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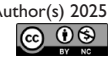

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Vegan sociology: An introduction and review

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Abstract

Veganism is a political movement, philosophy, and critical theory that problematizes humanity's oppression of other animals and, by extension, the strained relationship between animal-based food systems, climate change, and public health. These areas (food, health, justice, power, and inequality) fit securely within the jurisdiction of sociology, but the discipline has remained conspicuously silent on veganism until only recently. Over the past decade, the subfield of vegan sociology has emerged to address this gap, but in doing so, it has had to contend with entrenched structures of professionalization that continue to devalue and stigmatize more-than-human sociological analyses. This article introduces vegan sociology through a thematic literature review as a more species equitable practice, outlining its principles, goals, key research, and debates. Vegan sociology can be understood as a scholar-activist project that, in serving other animals, envisions that a fairer multispecies society is possible. It is delineated from neighboring disciplines with its emphasis on nonhuman liberation and intersectional justice, its structural consciousness (including a robust criticism of capitalism), and the methodological inclusion of other animals as relevant and protected subjects.

Keywords

Animals and society, critical animal studies, critical sociology, vegan sociology, veganism

Introduction: veganism rising

An ethical philosophy and political practice formed in the 19th century, substantiated in the 20th century, and popularized in the 21st century, veganism (or what might be called 'pure vegetarianism') critiques hierarchical and oppressive human relationships with

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other animals and advances a multispecies future in which species difference is celebrated and accommodated rather than weaponized for human benefit (Giraud, 2021a). Veganism involves the avoidance of animal product consumption, 'as far as is possible and practicable' (Vegan Society, n.d.), but this consumer behavior is contextualized within a variety of ideological motivations, including interest in nonhuman liberation, environmental sustainability, community resilience, and personal wellness at the individual, community, or institutional level (Griffin, 2017; Jannsen et al., 2016; Truath et al., 2022). As a social phenomenon, veganism could be understood as a lifestyle or cultural orientation (Parkinson et al., 2019), but its potential to radically restructure human relationships with nature and other animals also identifies it as a political movement (Dickstein et al., 2020; Grünhage and Reuter, 2021; Kalte, 2020).

However, veganism might be interpreted, it is gaining traction. As of this writing, between 1% and 3% of national populaces in the Global North identify as vegan (Vegan Society, 2023). Plant-based consumption and concern for more-than-human animals, incidentally, have long been observed by the global majority, but these have been diminished by colonization, industrialization, and Western corporate influence (Deckha, 2020; Spencer, 1993). Veganism as an organized cultural and political movement formed at the turn of the 20th century in response to these deleterious processes. It aims to reconnect humanity with nature, offer solidarity to other animals, and improve the health of both human and nonhuman populations (Melsa [formerly Cole], 2014). Following more than a century of advocacy, it had proven its staying power. In January 2021 at the height of COVID-19, a record 500,000 pledgers signed up for the Veganuary thirty-day transition program based in Britain, an increase of 100,000 from the year prior (Veganuary, 2021). By 2024, the campaign had globalized, and 25 million people were estimated to have tried veganism in January (Veganuary, 2024). The United Nations, meanwhile, declared 2021 the 'International Year of Fruits and Vegetables' to raise awareness to healthy, sustainable plant-based diets (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United States, 2020). As each year bests the last in record temperature extremes, scientific attention to the environmental (and affordable) benefits of vegan food systems has grown as well (Scarborough et al., 2023; Springman et al., 2023). Several universities in the UK, responding to their own faculty-led research in climate change and eager to own leadership over the sustainability agenda and cater to mounting student pressure are particularly notable, having begun a transition to plant-based catering (Krattenmacher et al., 2023). These advancements have been achieved in spite of considerable university greenwashing and structural laggardness given neoliberal institutional restructuring (O'Neill and Sinden, 2021).

Veganism can therefore be understood as a diet, a lifestyle, a political position, a cultural phenomenon, but also, for the purposes of this article, as a structural critique and theory for peaceful conflict resolution, multispecies coexistence, and environmental resiliency. As it reaches a cultural tipping point and draws the attention of critical social theorists, veganism might stimulate the sociological imagination in a number of ways given its potential to reinterpret and transform humanity's material relationship with food, the environment, and other animals. Yet, conventional sociology has remained conspicuously silent on these possibilities. Even groundbreaking publications in the interdisciplinary subfield of Critical Animal Studies (CAS) that urge sociology to broaden its

scope of inquiry to include other animals have tended to stop short of examining veganism (Beaman and Strumos, 2023; Carter and Charles, 2018; Cudworth, 2011; Hobson-West, 2007; Irvine, 2023; Peggs, 2012; Taylor, 2013; Whitley et al., 2024; York and Longo, 2016). Likewise, sociological plant studies as introduced by Ergas and York (2021: 4) is borne of multispecies sociology and aims to examine the 'various, dynamic, and complex relationships of human societies with plants' but avoids a consideration of veganism. Presumably, aligning critical theory and sociological evidence with prescriptions for consumptive change and political action is too radical a reach. Indeed, Peggs (2013) has analyzed the extent to which Nonhuman Animal[1] issues are considered in sociological journals, finding evidence of persistent marginalization. These difficulties create what Glasser and Roy (2014: 90) describe as an 'ivory trap' as scholars 'may be hesitant to push intellectual and institutional barriers for fear of losing professional respect or employment'.

