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A Feminist Analysis of Animal and Human Oppression: Intersectionality Among Species

By Kelsey Brown

Feminism in many settings emphasizes the importance of intersectionality and the idea that under a system of institutionalized oppression, all oppressions are connected. In America, we live in a capitalist society built off of greed, imperialism, colonialism, and the disenfranchisement of marginalized groups to benefit privileged groups. Because of this, feminism is incompatible with capitalism. However, animal agriculture is one of the cruelest forms of capitalistic exploitation and it is rarely discussed among feminists. The consumption and exploitation of non-human animals has many similarities to historical and current human exploitation, but it remains justified by society because we view animals as inferior and subordinate. The same justifications for oppressing animals have been used to justify human slavery, genocide, and other forms of social injustices. Throughout this paper, I discuss the ways in which animal exploitation is a feminist issue. Social inequalities among humans show many of the same patterns that animals face, and one of these similarities is the fact that animal suffering is gendered. Female animals are disproportionately exploited because of their reproductive ability. They are forced to reproduce in order to continue the cycle of violence and human profit, and millions of animals suffer every year because of this. I will also discuss the ways in which our language creates a foundation for sexism and speciesism. The way we talk about women and animals are often the same, and words that degrade women and animals are used interchangeably, allowing those with privilege to maintain power over those groups. To demonstrate this sense of power, I use the example of hunters and the links between hunting and predatory heterosexuality. Many hunters experience sexual arousal and entitlement to the bodies of those they can prey upon. In this sense, human women and animals face a similar relationship

with people who embody this type of masculinity. Lastly, I will discuss how animal agriculture and consumption serves to further oppress marginalized groups. Environmental racism leaves many communities of color in areas that are heavily contaminated with animal waste, and they have little to no access to healthy food. People are dying of heart disease at alarming rates, largely due to the consumption of animal products. While people of color are often placed in these dangerous areas, communities indigenous to the rainforest are being displaced because of cattle ranch expansion. Not only is the environment being demolished, people are dying from displacement. Feminism and other social justice movements should be deeply concerned about the ways in which animals are treated and the unsustainability of our agricultural system as it stands. Animal agriculture thrives off of ownership, greed, slavery, and the mass genocide of non-human animals. A feminism that tolerates this kind of injustice is a feminism that tolerates sexism, racism, and classism. Animals need to be included in liberation discourses, because humans are animals and our oppressions cannot be separated from each other.

In the United States alone, over 29 million cows are slaughtered each year alongside 110 million pigs, 9 billion chickens, and countless other animals that are needlessly killed for human consumption. It is no secret anymore that these non-human animals are kept in torturous conditions, yet millions choose to turn their head away from the suffering that comes with their meals. Cows are branded with hot irons, dehorned, and male cows are castrated. Pigs have their tails and front teeth cut with pliers, and male chicks are immediately ground up upon hatching. All of these acts are committed without painkillers of any kind.¹ So much of the cruelty done to non-human animals is gendered. Female cows, pigs, chickens, sheep, and more are exploited for their reproductive ability. Dairy cows are repeatedly and forcefully impregnated in order to

¹ “Animals Used for Food,” *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals*, 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-food/>

increase milk production. They are separated from their baby almost immediately. Ninety-seven percent of newborn calves are removed from their mothers within the first 12 hours.² Cows, like most other animals, form strong maternal bonds with their young and they will cry out for days after their calf is stolen from them. They are forced to go through this process for three to five years until their body is too exhausted to produce any more milk or offspring, and they are sent to slaughter. The natural lifespan of a cow is 20-25 years, but male cows only live for one year before being slaughtered.³ Like cows, pigs are exploited for their ability to reproduce. They are forced to live in gestation crates that are too small to turn around in, and they are impregnated over and over again until their bodies give out and are sent to slaughter. Egg laying hens are kept in small confines and often trample each other to death. Their lifespan in factory farms is about 18 months, but their natural lifespan is 8-12 years. The concept of “free-range” is a marketing strategy used to make consumers feel less guilty for their actions, but free-range means very little to the chickens that suffer. The U.S. Department of Agriculture requires that “free-range” chickens have access to outdoor foraging areas, but they never specify how much time or space the chickens are given.⁴ Regardless of how these non-human animals are raised, they all experience the same fate in the slaughterhouse, and are killed many years before their natural lifespan.

