data as key problems/frustrations that the informants experienced within the public discourse over animal rights issues: (1) labeling, (2) ignoring the worldview/ideology, (3) focus on radicalism (4) irrationality.

4.3.1 Labeling

In many cases, animal rights activism in the media becomes categorized under the umbrella of *Eco-terrorism*. For example, an article in the local newspaper titled “Volatile Mix: Eco-Terrorists. Habitat” (Young 2000) discussed actions of Animal Liberation Front (ALF) and Earth Liberation Front (ELF) and suggested that Vegetarian Resource Network is related to ALF. The author further discusses these actions and their impact,

At Oregon State University, the Vegetarian Resource Network has resorted to civil disobedience but not to violence to draw attention to an animal surgery class. The network has at least some ties with Animal Liberation Front...the so-called *eco-terrorists* of ALF and ELF say they’re on a crusade to protect animals and the environment. They also say their intentions are nonviolent.

It’s little comfort to the people who own property that has been destroyed or damaged in the attacks. Dana Watkins, whose dog food warehouse...was apparently the latest target, used to provide food to fur farms - favorite target of the *vandals*.

Watkins worries the *radicals* may return and try to finish the job. “Every night we go to bed scared, wondering what will happen,” he said...No lives have been lost but some fear it’s only a matter of time.

“Until fairly recently, they have been more of a nuisance than a real problem,” said Gary Perlstein, co-author of “Perspectives on *Terrorism*,” (Young 2000, emphasis added)

The article begins with a description of two specific acts of property destruction by ALF and ELF, clearly focusing on violent aspects of the movements. Further, in terms of representing the perspective of the activists, the author quotes one of the “spokesmen” for ELF saying, “[t]he public has a right to know that these are not just random acts.” However, nothing explaining why the acts are not random is ever presented in the article. In this example, the reader is not given any information about why these activists feel compelled to commit these types of acts. We do not learn anything about the worldview of ALF or ELF, the reader is simply given descriptive information about their actions. On the other hand, the reader is given much more detailed information about the “we” group (e.g. what the victims are feeling). In terms of the specific amount of speaking space (the amount of direct quotes), the activists’ point of view is covered with 29 words while the “we” group (the victims of the attacks and Perlstein) is given 81 words.

In a similar fashion, the majority of media coverage of animal rights leaves out many pieces of the complexity of the issues at hand. Animal rights becomes simplified, in conjunction with environmental rights, into “eco-terrorism,” “vandalism” and “radicalism.” Ultimately, these groups are in many cases categorized under “terrorism.” Riggins has noted that “to name one’s self is a fundamental human right that frequently is denied to Others...members of a “we” group may be identified by personal names more often than Others, who are identified anonymously” (1997:8). As the excerpt from the article above shows, the activists are commonly portrayed in the public discourse by labels that they would never choose. Other labels that have been used to describe animal rights activists in the media include “gang” (DeFalco 1999), “tree huggers” (Vincent 2001), and “extremists” (Maginnis 2001).

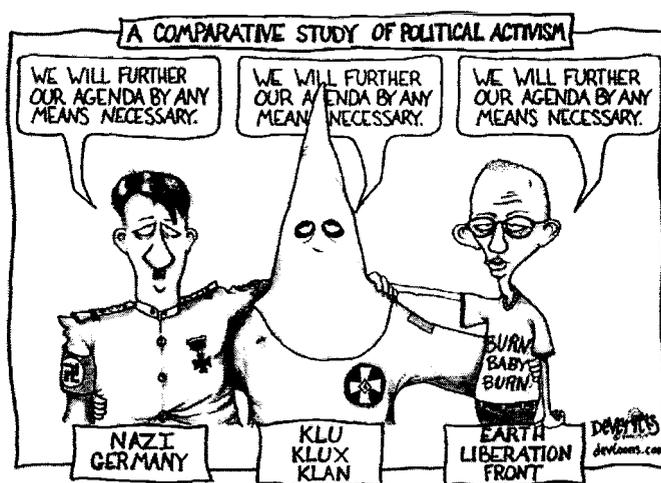
These labels operate to construct the animal rights movement on the whole as a radical organization that is a threat to society. In contrast to the American anti-abortion movement, which also has more radical wings, it does not seem that the members of this movement as a whole are regarded as ‘violent terrorists’ even though there have been incidents of killing doctors who provide abortions. It seems that the frame in which the anti-abortion movement operates is not as marginal as is the case of animal rights ideology.

As a result, this group is presented as a more diverse movement that has some (marginal) activists who might go as far as killing a doctor, but that most of the activists would never do such a thing. In contrast to this, the animal rights movement becomes labeled as a whole based on what a few activists do while the more moderate aspects are ignored.

4.3.2. Ignoring the Ideology

As noted above in the newspaper excerpt, animal rights and environmental rights are commonly discussed under the same category of eco-terrorism, and examples show how these movements are sometimes further lumped with such groups as white supremacists. Figure one can be used as an example to illustrate how marginal the worldview of the environmental movement in the US currently is. Given the common categorization of environmentalism and animal rights under eco-terrorism, this would also suggest the marginality of animal rights worldview. In a similar fashion that several cultural texts portray animal rights activism, this cartoon presents the ELF in the same light as Nazis or Ku Klux Klan.