As mentioned, there have been efforts to champion other-than-human animals as sociologically relevant (Cherry, 2021; Cudworth, 2015; Cudworth et al., 2021; Guenther, 2024; Pelikšienė, 2023), and some leading sociological scholars in the subfield of Animals and Society have called for a more substantive engagement. Taylor and Sutton (2018), for instance, have called for an 'emancipatory' multispecies sociology, one that not only includes other animals, but also identifies and resists humanity's predominantly oppressive relationship to them. As is typical of the existing literature, they make little mention of veganism, but their argument is certainly vegan in sentiment. As a critical theory, subculture, and political protest, veganism still wants for examination as both a sociological perspective and subject of study and will only continue to grow in relevance as the ill-effects of Western foodways, zoonotic diseases, climate change, and concerns over the treatment of other animals seriously call into question oppressive consumption practices and humanity's deteriorated relationship with the natural world. Sociology must rise to meet these challenges.

Vegan sociology is introduced here as a sociological branch that radically reimagines human-nonhuman relationships, envisioning a possibility for a just and equitable multispecies society. More than this, it is also a radical critique of sociology itself, challenging its manifest exclusion of other animals as appropriate and relevant subjects of study. This article also aims to understand this exclusion, examining contributions in sociological critical animal theory to illustrate how this sociology's steadfast anthropocentrism is bound in politics of institutional power. Notably, disciplinary boundary-maintenance, the veneration of biased Western Enlightenment values in scientific methods, and the encroachment of capitalist interests in a rapidly neoliberalizing higher education industry seem to be contributing to this institutionalized anthropocentrism. Critical sociology has challenged the white centrism, androcentrism, and ethnocentrism that an unreflexive sociology can perpetuate, warning that scientific analyses and resultant knowledge exchanges will lack in reliability and validity (Bourdieu, 2004; Burawoy, 2021; DeVault, 1996). Multispecies sociology, such as that aforementioned, also interrogates the shortcomings of anthropocentrism, not just for nonhuman species, but also for marginalized humans whose life chances are linked to that of other animals. Vegan sociology is part of this dialogue, arguing that institutional barriers that bind sociology to human-centrism must be acknowledged *and resisted* to achieve the uncompromised

inclusion of more-than-human species in theory and praxis *with a clear applicability to their collective liberation*. With respect to current academic trends in boundary-resistant interdisciplinary knowledge production, it remains in conversation with a number of neighboring fields (namely, CAS, ecofeminism, vegan geography, and vegan criminology) but does so with the aim of championing the merits of sociology and carving dedicated space for sociological theory and research. This article thus presents vegan sociology as a 21st-century response to 20th-century processes of professionalization in sociology, one that resists the deradicalization of Nonhuman Animal liberation politics in the academy and, in line with Taylor and Sutton's (2018) call, demands research that supports multispecies solidary and emancipation.

Sociology's institutionalized speciesism

The formation of sociology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was a vulnerable point at which the fledgling social sciences were demarcating themselves from more established natural sciences with an emphasis on abstract symbolism, culture, social constructions, and human exceptionalism (Hawthorn, 1976; Peggs, 2012). To the latter point, the belief that humans are cognitively unique justified the development of *social* research as a specialized area of scientific investigation. Early sociologists, such as Spencer and Durkheim, often adapted natural science to the study of society, emphasizing its organic, cooperative structure. The first president of the American Sociological Association (ASA), too, favored a functionalist perspective: 'Sociology shows us that human institutions constitute the structures, organs, and organic parts of society, and that they are not independent, but are connected into one great system' (Ward, 1907: 584). These themes of natural cooperation and coexistence were not thought to extend to other species, however, under the presumption that complex cognitive capabilities are unique to humans. Some sympathetic sociologists have suggested that Mead's assumption that other animals could not understand abstract thought or symbolism became an impenetrable rationale for prioritizing the human experience in sociology (Carter and Charles, 2018; Peggs, 2012). Similarly, Durkheim's interest in evolution's impact on society coupled with humanity's supposedly unique capacity for culture alienated other animals from sociological inquiry (Tuomivaara, 2019). This was seemingly in spite of his study of Nonhuman Animal social organization in the development of his work on social division and cohesion (Rosa and Richter, 2008).