There are many reasons to choose a plant-based lifestyle. Before delving into issues concerning the intersections among speciesism, sexism, and racism, I need to cover why a plant-

² “Colostrum Feeding and Management on U.S. Dairy Operations, 1991-2007,” *USDA*, Feb. 2009.

³ “Meet Your Meat,” *Sustainable Table*, accessed Feb. 2016. Retrieved from <https://sustainabletable.org.au/Hungryforinfo/Factory-farming/tabid/106/Default.aspx>

⁴ “The Organic and ‘Free-Range’ Myths,” *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals*, 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-food/free-range-organic-meat-myths/>

based diet is healthy and complete. A vegan diet can offer every nutrient humans need to thrive. Almost every food contains protein, and most meat-eating Americans consume too much protein in a day.⁵ Despite the dominant narrative in America, plant-based diets are high in fiber, complex carbohydrates, calcium, and iron.⁶ As Americans, we often hear that we must eat meat and drink cow's milk in order to be healthy. All mammals drink their mother's milk, and we are the only species that regularly consumes another species' milk. Cow's milk is for baby cows; it gives them the nutrients to grow into one of the largest land mammals on the planet. How could that possibly be beneficial for humans who grow into animals about the tenth of the size of cows? Diets high in animal flesh and byproducts increase levels of low-density lipoproteins (LDL) otherwise known as "bad" cholesterol. Our bodies make all of the high-density lipoproteins (HDL), or "good" cholesterol we need, but we get excesses of LDL from animal sources such as meat and dairy, since there are no plant foods that contain this type of cholesterol.⁷ When humans eat foods that are high in this "bad" cholesterol, it starts to build up on their artery walls, which causes them to harden and narrow. This slows down blood flow to the heart resulting in a condition known as atherosclerosis, and is a leading cause of heart disease.⁸ Heart disease is the number one cause of death of all Americans, and diet plays a huge role in our susceptibility to

⁵ "The Protein Myth," *Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine*, accessed Feb. 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.pcrm.org/health/diets/vsk/vegetarian-starter-kit-protein>

⁶ "A Vegan's Guide to Good Nutrition," *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals*, accessed Feb. 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.peta.org/living/food/vegetarian-101/vegans-guide-good-nutrition/>

⁷ "About Cholesterol," *American Heart Association*, April 2014. Retrieved from http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/Cholesterol/AboutCholesterol/About-Cholesterol_UCM_001220_Article.jsp#.VtKOzXQrIy4

⁸ "Diseases Linked to High Cholesterol," *The Cleveland Clinic Foundation*, 2016. Retrieved from https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases_conditions/hic_Cholesterol/hic_Diseases_Linked_to_High_Cholesterol

it.⁹ People who follow a plant-based diet are 2.5 times less likely to have heart attacks, strokes, bypass surgery, and angioplasty.¹⁰ Research is beginning to prove how unnecessary and even detrimental animal-based foods are to human health. However, not everyone can access a plant-based diet, and my goal in this paper is not to shame anyone who eats animals, but to shed light on the ways in which animal exploitation, sexism, and racism are inextricably linked, as well as the inaccessibility of health food for poor communities, especially poor women of color.

