Caring about Blood, Flesh, and Pain: Women’s Standing in the Animal Protection Movement

ABSTRACT

Using the results of a survey of animal rights activists, advocates, and supporters, the paper reveals much more convergence (80%) than divergence (20%) of attitudes and actions by male and female animal protectionists. Analysis of the divergence suggests that the differences between men and women in the movement are contingent upon such things as early socialization, gendered work and leisure patterns, affinity with companion animals, ambivalence about science, and a history of opposition to nonhuman animal abuse by generations of female activists and animal advocates. Aside from the feminist and women’s movements and groups like Mothers Against Drunk Driving, it is rare to find a social movement in which the standing of women eclipses those of their male colleagues. The paper suggests that animal protection remains a bastion of female activism and advocacy because women care about blood, flesh, and pain and, unlike earlier generations of animal activists, no longer are seen as a liability to the success of the movement.

The animal rights movement in many ways is the kindred spirit of the environmental movement. Indeed, one writer has suggested that the former is an offshoot of the latter (Eckersley, 1992). In terms of membership and activism, women have played a pre-eminent role in both movements. Most notably, Rachel Carson, author of Silent Spring is often lauded as the individual who launched the
environmental movement in the United States in the 1960s. It is therefore surprising to read, “a good bit of feminist theory is either insensitive to environmental and animal rights issues or downright hostile toward them” (Slicer, 1994, p. 35). Partly for this reason, ecofeminism emerged in the 1970s as a new and separate field of research that would herald an era of new relationships between men and women and between people and nature (Instone, 1997, p. 136). Writing about the environmental movement in Australia, Instone claims that the majority of members and volunteers of the movement are women. She notes that women’s numerical importance does not protect them from doing the lower status paid work or from being locked into the majority of voluntary jobs in the movement. “The male public face of the movement,” she writes, “contrasts sharply with the behind the scenes reality of women doing most of the jobs” (p. 138). In this respect at least, the animal movement is different. From the nineteenth century on, women historically have enjoyed a high standing as protectors of nonhuman animals.

**A Brief History of Animal Activism**

Women have been conspicuous in the animal protection movement from the outset as pioneers in the early antivivisectionist and animal protectionist organizations that were active in Victorian and Edwardian England. The early antivivisectionist movement in Victorian England attracted many women because they drew connections between the abusive treatment of especially poor women as gynecological patients, women’s portrayal in pornography, and male vivisectors’ dissection of nonhuman animals (Lansbury, 1985). Despite their strength of numbers however, they were denied leadership positions in the early Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), its counterpart, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and local SPCAs.

The early history of the animal protection movement in Australia took a different route. According to MacCulloch (1993), the animal protection and conservation movements were irrevocably intertwined and culturally became feminized, which - at least organizationally - ironically led to the movement’s gradual decline. MacCulloch’s carefully researched thesis traces the history of both movements in Sydney between 1850 and 1930. The Animal Protection Society of New South Wales was established in 1873, a half-century after the SPCA had been founded in England. The Women’s Society for the Prevention
of Cruelty to Animals (was founded in 1886). MacCulloch argues that in the twentieth century women and a shift in ideology increasingly would dominate the animal protection movement.

From a moralizing, reformist body, the movement was transformed into a society of pet lovers with a consequent change in direction from a campaign against cruelty to the more genteel approach of promoting kindness to animals. “This loss of purpose both mirrored and was reinforced by the growing feminization of the cause. Increasingly, the cause of animal protection was given over to women, and subsequently, children” (MacCulloch, 1993, pp. 45-46). Although these changes diluted the strength of the early movement, MacCulloch’s account acknowledges the social legacy of animal protection’s female pioneers that by the early twentieth century “had effectively changed the moral make-up of society” (p. 46), and the emotions that cruelty evoked had “. . . overflowed into the preservation movement and fused them together at a popular level” (p. 46).