Of relevance, stereotypes that inform this exclusion have informed sociological biases against other 'lesser' groups. Assumptions of white male superiority, for instance, have centered the white male perspective in sociological research to the exclusion of women and people of color as well (Andersen, 1988). Likewise, the engaged work of feminist founders such as Addams – scholars who merged rigorous sociological analysis with cultural sensitivity and charitable intervention – remains marginalized in the sociological canon (Schneiderhan, 2011). Framed as more sentimental than scientific, the derision of research that holds relevance beyond the immediate interests of the dominant class has proved a significant barrier for much of the discipline's history. Bierstedt (1960), a mid-20th-century vice president of the ASA, urged against the rising emphasis on empiricism, a rigid focus that threatened to undermine the theoretical and imaginative

capacities of sociological thought. Many in the sociological canon have since urged for scientific reflexivity (Bourdieu, 2004; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2005; Burawoy, 2021; Weber, 2011), but with regard to Nonhuman Animals, calls for theoretical courageousness and methodological caution have remained largely unheeded (Peggs, 2014). Most sociologists consider only the human experience, thereby replicating the socially constructed dualisms between humans and 'nature', 'civilization' and 'wilderness'.

Animals and society

Speciesism is more or less institutionalized in sociology, but this is not to say that there have been no practitioners in resistance. Peggs (2013), for instance, has admonished sociology for its persistent marginalization of Nonhuman Animals and those who studied them. 'It is sobering to think', she retorts, 'that sociology could be upholding rather than questioning hierarchies of oppressions' (Peggs, 2013: 603). The privileges associated with human identity, she furthers, likely discourage sociologists from a meaningful engagement across species. Indeed, animal-centric topics are overwhelmingly ignored as inconsequential to 'real' sociological study (Carter and Charles, 2018). Historically, the subfield of Animals and Society emerged to address this gap in multispecies research. The subfield has maintained a conservative position in the years since its inception, largely abandoning the radical intentions of many of its founders in an effort to protect its existence in an otherwise human supremacist discipline. A disproportionate amount of research conducted within the subfield of Animals and Society, for example, examines human-'pet' relationships (Charles and Davies, 2011; Irvine, 2013) and Nonhuman Animal abuse in situations of (anthropocentric) interpersonal violence (Arluke, 2009; Beirne, 2004; Fitzgerald et al., 2009; Tiplady et al., 2018). Society & Animals (n.d.), the field's flagship journal, 'explores relationships between human and non-human animals, the experiences of nonhuman animals, and the ways in which nonhuman animals figure in human lives from a variety of perspectives', and claims to deal with issues of cruelty, welfare, 'uses of animals in popular culture', and even 'the animal rights movement' (no page), but does not specify veganism or liberation.

As a radical social science with roots in CAS, vegan sociology is less interested in the use value of Nonhuman Animals. It focuses instead on sociology's considerable potential to improve humanity's understanding of and quality of life for Nonhuman Animals on the basis of their inherent value. Yet, due to the persistent marginalization of 'animal sociology', it has heretofore been the case that any and all sociological research related to Nonhuman Animals has been subsumed under 'Animals and Society'. First published in 1996 by sociologists Arluke et al. (2022), *Regarding Animals* stands as one of the first sociological texts on the study of humans and other animals; it exemplifies the tendency toward conservatism. 'Rather than adding to a litany of examples or decrying its moral and emotional consequences', they explain of their position, 'we want to understand it sociologically' (Arluke et al., 2022: 4).

The presumption that the sociologist can (and should) act as a neutral, non-participatory observer reflects the legacy of early American sociology that trumpeted an apolitical and ahistorical approach to research as a bargaining for legitimacy within the university (Bierstedt, 1960; Hawthorn, 1976). Professionalization, the bureaucratization

of sociology as an exclusive profession with specific disciplinary parameters, shared values, and occupational expectation distinguishes the practitioner into an impersonal, scientific role and shapes the discipline as an increasingly conservative institution comprised of diffused responsibility and increasing specialization. Sociological professionalization was clearly observable at the turn of the 20th century, a move predicted by Weber given the encroaching influence of rationalization (Ritzer, 1975). A century later, researchers continue to observe the considerable barriers that professionalization creates for applied sociology (Janowitz, 1972). Feminists, for one, have pointed to the androcentrism of professionalization that disadvantages women's contributions such that female sociologists have had to make use of extra-institutional, less conventional outlets for theoretical engagement (Clark and Dandrea, 2010). Sociology's considerable reliance on the university system has created a deep vulnerability, particularly as higher education contends with financial instability in an era of increased austerity (Black, 1999). Fraser and Taylor (2016) have pointed to the encroaching neoliberalization of the university system as reinforcing social inequalities by shaping research and knowledge production to support industrial desires and delegitimize liberatory sociologies. Another consequence of this neoliberalized institutional space, they warn, is the reliance on safe, conservative research that pushes few, if any, political boundaries and certainly avoids radical theory and calls for societal restructuring which may be interpreted as threatening to existing power structures.