Men in positions of power have always exploited women for their reproductive ability. Women, especially black women have historically been used to bear children and nurse the children of others. Michelle R. Loyd compared the treatment of black female slaves to the way factory farmed animals are currently treated: “In the U.S., how we treat food animals is reminiscent of how people of color were treated... in order to justify the brutality of slavery, the oppressors deemed Africans as less-than-human and undeserving of decent housing, education, food, healthcare, justice or respect. African women who were enslaved were often used as breeders for a new crop of slaves.”¹¹ Black women breastfed white women’s children, and were forced to give birth to children who would ultimately become slaves themselves. Currently, sex is still seen as a means of reproduction for women. Women are not allowed to be sexual, and while sex is supposed to be pleasurable for men, women are expected to just “take it” without any regard to their own desires. Currently, women don’t experience as much condemnation as they did in the past for sexual behavior, but the mainstream society still holds those outdated and

⁹ “Leading Causes of Death,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Sept. 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/leading-causes-of-death.htm>

¹⁰ “Animal Products are Linked to Heart Disease,” *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals*, accessed Feb. 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-food/heart-disease/>

¹¹ Michelle R. Loyd, “Thinking and Eating at the Same Time: Reflections of a Sistah Vegan” from *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society*, ed., A. Breeze Harper (New York: Lantern Books, 2010) page 4-5.

sexist beliefs. Women have historically been accused of being hysterical and irrational during menstruation, and their anatomy has been used as an excuse to exclude and oppress them. The famous example of King Henry VIII and all six of his wives who never bore a son shows how women have been viewed as machines for reproduction. Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, Anne of Cleves, Catherine Howard, and Catherine Parr were either divorced, murdered at the hands of their husband, or died in childbirth and never had a son to please King Henry VIII. The way that human women are treated as machines is exactly the way that non-human female animals are treated in the farming industry. Mary Spears' poem "Eyes of the Dead" shows the haunting juxtaposition between the way dairy cows and how black female slaves were treated:

How many of my ancestors

Were treated like today's farm animals?

How many of us look the other way?

When I hear of calves

Being taken from their mothers

To be sold as veal

I can hear the wailing voices of mothers

Crying for their babies

As the slave master takes them away.

The mother cow breastfeeds the human race

My ancestors breastfed the white race

So when I looked into those stunned eyes today

No one could have said to me,

“What’s the big deal?” “It’s just an animal.”

I could have remembered a time

*When someone might have said the same about me.*¹²

While it cannot be argued that dairy cows go through the same thing that black female slaves went through, the comparisons are uncanny. Dairy cows feel pain, happiness, sadness, and a full range of other emotions that we typically view as “human.” Female animals are by far the most exploited because of their reproductive abilities. Most male animals used for food are killed when they are very young, while female animals like goats, pigs, and cows endure years confined and forcefully milked and impregnated until they become too exhausted and are slaughtered. White men are capitalizing on female animal’s reproductive abilities, and they suffer solely because they were born female and are therefore “useful.” Dairy cows endure mechanized milking for ten months out of the year. They are hooked up to machines for hours on end every single day and they produce an unnatural amount of milk because they are genetically manipulated with hormones. Individual cows now produce 30 tons of milk annually, which is enough to feed ten calves. One in five dairy cows secretes pus from her udders due to this unnatural process that serves only to profit the corporations that sell her milk.¹³ The United States allows a maximum of 750,000 somatic cells per milliliter in cow’s milk. “Somatic cells” in milk are a scientific way of saying that there is pus in the milk. When all of the herd’s milk is combined, a cell count of 700,000 or more per milliliter indicates that at least two thirds of the

¹² Mary Spears, “Eyes of the Dead” from *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society*, ed., A. Breeze Harper (New York: Lantern Books, 2010) page 81. Italics mine.

¹³ Lisa Kemmerer, “Appendix: Factory Farming and Females,” *Sister Species* (University of Illinois Press, 2011) page 174.

cows in the herd are suffering from a painful udder infection due to over-milking.¹⁴ Dairy cows go through many painful procedures throughout their short lives, all to raise profits. They are painfully artificially inseminated only two months after giving birth, and they are forced to suffer alone through the health complications that inevitably happen to most of them.