This brief historical excursus suggests the organizational vulnerability of the modern animal protection movement with its predominantly female membership. The female of 1996 is altogether different from her 1886 counterpart, although to explain the fundamental changes affecting women’s status over the past century is beyond the scope of this paper. At the end of the twentieth century, however, Western democracies no longer see women as a liability to animal protectionist and environmental causes. In the case of the animal movement, female animal protectionists at century’s end can no longer be so easily dismissed as “dotty” cat lovers, or worse, diagnosed as suffering from “zoophil-psychosis” as they were both in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Buettinger, 1993).

Even so, a movement predominantly female in membership is likely to attract criticism as being “emotional” (stereotypical feminine trait) as opposed to “rational” (the masculine opposite). Indeed, stereotypes associated with labels such as “crazed spinsters”, “sob sisters”, and “idle, muddle-headed women” who are dismissed as “too emotional” to understand the rational endeavors of science and agriculture continue to crop up in the rhetoric of vilification used by critics of the animal movement (Munro, 1999b). Yet, these enterprises are quick to use emotional appeals in their counterattacks against animal liberationists (Munro, 1999a).
Gender, Attitudes, and Women’s Standing

Reviews of both feminist (Adams & Donovan, 1995) and ecofeminist (Vance, 1993) writings indicate that the large body of literature on the themes of women, nature, and animals support the argument that, when it comes to nature, there is a vast gender gap on attitudes and values. Much of the literature contains an implicit assumption that women and men vary fundamentally in the way they treat other life forms. There is ample empirical evidence in every context where humans use or abuse animals. It is evident that men, more than women, work or otherwise engage in animal-oriented occupations and leisure activities - in factory farms, abattoirs, science and veterinary practice, hunting, shooting, trapping and fishing, rodeos, horse and dog racing, and a host of similar pursuits. However, most studies of gender differences toward the treatment of animals focus on animal research rather than on other substantive areas such as hunting and farming (Pifer, 1996). Furthermore, many of those studies are based on comparisons between movement insiders and outsiders - animal rights supporters and animal researchers (Hills, 1993; Paul, 1995). In addition, the typical study of gender differences in our relations with other animals focuses on individual attitudes and behavior rather than on broader sociological issues. Virtually no studies look at the significance of the gender gap in relation to the preponderance of women within the animal movement.

It would seem plausible to argue that women are the primary actors within the animal protection movement since they make up close to 80% of the membership (Richards, 1990/1992; Jasper & Nelkin, 1992). Put differently, women have a pre-eminent standing and legitimacy in the movement that may eclipse that of their male colleagues. Yet, standing is not determined by sheer weight of numbers alone. Women always have constituted the army of grassroots activists in the animal movement - the handmaidens or “midwives” to the movement (Jasper & Nelkin, 1992, p. 90). Ironically, however, male philosophers, notably Tom Regan and Peter Singer, have predominated as the leading advocates of animal rights.

Indeed, a case can be made for describing the animal movement as “gender direct” rather than “non gender direct” or “indirect” (Beckwith, 1996). By gender direct, Beckwith means a social movement characterized by the
primacy of women’s gendered experiences, women’s issues, and women’s leadership and decision making in feminist and women’s movements (p. 1038). Strictly speaking, animal rights issues are gender neutral, although, in practice, many women believe that - especially in the predominantly male areas of science, hunting, and factory farming - their oppression parallels that of animal exploitation by men. The president of Animal Liberation (Victoria) sees that organization with its 95% female membership as fulfilling the requirements of a gender direct movement:

I think we need to look at the politics of animal rights to see how they do converge quite clearly with feminist politics. . . . And they are issues of oppression, they’re issues of abuse and the link is very easy to make for women because women have known what it is to live in patriarchies, to know what it is to confront that masculine scientific detachment that allows abuse to continue for abstract greater goals. . . . I’d have to say that people who care about animals and are prepared to politicise that caring, care about blood, flesh, pain, care about a particular animal’s suffering in this particular situation now. So they are situating their caring, they’re not abstracting it. (R. Linden, personal communication, 1997)