A case in point is the Animals and Society section of the ASA, which has consistently ranked as one of the lowest (if not *the* lowest) populated section of 53 total sections (Wrenn, 2020). The ASA generally requires at least 300 members to maintain section status, and the Animals and Society section has generally hovered between 100 and 200, necessitating a formal plea by the section chair every 3 years to solicit institutional permission to remain active. Letters from the Chair in almost every section newsletter emphasize the need to protect and grow membership. With such a tentative hold on in the profession, it is perhaps understandable that political positioning with regard to veganism and speciesism would be suppressed. The wider societal derogation of veganism (Melsa [formerly Cole] and Morgan, 2011; Greenebaum, 2012) would certainly complicate its scholarly inclusion. Indeed, vegan sociologists have documented this hostility to vegan research in academia (Fraser and Taylor, 2016; Stewart and Melsa [formerly Cole], 2021).

Again, this is misaligned with the severity of the problems associated with speciesism and the urgency with which social change actors are pursuing their resolution. Outside of the academy, the Animals & Society Institute (ASI), the preeminent scholar-activist charity and publisher of *Society & Animals* journal, ceased operation in 2024 citing the lack of appeal that its scholarly programs held for 'traditional supporters' (i.e. liberation-oriented advocacy charities) 'who understandably demand the immediate end to practices involving the exploitation of animals' (Animals Society and Institute (ASI), 2024: np). Although the institute suggests that this disengagement reflected frustration with the slowness of social change, the demise of the ASI demonstrates first that, outside the academy, the lack of attention to radical anti-speciesist politics presents a vulnerability. Second, it is a stark warning that the reliance on outside funding, whether provided by the university or nonprofit sector, cannot be ignored. Striking a balance between

scientific integrity and financial realities in determining the trajectory of research will undoubtedly prove difficult for vegan sociologists regardless of message or channel.

Defining vegan sociology

Although the accommodation of CAS liberation politics has been tenuous in Animals and Society, the emancipatory imperative of vegan sociology can find parallel in many founding tenets of Western sociology. Marx, of course, critiqued the capitalist system to both understand and liberate the working classes (Celikates, 2012), while DuBois (Burawoy, 2021), Wells (Allen, 2021), and Addams (Scimecca and Goodwin, 2003), to name just a few, engaged sociological research to serve minoritized communities. Mills (1959) famously promoted the 'promise' of a sociological imagination, one that he believed would unveil to practitioners the reaches of social connectivity and allow for a more reflexive and informed navigation of their lives. Subsequently, vegan sociology easily aligns with the discipline's humanist tradition of engaging science for the betterment of society. For that matter, with its interest in both individual political behavior and larger political, corporate, and environmental contexts, it also speaks to the fundamental sociological interest in transcending the social science divide between agency and structure in achieving this social change. The trouble lies, however, in disciplinary politics of inclusion.

Some sociologists have not been content with the conservatism of sociological animal studies, contributing instead to the lively interdisciplinary field of CAS. As a field that prioritizes the disruption of human supremacism and Nonhuman Animal oppression, CAS is usually inclusive of a liberatory, vegan imperative (Nocella et al., 2014). CAS encompasses a diversity of perspectives from across the social sciences, humanities, and grassroots advocacy, but it has been advanced considerably by the efforts of sociologists. Four key introductory texts, *Human and Other Animals* (Carter and Charles, 2011), *Defining Critical Animal Studies* (Nocella et al., 2014), *The Rise of Critical Animal Studies* (Taylor and Twine, 2015), and *Critical Animal Studies* (Matsuoka and Sorenson, 2018) were edited, for instance, by sociologists. The boundary between vegan sociology and CAS, it must be conceded, is thus not hard and fast. Indeed, the liberatory imperative and attention to intersectionality and capitalism that prevails in foundational CAS literature speaks directly to vegan sociological aims. The requisite interdisciplinary approach of CAS, however, has tended to obscure sociological contributions in its ambitious inclusiveness. Vegan sociology thus embraces the radical aims of CAS with an explicitly sociological framework, as it is argued that several characteristics of sociological thought remain under-utilized.

Critical empiricism

Both veganism and sociology were substantively developed in 19th-century Britain, Europe, and the United States as means of bringing into fruition the aims of the Enlightenment project through the scientific investigation of the social world and with the intent of facilitating political action and positive societal development (Melsa [formerly Cole], 2014; Hawthorn, 1976). Vegan sociology subsequently unites these two

efforts, interrogating institutionalized human supremacy, systematic species-based discrimination, and exploitative consumption patterns, what is known sociologically as *speciesism* (Nibert, 2003). Although speciesism to date has rarely been explicitly discussed in sociology (and veganism as an important counterforce has been engaged even less), vegan sociology is critical in that it centers the nonhuman experience in theory, methodology, and analysis. Cherry (2021) has suggested that vegan sociology is, most notably, an empirical study of vegan topics with emphasis on the empirical element given the philosophical emphasis that had characterized the vegan discourse hitherto fore. But many social sciences also offer empiricism; what makes sociology different?