Breeding domesticated animals has proven to be cruel and unnecessary. Humans have bred cats and dogs to have specific features that have ultimately made these animals suffer. Many dogs have breathing problems and bone problems because of human intervention. English bulldogs have been bred in such a way that their bodies are at an unnatural angle and they can't mate without one human holding the female's legs apart and another human forcing the male on top of her. Most bulldogs can't give birth naturally, and so 95% of bulldogs have a caesarian section.¹⁵ People who breed dogs are profiting off of their female dog's reproductive system. There are so many domesticated animals that humans have bred that end up in shelters, and even more end up homeless and dead. Countless animals suffer, just as women have, solely because someone in power found their reproductive system profitable.

Our language and the way we speak about non-human animals and women are what allow us to oppress those groups. We use phrases like "beef up" to talk about improving something, as well as "the meat of the matter" to refer to the most important part of something. Meat is viewed as something for men to eat. Restaurants are constantly advertising steak and hamburgers to men, while salads and other plant-based dishes are advertised to women. Vegetables are seen as passive and dull. To vegetate is to passively exist, and being feminine

¹⁴ "Cow's Milk: A Cruel and Unhealthy Product," *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals*, accessed Feb. 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-food/animals-used-food-factsheets/cows-milk-cruel-unhealthy-product/>

¹⁵ "What Unethical Breeding Has Done to Bulldogs," *PuppyLeaks*, accessed March. 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.puppyleaks.com/done-bulldogs/>

describes a passive existence in our patriarchal society. Our language is male centered as well as human centered. It favors men to women, just as it favors humans to non-human animals. We justify exploiting other species by naming them “animals” without recognizing that we are also animals. We view them as inferior and we feel entitled to dominate them, just as we have done to marginalized human groups.¹⁶ We use words and phrases to target women such as “catty, shrew, cow, bitch, old crow, queen bee, sow,”¹⁷ and while these words degrade women, we are also degrading the animals being named. When a woman is called a “dog” she is being called out on her obligation to be attractive, and is being called ugly. Therefore, all dogs are merged into the category of “ugly” when a woman is referred to as such.¹⁸ Most of the words used to degrade women are words that refer to domesticated animals, as Dunayer states, “those bred for service to humans.”¹⁹ Animals bred for service to humans are also typically female animals exploited for reproductive purposes. The word “cow” might be used to describe a woman as fat and ugly, but using the word “bull” does not connote the same thing. This is because we exploit dairy cows for their milk and offspring. They are constantly swollen because they are kept in a perpetual state of pregnancy and lactation. “Cow verbally abuses women by identifying them with the abused cow.”²⁰ “Bitch” might be one of the most common words used to describe women. The word “bitch” comes from terminology used to describe a female dog that will/has produced a litter. The word has become derogatory because “breeders... have always treated the female dog with

¹⁶ Joan Dunayer, “Sexist Words, Speciesist Roots,” *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*, ed., Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan (Duke University Press, 1995), page 11.

¹⁷ Ibid., page 12.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., page 14.

contempt – as a means to a useful, profitable, prestigious litter.”²¹ Repeated impregnation is not enjoyable for any species, and the female dog will often struggle and try to escape the situation that they are forced into. This language of domesticated animals is offensive to women because it implies that they are “mindless servants” but this is a very speciesist attitude. Dunayer recognizes that “without speciesism, domesticated animals would not be regarded as mindless; without speciesism, they would not be forced into servitude. Exploiting the hen for her eggs, the cow for her milk, and the bitch for her ability to produce litters invites demeaning female-specific metaphors.”²² Exploiting non-human animals serves to exploit women. Some phrases used to describe women might be seen as compliments such as “foxy lady” but it has very problematic implications. Hunters view the fox as “an object of pursuit – a future trophy or pelt.”²³ This implies that women are desirable prey to be captured, rather than human beings. Our language surrounding animals also serves to further oppress marginalized groups. Black folks have often been referred to as “monkeys” in order to describe them as “primitive” or “animalistic.”²⁴ We also use words that oppress those with mental disabilities such as “birdbrain,” “crazy as a loon,” or “looney-bin.”²⁵ These words and phrases are inaccurate descriptions of humans, as well as the animals being referred to. “Chickens are not “chicken.” Throughout the centuries, observers have reported the hen’s fierceness in defending her chicks.”²⁶ Likewise, pigs are not naturally filthy animals. If given the choice, pigs will not defecate in the same place that they eat and sleep. All of this language allows humans to distance

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., page 15.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., page 16-17.