Figure 1. Cartoon from *The Barometer*



As I have discussed earlier, the worldviews of these groups are drastically different but as figure one shows, all of these groups are, regardless, seen as an equal threat to the

main stream society. This (mis)categorization can be further explained in relation to the process of Othering. Riggins notes that, “outsiders...tend to perceive Others as a homogeneous category...by contrast, the Self tends to make finer distinctions among its own members, who are perceived as constituting numerous subgroups” (1997:5). Because environmental and animal rights issues are so marginal in the current society, we can find these types of categorizations that completely ignore the ideological differences. However, the anti-abortion movement, for example, doesn’t seem to be linked with white supremacy groups in the mainstream media discourse, not even in a relatively liberal student newspaper such as *The Barometer* where both figures one and two (presented soon after) appeared. Again, this would suggest that the ideology of anti-abortion movement is closer to the worldview of the “we” group and is therefore seen to have more diversity regardless of its radical aspects.

4.3.3. Focus on Radicalism

As noted earlier by the informants, radical action is what draws the attention of the media or the authorities. When participating in more ‘liberal’ protests, I was able to witness the amount of time and energy required to prepare for a march or a candle light vigil, for example. One such event in which I participated occurred in January 2001, yet another protest against OSU’s Veterinary Medicine Department offering a class on small animal surgery. This protest involved approximately 25 people, some OSU students or local community members as well as activists who traveled from Eugene and Portland. The next day, student newspaper covered the march and quoted the OSU director of Laboratory Animal Resources saying,

I missed the march, I understand that there was a dozen or so people involved with few signs, and a couple of animals, just walking around the center and then they went over to Magruder [the Vet Med building on Campus], they stayed on the sidewalk, and that was that...*It was basically a non-event.* (Moore 2001, emphasis added).

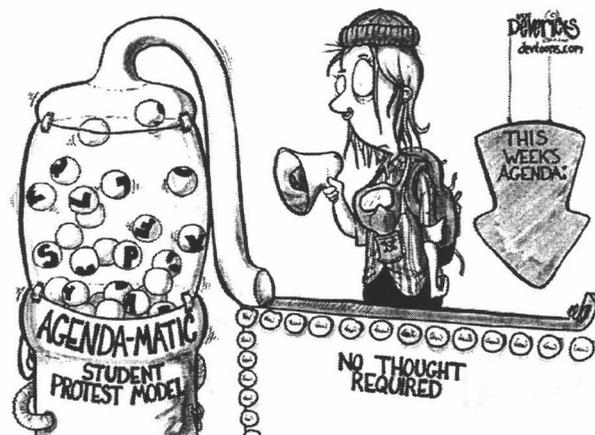
The media’s tendency to focus on more radical protests is especially important in relation to the tendency to ignore ideological aspects of the movement. When the two are combined, the discourse constructs a notion of the activists as engaging in radical activism without any justification. When examining media coverage of Native American protests

during 1960s through 1970s, Baylor found a similar bias in the media. He notes that the media coverage mainly focused on the “militant” aspects of the movement (90% of the total coverage) and did very little to cover the specific social/cultural issues facing this community. As a result, the audience received minimal information about the reasons behind these actions and was left with a viewpoint that “violence and conflict occur without any kind of justification or purpose” (1996:248).

4.3.4 Irrationality

To portray any activist as an irrational (terrorist) is a convenient way to delegitimize their ethical demands or concerns. To show whether this is a specific goal of the discourse is beyond the scope of this paper but it is nonetheless worthwhile to discuss the way irrationally is so often used against social movements. Figure two is one example of this type of presentation.

Figure 2. Cartoon from *The Barometer*



While the cartoon does not specifically portray an animal rights activist, the informants found it very insulting in terms of its ridicule towards activism in general. Furthermore, several activists felt that the fact that the character is a) female and b) portrays a body piercing was in reference to the local animal rights activists.

Further examples of how the countermovement delegitimizes the activists as irrational can be found in the phrases such as the following title that appeared in a newspaper editorial, “animal extremists antics are beyond absurd” (Maginnis 2001). To state that something (or someone) is absurd is to suggest that it is “utterly or obviously senseless...contrary to all reason or common sense” (Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary 1998). Another example of irrationality (of the animal rights ideology) is presented in the following quote from the head of the Animal Care Division at Oregon Health & Science University’s Regional Primate Center, who has stated that “[the animal rights activists] value the life of a rat as much as the life of a child. I believe that a reasonable person would choose to save his child’s life, or the lives of other family members or friends, above the life of a rat or a monkey” (Maginnis 2001).