Structure

Emphasizing the role of capitalism, power, systems, structures, and institutions, sociology is somewhat unique among the sciences (Giddens, 2014). Vegan sociology aligns with these emphases, exploring the role of human violence against other animals in large-scale and increasingly global catastrophes including but not limited to climate change, pandemics, chronic diet- and lifestyle-related illnesses, and nonhuman suffering in ever-expanding agricultural systems. In prioritizing an examination of structural-level relations, vegan sociology offers a level of analysis often missed by neighboring disciplines such as psychology and anthropology which tend to focus on individual- and cultural-level mechanisms. For the purposes of understanding human-nonhuman relations, non-sociological analyses may overlook overarching influences such as capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy, and settler-colonialism. To that end, vegan sociologists have also examined the role of major agents of socialization, such as parents, school, and media, in reproducing social relations (Melsa [formerly Cole] and Stewart, 2014).

Structure was a particular preoccupation of Marx, who identified the economy as determining societal ordering. Marx's rejection of multispecies experiences is unfortunate, but his work continues to inform novel reinterpretations with modern relevance to other animals (Foster, 2020; Foster and Clark, 2018; Wadiwel, 2023). Being as it is rooted in conflict theory, vegan sociology typically engages a robust critique of capitalism in the Marxist tradition, recognizing that consumption practices are shaped by the state, industries, and elites to the effect of creating considerable social inequality and suffering. Torres (2007), for instance, points to the commodification of Nonhuman Animals as particularly poignant under this capitalist system, advocating an anarchic alternative as key to achieving a vegan society. Nibert (2002, 2013) who adopts a more socialist position, notes how capitalism (and, to a lesser extent, previous modes of production such as 'hunting', agricultural, war-based, and colonial economies) has manufactured and benefited from the oppression of humans and other animals. Capitalism is also identified as the primary source and reproducer of modern speciesism by Wadiwel (2015, 2023) whereby the state expedites speciesism in pursuit of continuous economic growth and, by extension, full sovereignty. Wadiwel identifies this state relationship with other animals as a persistent 'war on animals' whereby all manner of injustices are routinely enacted on Nonhuman Animals in pursuit of 'maximal human utility' (Wadiwel, 2015: 101).

Even celebrated 'civilized' and 'multicultural' nation-states such as Canada cannot escape this legacy given their roots in colonial conquest and state-sanctioned exploitation of Indigenous communities and non-Western regions (Sorenson, 2010). Indeed, colonialism has effectively entrenched powerful ideological and economic paths of dependency in its host countries which have persisted well into the 'post-colonial' nation-state system. The installation of speciesist industrial practices and the animalization of human *and* nonhuman colonial subjects have proven essential in the historical and contemporary maintenance of unequal colonial relations (Atsuoko and Sorenson, 2021; Nibert, 2013). Vegan sociology's theory of capitalism and colonialism as fundamental to the symbolic making of the 'human', the reification of human supremacist social hierarchies, and the global spread of ideologically-bound structures of oppression and environmental destruction, I would argue, renders it distinctive as a structurally aware social science and potent emancipatory sociology.

Emancipation

If vegan sociology can be identified by its empirical leanings and structural focus, what distinguishes it from other sociologies? Cherry (2021) has indicated that vegan studies in sociology tend to gravitate toward symbolic interactionism, culture, and social movements. Vegan sociology, she notes, also pulls heavily from environmental sociology and the sociology of food. But vegan sociology cannot be reduced to the study of identity, culture, social movements, environmentalism, or food. It is not a conglomeration of complementary sociological inquiries. Instead, it is a conflict theory, a sociological perspective, a guiding ethic, and prescription for social change. Cherry's (2021: 157) survey of vegan research in sociology has suggested that the subfield could do more to investigate social inequalities (a core interest in the sociological discipline). Perhaps the key difference between 'vegan studies in sociology' and *vegan sociology* lies in this observation: vegan studies can, but do not always, examine social inequalities, whereas the study of social inequality is the *raison d'être* of vegan sociology. Indeed, as a feminist-influenced conflict theory, vegan sociology characteristically accounts for social oppressions as deeply intertwined and fundamentally rooted in oppressive power relations.

As a discipline that arose in response to modernization and its many unexpected consequences, it is argued that sociology is especially well positioned to address the concerns of the vegan project. 'Sociology', Soler-Gallart (2019: 187) explains, 'was born with the democratic revolutions, to develop scientific knowledge that can help people govern themselves towards a more just and equal society'. This revolutionary spirit reflected a larger trend in the West as community leaders were also seeking to understand the dramatic societal shifts that modernization had wrought and worked to improve the status of women, people of color, people in poverty, colonized people, and other marginalized groups. These efforts of the Progressive Era focused on working and living conditions, sanitation, nutrition, food quality and security, and liberatory alternatives to oppressive social arrangements. Less remembered are the heavy contributions of vegan pioneers who sought to address all these issues, not only for humans, but for fellow animals as well. When The Vegan Society formed in the midst of World War II, its founders envisioned veganism as a promising solution to many sufferings arising with modernity