²⁵ Ibid., page 17.

²⁶ Ibid.

themselves from animals and justify their abuse, meanwhile using that same language to degrade women and other oppressed groups.

Carol J. Adams uses the example of “absent referents” to describe the way we use language surrounding animals and women. An absent referent is a word or a phrase that refers to something without actually naming it for what it literally is. An example that Adams uses to describe an absent referent is how a woman who was victimized by male violence might say she “feels like a piece of meat.” Meat in this context does not refer to actual dead animal flesh that is to be consumed, but it describes how she felt: consumed and objectified. Thus, “the animals have become absent referents, whose fate is transmuted into a metaphor for someone else’s existence or fate.”²⁷ Adams describes three ways in which animals become absent referents: the first is through meat eating, because they are literally absent since they are dead and their corpse is being consumed. Butchering is unique to humans, and when carnivorous animals kill and consume their prey, “they see and hear their victims before they eat them. There is no absent referent, only a dead one.”²⁸ The second way is “definitional” because when we eat them, we change the way we talk about them. Instead of saying “baby calf” we say “veal.” Instead of saying, “pig” we say “ham,” “bacon,” or “pork.” By using these words, it is easy to forget that there is a dead animal on our plate that once had a life, thoughts, feelings, and companions. Lastly, animals become absent referents metaphorically. Like the example I used from Adams above, animals become metaphors for describing²⁹ human experiences such as feeling like a “piece of meat,” or calling a woman a “cow.” Like animals, women are also often absent referents in our language. Dead bodies are absent from our language about meat, and in

²⁷ Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd, 1990) page 21.

²⁸ Ibid., page 30.

²⁹ Ibid., page 21.

descriptions of cultural violence, women are the absent referent. When we say things like, “the rape of the earth,” we are talking about exploiting the earth for its resources, but women become the absent referent because rape is largely committed against women. The phrase “rape of the earth” draws upon women’s experiences in a metaphorical way without referring to women themselves.³⁰ In our society we often speak symbolically because literal terms make people upset or uncomfortable. If a server at a restaurant offers someone a piece of the anemic corpse of a 16-week-old calf, they would most likely decline. However, if they offer them the finest veal on the market, they are likely to consider it because the dead baby calf is absent from their language. Adams argues that we live in a society that masks reality and states that the phrase “meat is murder” “speaks the literal truth and calls one away from symbolic thinking. Part of the battle of being heard as a vegetarian is being heard about literal matters in a society that favors symbolic thinking.”³¹ When people prefer to think symbolically, it makes them feel like their violent actions are actually non-violent and justified. If meat is viewed as something to be consumed, and women are viewed as meat, it aids in justifying sexual violence against women, as well as violence against non-human animals. Adams points out that when vegans and vegetarians make an attempt to “disarm the dominant control of language, they are seen as picky, particular, embittered, self-righteous, confrontative, and especially sentimental.”³² This applies to anyone who is a part of marginalized groups or speaks out on behalf of oppressed groups. Feminists are often brushed off as “bra burners” and “man haters.” People of color and especially the relevant Black Lives Matter movement are seen as “racist against whites” and are told “if you don’t want cops to kill you, don’t break the law” or “all lives matter.” Queer and Trans folks are often told

³⁰ Ibid., page 22.

³¹ Ibid., page 56.

³² Ibid., page 59-60.

that using their correct names pronouns is “grammatically incorrect” or that it’s “too much work to remember.” All of these responses ignore the violence that these groups endure on a regular basis. Those with privilege trivialize oppressed groups, and a feminist society cannot exist if we continue to exploit animals and justify their oppression using language. Animal oppression is interconnected with human oppression, and marginalized groups cannot continue to use language that keeps humans in a position of power. It maintains a hierarchy that is incompatible with feminism and other social justice movements.