5 CONCLUSIONS

5.1. CONSEQUENCES OF ACTIVISM AT OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

As of winter term 2002 the small animal surgery class is still offered at Oregon State University, after over four years of protest by the local activists. On the other hand, some institutional changes, and maybe most importantly, a great amount of dialogue and discussion has taken place within the campus community. One change that has occurred within the department of Veterinary Medicine is that, unlike in the past, the dogs used for the class are now acquired from breeding farms (“class-A dealers”) that specifically produce animals to be used in laboratories. This is a change from the earlier years, when the animals were obtained from “class-B dealers” that do not have an equally controlled way of producing the animals. One of the key legal angles that the activists at OSU had against the class was that the origin of the animals used for the course was unclear. The activists further obtained information suggesting that some of the dogs obtained from class-B dealers might have been pets that had run away, possibly even stolen from their owners. This was a particularly effective angle for the activists to direct public attention to the small animal surgery class.

In addition to this change, several educational forums have been held during the past few years. Furthermore, the university has revised some of its general requirements for using animals in research, adding a requirement that anyone conducting this type of research must become familiar with animal research regulations. However, overall these changes have made little difference for the local activists. From their point of view, the cruel practices are still in place as long as terminal surgeries are used for the class, no matter how the animals are acquired. For an animal rights activist, the university obtaining the dogs from a class-A dealer is not a significant ethical advancement by any means. For these activists, the idea of breeding dogs to be used in laboratories is already, in itself, an abhorrent one, and shows how animals are turned into a commodity without any moral standing. The point that these activists have been making at OSU is that the course is not necessary in its current form. As such, the only concrete improvement to the situation, besides ending VM 757, would seem to be a decreasing enrollment in the class.

5.2 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

While this and past research shows that radical action is a central part of the animal rights movement, I argue that this centrality is constructed within the discourses both inside and outside the movement. Inside the activist community, emotional awakening (which commonly occurs through the movement's use of moral shocks as the main form of recruitment) sets a certain level of urgency for action within the group. In many cases this feeling of having gained a new moral consciousness becomes funneled through different forms of radical action, partially because the worldview of animal rights is so marginal and actively downplayed by the countermovement.

Furthermore, the four emic themes of animal rights activism at the local level revolve around authenticity that involves "going all the way" on several different levels of activism. Having animal rights activism as a way of life is a first step towards authenticity, this being especially important in relation to being stereotyped or not taken seriously. When people cast doubts toward the demands of these activists for equal respect of animals and humans, they are able to increase validity of their assertions by turning their ideology into praxis in their everyday lives.

Secondly, by engaging in radical action and being willing to take the risks that come with it, the activists increase their authenticity among local activists, as well as within the larger movement. They are the few who are actually willing to take risks and face the potential consequences of their activism. Overall, it seemed that within the local subculture of animal rights activism radicalism as a concept is viewed in a positive light. The informants often discussed the way different civil rights movements were viewed as radical when they first emerged, but later gained public acceptance. The local activists regarded radicalism as a moving force that brings about positive social change. However, because of the general negative associations with the word "radical" outside the activist community the informants would not commonly identify as "radicals" or "extremists." Instead, they would commonly refer to themselves simply as "activists."

Given the above parameters alone, radicalism within the movement is a central part of the subculture. However, a few elements within the movement-countermovement discourse add to the complexity of the issue. As chapter four shows, the public discourse further uses several rhetorical devices that marginalize the movement and delegitimize its

ethical concerns. Some examples of this are labeling the activists as “eco-terrorists” which, in of itself, draws attention only to the radical forms of the movement. Further, by ignoring the ideology and elevating violent aspects, the movement is portrayed as irrational and comes to be seen as simply a threat to society.

The main implication of this study is to show the importance of examining how different social movements (or any cultural groups) become framed within the public discourse. While this research is not able to offer any conclusive comparisons about the degree to which this occurs, it is plausible to hypothesize that groups ideologically closer to the status quo are framed very differently than those offering an ideological or ethical challenge. Furthermore, the way an issue becomes framed has a vast impact on the way different institutions react to it. When no information is offered about the group’s worldview, it is easy to shift the focus onto the most extreme actions and portray these as irrational acts of violence. This shift then, comes to define the whole movement as operating on the margins of legality.

Both the pro-life movement and the animal rights movement in the US have branches that engage in illegal acts. Yet the latter is more likely to be seen as a “terrorist” group. Neither movement as a whole should be categorized based on the actions of a few. The animal rights movement as a whole aims to increase people’s awareness about animal exploitation and ultimately lessen oppression on all fronts. Based on this core idea, the movement holds a great amount of diversity in terms of different approaches to activism. This diversity should not become simplified, just as the ethical issues at hand should not be ignored by vilification of the activists.

In the light of the September 11th 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center, the label “terrorism” carries an increasing weight. In a more recent discourse over animal rights activism in the US, some political leaders have begun to utilize this new arsenal against the movement. For example, an article in *The Oregonian* quotes one of the House Representatives stating that just like any terrorists, the eco-terrorists “hate American freedoms, including the freedom to choose...and freedom to prosper...they will commit arson, vandalism and set bombs to express their hatred for our freedoms” (4/10/2002). Clearly, this type of rhetoric does not advance any type of ethical dialogue over the moral consideration of non-human animals.

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