Most studies of everyday attitudes toward animals confirm the general feminist-ecofeminist thesis Linden articulates that women, more than men, care about nonhuman animals - a claim dramatically underlined by the massive over-representation of women in her own organization. Yet, within the context of animal movement membership the gender gap takes on a different complexion. In comparing the attitudes of animal rights supporters, farmers, and the urban public, Hills (1993) notes that there were gender differences between all three groups, with animal rights supporters scoring highest on empathy and lowest on instrumentality. These results were a direct contrast to males in general and to farmers in particular. For our purpose, the most pertinent result was the similarity in responses between male and female animal rights supporters, which was not the case for farmers and the urban public where gender differences were marked.

McAdam (1992) points out that in the context of social movements, sociologists have perceived activism as gender neutral (p. 1214). My own study of the attitudes of animal welfare supporters toward animals generally
confirmed the finding by Hills (1993) that little or no difference exists between the views of men and women committed to the animal welfare cause. Although this might seem self-evident, the finding has important theoretical implications for the analysis of gender relations in other social movement organizations. According to McAdam, gender is arguably the most important factor mediating the experience of social movement activism (p. 1213). While the worldviews of males and females may seem of a different order, when their attitudes and values are compared within a specific social movement context, there may be a degree of convergence within these movements and organizations that challenges conventional wisdom. More particularly, the convergence challenges the view, pace Gilligan (1982), that there is a different female voice in various moral contexts, such as within the animal protection movement. This argument about convergence is based on the results of an Animal and Social Issues Survey (ASIS) conducted among members of the Australian and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies (ANZFAS) in late 1995.

**About ANZFAS and ASIS**

Widely representative of the animal protection lobby in Australia, ANZFAS covers the whole spectrum of animal protectionists from RSPCA welfarists and Australian Koala Foundation conservationists to the more radical animal liberationists, anti-vivisectionists, and animal rights advocates who belong to one of several campaigning groups such as Animal Liberation. ANZFAS is the umbrella organization for some 35 societies in Australia numbering about 33,000 members. An additional 500 individuals join as private rather than affiliated, members.

In late 1995, the ASIS, an eight-page questionnaire, was sent to these 500 private members throughout Australia. The response rate was 87% (n=437), well above the usual rate of around 30% for mail-out surveys (Fowler, 1988, p. 49). The survey was designed to elicit the following information about members: attitudes toward animals; involvement in animal issues; views about ways to improve the treatment of animals; lifestyle and social attitude as well as a personal profile of the ANZFAS membership, including how members defined themselves in the movement - animal activist, advocate or animal welfare supporter.
Two demographic variables in ANZFAS stood out. In relation to age and sex, there were major discrepancies between ANZFAS members and the rest of the Australian population: There was a disproportionately large number of females in the sample (79%), and the age distribution of the sample did not conform to the national figures. For example, the median age for the population in 1994 was 33.4 years as compared to 51 years for the sample. Structural factors may also be important in explaining the preponderance of older people in the organization. Biographical availability may account for the high proportion of older women in ANZFAS, since people who are willing to support such organizations must have the time to do so. For example, in Oliver’s (1983) study of voluntary activists in the neighborhood movement, discretionary time was seen as a critical resource. People who are employed full-time or have heavy marital and familial responsibilities are less likely than retired seniors to engage in social movement activism.

Thus, while discretionary time is important for a person’s availability to a cause, age made little difference to the level of self-designated activism. That is, age was not important when people described themselves as activists, advocates, or supporters, at least when the cohorts were categorized broadly as young (under 39 years) and old (over 40 years). The unusually high number of middle-aged people in ANZFAS suggests that members might be unwilling to engage in the direct action campaigns favored by younger activists. That this was not the case is supported by the evidence of the massive protests and militant actions of “middle England” where many of the activists were older people protesting against the United Kingdom’s mid 1990s live animal export trade. In the Australian sample, however, age was a significant variable affecting respondents’ dietary habits. Not surprisingly, as vegans and vegetarians, younger cohorts had stricter dietary regimens than the older persons who made up the bulk of carnivores in the sample. Therefore, except for diet - where meat avoidance was strongest among the young - age was not a factor in determining the respondents’ beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors toward animals.