Masculinity in our society heavily contributes to the sexism and speciesism that intersect today. Privileged white men are in a position of power over human women as well as non-human animals, and part of this is due to men’s historical and modern ties to hunting. “The oppression of humans and other animals has always been deeply entangled. When humans began routinely to hunt large animals – primarily a male pursuit – they could do so only by creating weapons. Those who were most successful at such killing exerted growing power; social hierarchy began to emerge and the status of women began to decline.”³³ Animal-based societies gave men power, while plant-based societies proved to be more egalitarian. Animal-based societies like ours are typically sex segregated in work. Women tend to do more work but it is less valued and they are seen as the main caregiver of children. Other factors that favor men in this type of society are the worshipping of male Gods, and patrilineality.³⁴ Within animal-based societies, nonviolent essential practices such as gathering, planting, cooking, and teaching do not enhance one’s status as a man. “The struggle for animal liberation is also a struggle against a manhood defined by

³³ David Nibert, “Foreward,” *Defining Critical Animal Studies: An Intersectional Social Justice Approach for Liberation*, ed., Anthony J. Nocella II, John Sorenson, Kim Socha, and Atsuko Matsuoka (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc. 2014), page IV.

³⁴ Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, page 14.

sexism.”³⁵ Hunting is largely a masculine activity, and instead of being viewed as unnecessary cruelty or even murder, it is excused as a “sport” and is even considered a sexual pursuit for many men. Hunters refer to their prey in terms of “sex and affection.”³⁶ Hunters talk about passion, intimacy, courting, falling in love, and the word “romance” is one of the most common words used to refer to hunting. “Hunting and predatory heterosexuality are instances of romance because each is simultaneously sexual and an expression of power.”³⁷ Brian Luke argues that rape culture and hunting culture are related when he states,

A comparison with theories of rape may be useful here. Rape is often imaged as the deviant behavior of a sexually frustrated man overwhelmed by a chance encounter with a provocative woman. To sustain this image, certain facts must be ignored: that most rapes are premeditated, that rapists usually know those they attack, that rapes are often carried out by men in groups, that rapists are typically not degenerates or sexual deviants, that more than half of college age men surveyed said they would force sex on a woman if they were sure they could get away with it. The last two facts suggest that rape is hardly a deviant activity, yet to acknowledge this conclusion, just as to acknowledge the normalcy of men’s erotic enjoyment of hunting, suggests the threatening possibility that there is something seriously wrong with normal manhood in this culture.³⁸

The way that these men talk about pursuing women is equally as problematic as the way they talk about pursuing animals. Similar to the way that too many men view women as prey to be captured and controlled, the eroticism of hunting is in the pursuit as well as the climactic event

³⁵ Ibid., page 23.

³⁶ Brian Luke, *Brutal: Manhood and the Exploitation of Animals* (University of Illinois Press, 2007), page 82.

³⁷ Ibid., page 83-84.

³⁸ Ibid., page 87.

when the animal is finally killed. “Through killing, the hunter gains ultimate control over the animal. In particular, he may now do something to wild animals that they generally do not permit while alive: he may touch them.”³⁹ A poem by Ted Nugent describes the erotic tension built through hunting:

Last season’s hunts are still vivid in the mind, but it does little to satisfy the craving.

It’s the preparation, the thought process that goes into anticipating the hunt that’s the most exciting part.

Their grace and beauty... was the essence of the thrill of the hunt. My binoculars revealed their delicate features.

A certain light, cream-colored sheep was calling me.

Him, I wanted.

I had worked myself up to a nervous wreck waiting to shoot.

The heated excitement of the shot.

The shaft was in and out... complete penetration.

I was hot... I was on fire.

Oh yeah, a lot of blood here, I’m getting excited now... there’s no telling what I might do... I’m excited... I am high.

The kill is climactic.

I felt good all over.

It satiated a built-up frustration.