including sickness, famine, war, environmental destruction, and alienation from nature and other animals (Melsa [formerly Cole], 2014). In the aftermath of the West's messy transition into modernity, the possibility of alleviating suffering and eradicating inequality took prominence again, and veganism was believed to be central to that goal. 'Who can say that the purpose of our existence is not to test our reaction to the cruel conditions that surround us, in qualification for higher responsibilities later?' questions co-founder Donald Watson (1944: 2) in an early issue of *The Vegan*, the society's periodical. He continues: 'Certainly we can claim that a truly humane order of society can be built only by those who have the vision of it, and who accept cruelty as a personal challenge' (Watson, 1944: 2). In the United States, the American Vegan Society formed in 1960 on similar terms, drawing explicitly on Eastern principles of ahimsa and reverence for life (Dinshah and Dinshah, 2022).

Intersectionality

Vegan sociology is a relational theory, having emerged in response to human supremacy and nonhuman exclusion; however, the intersectional nature of speciesism tends to predominate in vegan sociological inquiry given its feminist legacy, and less frequently are Nonhuman Animals examined on their own terms as is more typical of non-academic activist spaces. This intersectional trend probably reflects the multivariable sociological epistemology (Davis, 1994). It also derives from ecofeminist theorizing of the late 20th century, like that of Greta Gaard (1993), which would inform both CAS and vegan feminist thinking. Indeed, some found ecofeminist thinkers can be counted as vegan sociologists, notably Marti Kheel (2007) and Erika Cudworth (2005). Scholar activists have contended that there is also the ethical and scientific imperative to recognize a diversity of perspectives regarding veganism, speciesism, food, and justice. Vegan sociological research has found that some vegans of color do find it difficult to align their vegan practice with racial and ethnic cultural expectations (Greenebaum, 2018). Some vegan scholars, furthermore, have decentered other animals, noting that veganism for Black and Brown folks is most importantly a form of human colonial resistance (Deckha, 2020; Harper, 2010a). Food justice, of which veganism is a vital component, is also key to the health and survival of marginalized and racialized human communities (Murphy and Mook, 2021). Indeed, vegan sociology advances a spatial critique that recognizes disparities in reliable access to food, especially for lower classed groups, racialized peoples, and inhabitants of the developing world (Asher and Cherry, 2015; Harper, 2010b). Furthermore, with animal-based agriculture constituting one of the world's most dangerous and polluting industries, it also draws attention to race and class inequalities related to job safety, environmental quality, and exposure to the risks of climate change (Bristow and Fitzgerald, 2011; Fitzgerald and Pellow, 2014; Koop-Monteiro et al., 2023).

Vegan sociology also contends with the politics of animality in the reproduction of inequality. Racism, like sexism, has been established across many centuries through processes of animalization that are often facilitated by settler-colonialism (authors research here, Nibert, 2013). That is, racialized persons are often demarked by the dominant class as cognitively, physically, and evolutionarily inferior and less-than-human, a measure of otherness that is characteristically aggravated by the installation of speciesist economic

systems (such as 'fur'-trading or animal-based agriculture) that normalize discrimination of this kind and uproot Indigenous ways of living. Racial minorities have some awareness of this shared oppression, with some research demonstrating that more radical, social justice vegan protest frames resonate more with multiply marginalized groups, especially women of color (Brockett, 2024). Racial distinction is manufactured by the dominant class with reference to supposed cognitive deficiencies, physical differences, lack of cleanliness, association with other animals, and general wildness or savagery (DeMello, 2017). As with gender, racial difference has historically been conceptualized as natural, biological, and evolutionarily determined. Subsequently, it has been posited that racism cannot be dismantled so long as the category of 'animal' (with its connotations of inferiority, otherness, and unbelonging) goes unchallenged (Cudworth and Hobden, 2021; Wrenn, 2021).

Vegan sociology recognizes that animality interacts with gender constructions as well. The idealized human is not only culturally envisioned as white and European, but also male. Here, women are lumped together with Nonhuman Animals and all things earthly, beastly, and wild, to the effect of justifying efforts to conquer, tame, domesticate, and exploit to the benefit of 'civilized' human society (Cudworth, 2011; Hobson-West, 2007; Kheel, 2007). The aim in examining oppression through a multispecies lens is not to erase difference or to subsume all variety of experiences into something universal (which almost inevitably defaults to the experience of the more privileged in the group) (Zinn, 1996). Instead, the goal is to delink socially constructed differences from access to resources and life chances. To that end, there has also been vegan sociological research emerging in transgender studies that further supports the CAS argument for holistic liberation in identifying similarities across institutional control, medical experimentation, and linguistic oppression (Whitley, 2024). Research in vegan masculinities reveals the influence of patriarchy over these linked oppressions, with vegan men facing difficulties in role negotiation when eschewing the domination of feminized nonhuman bodies (Aavik, 2023). Vegan sociology, then, may prioritize a radical inquiry of the nonhuman condition, but in doing so, it necessarily adopts a wider analysis of power and inequality.