Gender effects were only slightly more noticeable than age. The most striking feature about ANZFAS - as an organization - is its predominantly female membership (79%), a characteristic of the animal protection movement worldwide. In a sample taken from the readership of Animals’ Agenda, Richard’s
(1990) study of a similar group of American animal welfare and rights supporters also reported a 79% female membership.

Wells & Hepper (1997) and Kruse (1999) report on greater female affinities with animal issues. Their studies demonstrate that women, more than men, express concern about the use of animals in research, are more likely to be members of animal welfare groups, are more inclined to abstain from eating meat or other selected animal produce, hold anthropomorphic views regarding animals, and support animal rights. They also report that women are more likely than men to take action to promote animal welfare.

How can we explain why women, more so than men, are active in the animal protection movement? According to McAdam (1992), activists in social movements appear to be distinguishable from non-activists. Does this mean that high levels of consensus activists can characterize attitudes within the same social movement? At least in the case of the animal movement, the activists do share a common worldview for which there is a strong ideological consensus (Munro, 1997). In fact, McAdam points out that very little research exists about activists within the same movement, a fact most evident in the case of animal protection and one that this paper seeks to redress.

That women have good standing in the contemporary animal movement can be seen in the increasing number of women in animal protection organizations who are taking up leadership roles that were not available to them in the nineteenth century. Women led more than half of the 27 animal protection organizations I studied in Australia, Britain, and the United States (Munro, 2001), although only three of these were large, prominent organizations with relatively well-paid staff. These gendered work patterns are reflected in the staffing of anti-environmental/animal rights groups such as Put People First. A sample of the same number of these organizations (Deal, 1993) indicated that women headed only 7 of the 27 groups sampled and that men headed the remaining 20. This can be explained sociologically by the industries and interests represented by these anti-green organizations. Most are male-oriented enterprises associated with the extractive industries (coal, gas, oil, timber), off-road vehicle manufacturers, hunting and fishing lobbies, chemical and pharmaceutical companies, and the cattle industry. There can be little doubt that leadership positions in these social movement and, especially, countermovement organizations reflect the structure of gendered
employment opportunities in the wider society. Yet, leadership issues aside, this is where differentials cease to be important.

The ASIS data show a strong consensus among women and men on most of the issues covered in the survey. The ASIS findings suggest that the issue of animal cruelty blurs the differences between male and female protectionists and acts as a catalyst for bringing the two together. The moral standing of women in the movement is also strengthened by the movement’s strong ideological consensus, specifically in what it condemns as the worst forms of animal exploitation (Munro, 1997). In the remainder of the paper, I outline the main findings in connection with the role of gender in animal protection.

Discussion

The sex of the survey respondents in ASIS made a significant difference to fewer than 20% of the issues surveyed. For more than 80% of the issues examined in the survey, there was a strong consensus between the male and female members of ANZFAS. Ideological consensus in the movement as a whole has been reported elsewhere (Munro, 1997). The purpose of the following discussion is to identify and explain the areas where there is a significant difference between women and men on the issues covered in the survey. Gender differences may have been relevant in four broad areas. As indicated in Table 1 below, there were only 12 instances where this was the case.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Item</th>
<th>No of Items</th>
<th>Significant Gender Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards animals</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in animal issues</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving the treatment of animals</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle and social attitudes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given the importance of gender differences in the way men and women are said to perceive nature and other life forms, the gaps identified in this study are of particular interest. Why is it that both men and women reject some abuses of animals with equal vehemence but not others? Thus, while the respondents agree on how to improve the welfare of animals in general, there
are significant gender differences when it comes to specific issues. (See Table 2.) Respondents were asked to rate these issues on a scale from 1 (extremely wrong) to 7 (not at all wrong). There were seven such issues identified in the questions on which there was significant gender divergence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Significant Gender Difference on Seven Issues</th>
<th>Females’ Lower Mean and Tolerance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Hunting wild animals with guns</td>
<td>p&lt;.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Using horses for steeple/jump racing</td>
<td>p&lt;.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Exposing an animal to a disease as part of a medical experiment</td>
<td>p&lt;.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Using animals organs in human transplants</td>
<td>p&lt;.0006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Killing kangaroos for their meat or skin</td>
<td>p&lt;.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Using poisons for feral animal control</td>
<td>p&lt;.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Performing operations on animals without anesthetics (eg. branding/de-horning)</td>
<td>p&lt;.032</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the remaining 17 uses to which animals are put, there were no significant differences between the sexes. So how can the gender effects for these seven practices be explained? The practices can be further divided into four categories as indicated below.