*A serious still hunt/stalking maneuver... can gratifyingly drain a guy. I like that.*⁴⁰

³⁹ Ibid., page 91.

⁴⁰ Ibid., page 89.

As described by Ted Nugent, there is a phallocentric sexuality felt by hunters. Their weapon becomes an extension of their body that penetrates an animal and ultimately kills them. “Hunters take great pleasure in stroking the fur, antlers, and horns of the large mammals they kill. The erotic nature of this touching is evident from the sensual way that it is done, from the quiet, admiring comments about the animal’s beauty that frequently accompany the stroking...”⁴¹ Words that describe hunting frequently describe the pursuit for a female lover. Brian Luke gives the example of two nineteenth-century romantic verses:

*O let my love sing like a thrush
In the greenwood’s blossoming crown
And leap away like a fleeing roe
So that I can hunt it down.
Man is the hunter; woman is his game
The sleek and shining creature of the chase,
We hunt them for the beauty of their skins;
They love us for it and we ride them down.*⁴²

Women and animals are objectified for male pleasure, and violence is normalized and eroticized. Instead of respecting women and animals as equals, they are subordinated and men exert power and control over them. It is no surprise that animals are the most exploited beings on the planet and that sexual harassment and assault remains a normalcy in so many women’s lives.

Hunters have been called out by many animal rights activist and even people who continue to eat meat because hunting is not necessary due to all the food available to us at grocery stores. Hunters typically respond with two arguments: hunting is natural, and hunting

⁴¹ Ibid., page 91.

⁴² Ibid., page 99.

helps limit the overpopulation of species. Both of these arguments are invalid. Many people believe it is natural for humans to consume animal flesh, but humans do not function as natural predators in any way. “No other species intensively confines animals to the point that their waste products become ecological hazards, as we do in factory farming. No other species has institutionalized the display of other animals for their amusement, as we do in zoos, circuses, rodeos, and seaparks. Even in hunting, the type of exploitation most often defended as parts of the natural order, men are not functioning as truly natural predators do.”⁴³ Humans have mostly herbivorous traits. We must use weapons to kill animals, unlike natural predators who use their teeth and claws. There are vast differences between carnivores/omnivores and humans, proving that humans are designed to mostly eat plants. Carnivores have traits such as a wide mouth, jaws made for slicing, large stomachs for gorging, highly acidic stomachs, and short intestines. Their acidic stomach aids in breaking down proteins as well as bacteria that colonizes in decaying flesh, which would make humans sick if they didn’t cook the meat. Herbivores including humans have fleshy lips, small mouths, mobile jaws for chewing, small stomachs, long small intestines to break down carbohydrates, and human stomachs are only moderately acidic.⁴⁴ While humans are able to hunt animals with the use of weapons and ways to cook the flesh, it doesn’t mean it is a natural process. The differences between humans and true carnivores nullify the argument that hunting is natural. When hunters make the argument that they are preventing overpopulation and potential starvation among species, they don’t realize that they are actually supporting overpopulation. Wildlife managers often feed deer, manipulate flora, and decimate their natural

⁴³ Ibid., 68.

⁴⁴ Sherry F. Colb, *Mind if I Order the Cheeseburger? And Other Questions People Ask Vegans* (Lantern Books, 2013).

predators in order to attract more hunters to their park.⁴⁵ If humans didn't interfere with deer populations, overpopulation would most likely never become an issue. When hunters use this argument they often speak of themselves as saviors, saving deer from suffering due to starvation. If they really care about "saving" deer from starving to death, why do they typically kill the healthy adults who would likely survive harsh winters?⁴⁶ Overpopulation is rarely an issue in nature. Species of animals have unique means of regulating their population. Natural predators aid in regulating prey populations, but predator animals do not have the same method of regulating their populations. "If species in general need to be preyed upon in order not to overpopulate, then so do predatory species... the fact that we do not see these infinite regresses in nature shows that successful species that are not preyed upon develop some other means for regulating their population levels."⁴⁷ Arguments that support hunting have proven to be insufficient. Hunting is a cruel and unnecessary "sport" that only serves to exploit animals and provides a narrative used to objectify human women. Hunting gives men an analogy for how they can hunt and obtain women, but animals and women do not exist for that purpose, just as humans do not exist to regulate other species' populations.

