

Connecting inequalities: Women and the animal rights movement

by *Gardner, Emily*, Ph.D., Arizona State University, 2005, 247 pages; AAT 3166091

Abstract (Summary)

The claim that animals deserve moral consideration and a right to live free from human abuse and exploitation has provoked significant debate in society. The movement for animal rights has grown exponentially in the past three decades, and one of its most striking characteristics is that women make up the majority of its activists. This dissertation examines the motivations, beliefs, and experiences of women animal activists, and the gender politics that shape these activists' lives and the movement as a whole. The study was conducted using 27 interviews with women animal rights activists, as well as participant observation of various aspects of the movement, such as organizations, protests, and conferences. This analysis suggests that gendered social learning, societal expectations, and empathy based on common oppressions best explain the high percentage of women in the movement. Women animal activists suffered negative repercussions as a result of their views and actions, including strained relationships with friends and family, harassment, and emotional distress. Yet they also reaped personal benefits from their heightened awareness and political involvement, including greater self esteem, confidence, and a sense of meaning in their lives. Although this social movement is focused on animals, its activists are influenced by the meanings attached to gender in society. Questions of legitimacy abound in a movement dominated by women and the gendered association of animal rights with sentimentality or emotion. Gendered tensions also exist within the animal rights movement over leadership, division of labor, the lack of attention paid to issues of gender and race, and controversial tactics such as sexualized advertising campaigns. This analysis suggests that many women activists recognize and are even motivated by the connection between the oppression of women and the oppression of animals. However, they struggle with two competing frameworks within the animal rights movement, one that names animals as the most oppressed class of beings in society, and thus, the most important issue of focus, and the second which calls for a more broad-based approach to social change that explicitly links the oppression of animals to other social struggles such as feminism and racial equality.

Indexing (document details)

Advisor:	Zatz, Marjorie
School:	Arizona State University
School Location:	United States -- Arizona
Keyword(s):	Social movements, Activism, Gender, Animal rights, Women
Source:	DAI-A 66/02, p. 764, Aug 2005
Source type:	Dissertation
Subjects:	Sociology, Womens studies