Hunting

Hunting wild animals with guns ranked 10th (very high level of concern with a mean of 1.32) in the list of 24 practices involving the human use of animals. That female respondents, rather than their male counterparts, see sport hunting as more morally objectionable is supported in the feminist and ecofeminist literature, specifically in papers by Comninou (1995), Kheel (1995), Adams and Donovan (1995), and Collard and Contruccis (1988). They explicitly define “man” as male to argue that hunting is man’s oldest profession and that it is pursued for “pleasure, status, profit, power and masculine identity” (p. 52), a thesis challenged by Stange (1997). Stange’s refutation of feminist discourse on women’s estrangement from hunting is, however, a voice in the wilderness when measured against the empirical data on hunting that suggest that most forms of hunting remain primarily a male activity.
Hunting wild animals with guns in Australia typically means men killing indigenous animals like kangaroos, wild pigs, and ducks. Unlike the United Kingdom where fox hunting includes a smattering of female hunters, almost all Australia’s recreational and professional hunters are male. According to Stange, (1997), roughly 10% of all American hunters are female and “these numbers seem to be growing exponentially (although) the precise number of female hunters nationally is impossible to determine” (p. 179).

Steeple/Jump Horse Racing

This particular practice, glamorized in Australia as the sport of kings, ranked 17th in terms of moral reprehensibility. Nonetheless, a mean score of 1.79 places it in the second division of perceived atrocities to animals; that is, it represents a high, rather than very high, level of concern for the respondents. Like hunting, but less so, horse racing in Australia is largely a male preoccupation. There are few female jockeys, bookmakers, or trainers, and a visit to any betting shop will confirm that gambling is predominantly, though not exclusively, a male phenomenon. Furthermore, females tend to have a special relationship with horses through their childhood experiences in pony clubs and the like. These reasons no doubt explain a significant difference in attitudes toward the sport among the survey respondents.

Animal Experimentation: Disease, Animal Organs, and Branding

Three uses of animals came under the heading of animal experimentation: (a) operations without anesthetics (ranked 8, mean 1.20); (b) exposing an animal to a disease as part of a medical experiment (ranked 11, mean 1.33); and (c) using animal organs in human transplants (ranked 13, mean 1.73). Female respondents recorded lower means than their male counterparts. Given the pioneering role of women in the early antivivisectionist movements discussed above, it is hardly surprising that more women than men should oppose animal experimentation. As we have seen, the term animal experimentation arouses the passions more of women than of men. That female respondents had a significantly lower mean and tolerance for animal research than their male counterparts was reinforced elsewhere in the survey with more women than men believing that scientists cause more harm than good.
Males and females differed on an additional two questions that concerned the killing of kangaroos for their meat and skins and the poisoning of feral animals as a means of control. Both tied for 15th place in the list of 24 practices and were seen as being of great concern to the respondents (mean 1.76). Thorne (1998) suggests that killing kangaroos for commercial reasons, although perceived as less morally objectionable than recreational hunting, is predominantly men’s business:

Four-wheel drive vehicles penetrate the darkness using light to freeze groups or individuals. A gunshot claps, echoing fear. Adult bodies fall to the dusty ground, often dead on impact. Young-at-foot, hurtling into the blackness, die alone. Pouched young stunned, but not killed outright, expire with time. The shooter, most likely a part-timer, hangs each carcass - legs tied vertically, head swinging - on the truck. The shooter proceeds to the next target. (p. 174)

Cruelty seems to be the issue that explains the gender difference here. There is no need to refer to the sex of the part-time shooter in this passage, which focuses on the death of an Australian icon in the outback. The passage speaks for itself.