Nature politics

These social constructions also inform environmental relations. Speciesist logics that categorize women, people of color, Nonhuman Animals, and others as animalistic and evolutionarily underdeveloped tend to, by extension, position them as inhabitants of 'wild' nature, not altogether suited to life in civilized spaces (Kheel, 2007). Arguably, environmental sociology did the most to open up the discipline to acknowledging the more-than-human as a legitimate area of study. Locked in its commitment to the humanist tradition of advancing human society in a heavily industrialized culture, sociology was slow to recognize the influence of these 'external' environmental influences (Catton and Dunlap, 1978). As York summarizes, species-inclusive sociology and environmental sociology have a 'related ethical imperative', that being a 'critique of the anthropocentrism common in the larger discipline and a recognition that environmental destruction threatens the survival of many species including humans' (York, 2014: 4–5). Both areas

of inquiry, furthermore, 'ask questions about animals and nature as well as about the meanings humans attach to animals and nature' (York, 2014: 5). Drawing on the principles of CAS, Pellow (2014) has argued that an anti-capitalist, anarchic goal for intersectional liberation offers many points for collaboration between environmental and Nonhuman Animal rights efforts, but Fitzgerald's (2018) work has amply illustrated how the two subfields and their associated social movements remain at odds. Environmental sociology publications, furthermore, systematically obfuscate the relationship between animal-based agriculture and climate change (Twine, 2020).

These examinations are not only abstract and symbolic: vegan sociology is a materialist endeavor, speaking to politics of sustainability, risk, and resilience. Climate change is one of the most encompassing and disastrous array of catastrophes in the planet's history, but these catastrophes are unevenly distributed. Sociologists have long urged an intersectional conceptualization of environmental degradation (Pellow, 2018) given the disproportionate impacts on those in the Global South (Roberts and Parks, 2002; Urry, 2009), particularly women, children, those with disabilities, and impoverished persons. Vegan sociology expands these areas of concern to include free-living Nonhuman Animals harmed by habitat destruction as well as those harmed and killed in the speciesist foodways largely responsible for the crisis (Koop-Monteiro et al., 2023; Pendergrast, 2020). Vegan sociology also calls for a symbolic analysis of how Western, capitalist, and colonial constructions of development and growth, in tandem with the perceived exploitability and object-status of nature and Nonhuman Animals, feeds a culture of climate abuse and ecocide (Browne and Sutton, 2024).

Multispecies methodology

While environmental sociology is very much relevant to the development of vegan sociology, feminist sociology perhaps more fundamentally informs it in theory *and* in practice.[2] Indeed, methodologically, it borrows heavily from feminism and envisions research as a vehicle of liberation. Unlike posthumanism (Hobson-West, 2007), the vegan critique is not simply interested in troubling human exceptionalism or the definitional boundaries of what constitutes the human. It is abolitionist in nature, and subsequently, it is action oriented (Giraud, 2021b). Feminist methodology is especially attuned to the finer points of ethical practice as it recognizes science's potentiality to cause harm or legitimate systems of oppression (DeVault, 1996; Hammersley, 1992). In practice, this usually entails the integration of research transparency and a reflexive interrogation of the self-as-researcher (Letherby, 2011). Likewise, vegan sociological methods call for explicit recognition of species in research design, a decentering of the human experience, and an account for researcher bias given inherent human privilege and anthropocentric worldview any sociologist will harbor (Jones and Taylor, 2023).

In response to these particular research challenges, sociologists have been exploring the ways in which Nonhuman Animals might be meaningfully and respectfully incorporated. Nonhuman Animals, here, are recognized as individual social agents with their own subjective experiences (Colombino and Bruckner, 2023), and vegan sociology seeks to embed both compassion and respect for other animals in study design in recognition of nonhuman subjectivity. This acknowledgment is pivotal given the historical treatment

of Nonhuman Animals as research objects (Birke, 1994). Sutton (2021), for instance, has experimented with both physically and rhetorically including Nonhuman Animals in qualitative interviews with their cohabitating humans. Consistent with the activist orientation of the discipline and feminist methodological aims, Sutton points to the reciprocal nature of research methodology as a means of both understanding *and* shaping the social world. That is, vegan sociological methodologies do not simply record data but can actively resist speciesism as well. Methods, she explains, 'can, and should, be used politically as a tool to pursue critical posthumanist futures that challenge our current way of coexisting with 'other' animals' (Sutton, 2021: 387).

Conclusion

Vegan sociology ultimately serves as a provocation of societal and disciplinary norms that disadvantage fellow animals and minoritized humans whose life chances are linked to speciesism. It is an ethically driven, empirically oriented theoretical perspective and methodology that critically identifies and deconstructs dysfunctional and unequal social arrangements to achieve fairness and flourishing for all sentient beings. Despite calls for value-neutrality to increase sociology's resonance and political applicability (Gouldner, 1971; Holmwood, 2007), it remains the case that a substantive portion of sociological work embraces the normative and aims to be emancipatory. 'Morality and science', Burawoy (2022) implores, 'are inextricably bound together' (p. 3). Accepting this reality of sociological work will thus necessitate a reconceptualization of sociology to recognize Nonhuman Animals as sentient subjects worthy of research.