Movement Involvement, Lifestyle, and Social Attitudes

Gender differences also were significant in a number of other areas covered in the survey.

Involvement in animal issues. Female respondents belonged to significantly more animal welfare/rights organizations than their male counterparts (p=<.001). Apart from the ecofeminist claim that women are more in tune with nature than men and Gilligan’s (1982) argument that women, more than men, seek a sense of inter-connectedness with others (including other animals), there is the historical fact concerning women’s traditional involvement and standing in the animal protectionist movement. For many contemporary women, animal protection organizations still offer an outlet for social and professional development. This is particularly likely in the ANZFAS membership with its very high number of retired and elderly women.
Similarly, of the 330 life members in the RSPCA, just over 80% - roughly the same proportions as in ANZFAS - are female. Although pro-active groups like hunting fraternities mainly attract male enthusiasts, reactive animal protection organizations like ANZFAS and the RSPCA appeal more to women. In the nineteenth century, animal protection societies provided a rare opportunity for women to work outside the home. At the end of the twentieth century in Australia, animal protection still manages to attract women, but typically only as voluntary workers or part-time employees. Although this does not augur well for the future of the movement, it does say a lot for the commitment of females to the cause. In 1994 and 1995, women contributed just over 60% of all donations to the RSPCA (Victoria) in excess of $500. In that period in Victoria alone, the RSPCA received more than $1 million in bequests and over $60 million in donations, most of which, it is safe to assume, came from female benefactors (RSPCA, 1994, 1995).

*Lifestyle.* In the western world, a high rate of pet ownership is a strong characteristic of animal rights supporters (Richards, 1990/1992; Jasper & Nelkin, 1992). In the ANZFAS sample, the rate was 81% compared to the national figure of 60%. Females (84%) are more likely than males (69%) to keep a companion animal, and the difference here is significant at the .0001 level. Although by no means an earth-shattering revelation, this may confirm the ecofeminist claim concerning female empathy with animals. In addition, companion animals function as honorary members in the family where women traditionally do much of the caring and nurturing, which may explain the discrepancy. Also, more divorced, separated, and widowed females than males comprise the ANZFAS membership. These women may have a greater need for companion animals. Although more male than female respondents were single at the time of the survey, this is not the same as a since-ended relationship.

*Social Attitudes.* The survey asked respondents to rate eight statements from strongly disagree to strongly agree (see Table 3). There was a significant gender gap in only three statements where females scored a higher mean than their male counterparts.
Table 3. Survey Respondent Statements on Social Attitudes - Rated from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Being Involved in the Animal Movement is</th>
<th>Gender Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. a way of life to me</td>
<td>(p&lt;.005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. very satisfying to me</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. a personal sacrifice</td>
<td>(p&lt;.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From My Point of View</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. religion is very important in my life</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. meat eating is the worst form of animal abuse</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. on the whole, scientists do more harm than good</td>
<td>(p&lt;.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. moral support is more important for the movement than financial support</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. wide media coverage is important for the movement’s success</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first two issues - belonging to the movement is a way of life and a personal sacrifice - may be idiosyncrasies of the survey respondents, many of whom are older women. Although animal welfare work in Australia does not provide daily bread, it does provide daily meaning for many people, especially older women. This is borne out in interviews with members of animal welfare organizations (Munro, personal communications, 1994, 1995, 1996). Therefore, it is not surprising that for many women this work involves a high degree of commitment and sacrifice. A commonly expressed sentiment in the open-ended section of the questionnaire was that being a member of so many animal welfare groups often was financially taxing, especially for females on a pension.

Finally, in the question concerning scientists, females had a significantly higher mean than males in agreeing with the proposition that scientists do more harm than good. Again, as in opposition to vivisection, there is a strong historical precedent for this negative view of the scientist’s work. Modern animal protectionists, like their antivivisection predecessors in the late nineteenth century, perceive the abuse of animals as a central moral dilemma confronting society. Sperling (1988) puts the contemporary position succinctly when she writes how for many animal activists “the animal as victim has become a symbol of both humanity and nature besieged (in the) vivisection of the planet” (p. 39).
If gender differences in activities associated with hunting, wild animals, horse racing, and animal experimentation explain the divergence of attitudes of male and female animal supporters, converging attitudes logically would mean equal or minimal differences in male and female involvement in these activities. This seems to be the case in the majority of practices ranked by the respondents at either very high or high levels of concern. For most of these practices, either a roughly equal involvement of men and women or some other factor made the issue of gender involvement less important. Thus, in condemning the use of steel-jawed leghold traps - ranked as the most morally objectionable practice in the entire list - males and females are equally concerned by the sheer cruelty of the practice; that the relatively small number of trappers is predominantly male is of little importance.

Nor does gender involvement appear to be the most important factor in the relatively low condemnation of the commercial use of wildlife (ranked 14) or the raising of cattle on open ranges (ranked 20). In Australia at least, these practices are viewed as relatively benign, often carried out as small-scale, family enterprises in contrast to the industrialized mass production of animal products in factory farming. Even in raising animals in feedlots (ranked 12), the most important factor in shaping attitudes concerns the purpose of intensive farming - the production and consumption of meat. The ASIS questionnaire revealed much ambivalence about this. Both male and female respondents saw meat eating (ranked 18) as only slightly more objectionable than containing animals in zoos (ranked 19). Because the sampled men and women consume meat equally, though perhaps not in the same quantities, we can expect that attitudes toward industries involving pig production (ranked 2), battery hens (ranked 4), and the live sheep trade (ranked 5) will share the same fate as raising cattle in feedlots. The equal numbers of males and females involved in the consumptive side outweigh the gender imbalance in the productive side of these industries. Similarly, for using animals in cosmetic/beauty product experiments and for fur coats the consumptive outweighs or equals the productive so that both males and females are equally involved in these activities.

For the purpose breeding of animals for research (ranked 9) and the use of unclaimed dogs in experiments (ranked 7) the respondents’ convergence of attitudes calls for different explanations. One only can speculate that males and females equally see the use of unclaimed dogs as morally reprehensible
because they associate dogs with companion animals. For purpose-bred animals, it may be that the gender involvement is about equal because both female animal technicians and male scientists perform this practice.

In the practices for which there are convergences of attitudes from the respondents, the relevance of gender involvement is either minimal or outweighed by some other factor. A strong male involvement and an almost complete absence of females characterize the seven practices in which there is divergence of attitudes between the sexes.

Conclusion

I have tried to show in this paper that women have high standing in the animal protection movement because of their long-standing commitment to animals and deep involvement in animal issues. By focusing on activism within the animal movement, the paper reveals much more convergence (80%) than divergence (20%) of attitudes and actions by male and female animal protectors. This ideological consensus reflects the high standing of women as activists and advocates in the animal movement. It means that women’s ideas are the prevailing ideas of the movement. Issues of divergence results indicate that stronger female opposition to hunting and allegedly cruel practices - steeple/jump horse racing, experiments on animals, and the commercial exploitation of wildlife - is contingent on early socialization, gendered work and leisure patterns, affinity with companion animals, ambivalence about science, and a history of opposition to animal abuse by generations of female activists and animal advocates. Outside the feminist and women’s movements, it is rare to find a social movement in which the standing of women - their gendered experiences, their issues, and their roles - eclipses those of their male colleagues. Much more than in the environmental movement, animal protection remains a bastion of female activism and advocacy. Unlike previous generations of activists, today’s female animal protectors are seen as an asset in the animal protection cause, and their standing in the movement is increasingly reflected in leadership positions and decision making.

Note

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