More than 70 billion nonhuman lives are violently extinguished by humans each year to satisfy various unnecessary human penchants, particularly economic interests (the number is easily in the trillions if fishes and crustaceans were to be included in the body count).[3] The commodity status of most Nonhuman Animals has rendered them unsensed in most cultural contexts, the social sciences being no exception. Early efforts to delineate sociology, for that matter, have excluded fellow animals as subjects of study, initiating a long legacy of anthropocentrism in the discipline. To overcome these constraints, sociology must first disengage from the societal and institutional stigmatization of veganism and, second, begin to problematize human supremacy and violence against fellow animals. The discipline thus finds itself at an impasse: it can continue to lag behind in its commitment to an outdated anthropocentric research agenda that willfully ignores key intersections between humans and other animals in the face of so many social problems emanating from speciesism, or it can embrace its emancipatory heritage and rise to the challenges presented by speciesism with scientific integrity, reflexivity, and a commitment to social justice for all persons, regardless of biological, cognitive, and physical difference.

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Notes

1. I intentionally capitalize this term as a political measure to draw the reader's attention to the shared oppression of more-than-human animals as a distinct minority group. Sociologists have been particularly critical of euphemistic and diminishing language that replicates speciesism (Nibert, 2002, Nguyen, 2019, 2013). There is not much consensus on the most effective means of revising language to respect nonhuman personhood and decenter humans, but some of these suggestions will also be incorporated in this article, including 'nonhuman persons', 'more-than-human animals', and 'other animals'.
2. Marti Kheel, prolific scholar-activist and co-founder of Feminists for Animal Rights, held a degree in sociology and taught sociology at the community college level (California Community Colleges, 1982).
3. The Food and Agriculture Organization measures aquatic animals by weight, not by head as is the case with land animals.

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Résumé

Le véganisme est un mouvement politique, une philosophie et une théorie critique qui remet en question l'oppression des autres animaux par les humains et, par extension, les tensions entre des systèmes alimentaires basés sur les produits d'origine animale, le changement climatique et la santé publique. Quoique ces domaines – alimentation, santé, justice, pouvoir et inégalités – relèvent clairement de la sociologie, cette discipline est jusqu'à récemment restée remarquablement silencieuse sur le véganisme. Au cours de la dernière décennie, le nouveau sous-domaine de la sociologie végane est venu combler cette lacune, mais ce faisant, s'est trouvé aux prises avec des structures de professionnalisation bien établies qui continuent de dévaloriser et de stigmatiser les analyses sociologiques du « monde plus qu'humain ». À travers une revue thématique de la littérature, cet article présente la sociologie végane comme une pratique plus équitable envers les espèces, en soulignant ses principes, ses objectifs, ses recherches clés et ses débats. La sociologie végane peut être comprise comme un projet de recherche militante qui, au service des autres animaux, envisage la possibilité d'une société multi-espèces plus juste. Cette sociologie se distingue des disciplines voisines par l'importance qu'elle accorde à la libération non humaine et à la justice intersectionnelle,

sa conscience structurelle (y compris une critique vigoureuse du capitalisme) et son inclusion méthodologique des autres animaux en tant que sujets importants et protégés.

Mots-clés
animaux et société, études critiques sur les animaux, sociologie critique, sociologie végane, véganisme

Resumen
El veganismo es un movimiento político, una filosofía y una teoría crítica que problematiza la opresión de la humanidad hacia otros animales y, por extensión, la tensa relación entre los sistemas alimentarios de origen animal, el cambio climático y la salud pública. Estas áreas (alimentación, salud, justicia, poder y desigualdad) encajan claramente dentro del ámbito de la sociología, pero la disciplina ha permanecido notoriamente silenciosa respecto al veganismo hasta hace poco. Durante la última década, el subcampo de la sociología vegana ha surgido para abordar esta brecha, pero al hacerlo, ha tenido que lidiar con estructuras arraigadas de profesionalización que continúan devaluando y estigmatizando los análisis sociológicos más allá de lo humano. A través de una revisión temática de la literatura, este artículo presenta la sociología vegana como una práctica más equitativa para las especies, describiendo sus principios, objetivos, investigaciones clave y debates. La sociología vegana puede entenderse como un proyecto académico-activista que, al servir a otros animales, visualiza la posibilidad de una sociedad multi-especie más justa. Se distingue de las disciplinas vecinas por su énfasis en la liberación no humana y la justicia interseccional, su conciencia estructural (incluida una sólida crítica del capitalismo) y la inclusión metodológica de otros animales como sujetos relevantes y protegidos.

Palabras clave
animales y sociedad, estudios críticos sobre animales, sociología crítica, sociología vegana, veganismo