Animal oppression and racism are institutionalized and persist in many different intersecting ways. Environmental racism has been a huge factor in America's history, and it continues on today with animal agriculture causing health disparities in communities of color and regions of poverty. One historical example of environmental racism includes the Indian Removal Act of 1830. Indigenous communities were forced to move west and leave their land for the white colonists. These white colonists used this newly vacant land to expand ranching and

⁴⁵ Brian Luke, *Brutal*, page 69.

⁴⁶ Ibid., page 68-69.

⁴⁷ Ibid. page 63.

livestock farming.⁴⁸ We are repeating history. Due to cattle ranching, “many human communities indigenous to tropical rainforests are starving to death; native rainforest tribes are being wiped.”⁴⁹ Americans are expanding cattle ranching, which is destroying the rainforest as well as displacing indigenous individuals, leaving them with nowhere to go. In a local context, environmental racism is an insidious part of our society. Factory farms and slaughterhouses are often placed in communities of color as well as regions of poverty, and food deserts are commonly found in those communities as well. Not only are economical and environmental hazards destroying the health of marginalized groups, but soul food practices are also causing health disparities, especially among black females.⁵⁰ Soul food dates back to the enslavement of Africans when they were given the undesirable and leftover cuts of meat. While food can be an important part of one’s culture, soul food has oppressive roots. Carol Adams argues that, “racism is perpetuated each time meat is thought to be the best protein source. The emphasis on the nutritional strengths of animal protein distorts the dietary history of most cultures in which complete protein dishes were made of vegetables and grains.”⁵¹ Meat as a protein reinforces a hierarchy of race, class, and sex, because wealthy white men have historically had the privilege and power to consume expensive food.⁵² Marginalized groups do not always have the privilege to choose what they eat, and they also don’t get to choose where they live. “Environmental justice activists recognize that both class and race are integrally related to the distribution of

⁴⁸ David Nibert, *Animal Oppression and Human Violence: Domesecration, Capitalism, and Global Conflict* (Columbia University Press, 2013) page 83.

⁴⁹ A. Breeze Harper, “Social Justice Beliefs and Addiction to Uncompassionate Consumption” *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society* ed., A. Breeze Harper (Lantern Books, 2010) page 27-28.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, page xix.

⁵¹ Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, page 10.

⁵² *Ibid.*, page 8.

environmental hazards...”⁵³ Slaughterhouses, confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs), and factory farms are disproportionately located in communities of color. Industrial pig farms heavily contaminate the air and water due to manure lagoons that hold the waste from thousands of pigs raised for food. Residents of these areas complain of respiratory problems, irritation in the eyes, nose, and throat, depression, and fatigue.⁵⁴ These locations are also usually food deserts, making healthy food completely inaccessible. In these food deserts, grocery stores are often several miles away or more. People who don’t have access to a vehicle might not be able to go to a grocery store at all. Wealthy neighborhoods have an average of three times as many supermarkets as poor neighborhoods, and white neighborhoods have four times as many supermarkets as black neighborhoods.⁵⁵ Food deserts usually contain many fast food chains and convenience stores that sell processed foods. People who live in these communities are forced to consume unhealthy amounts of processed foods, and are exposed to environmental factors that pollute their bodies. Marginalized groups suffer because of animal agriculture and are denied the right to make autonomous decisions that could change their health, the environment, and the welfare of non-human animals.

“The animals of this world exist for their own reasons. They were not made for humans any more than black people were made for whites, or women for men.”⁵⁶ Humans are destroying the world due to cruel and irresponsible consumption. Until animals are given the autonomy that humans have stolen, all oppressed groups will remain oppressed. Our justifications for exploiting

⁵³ S.A. Mann, “Pioneers of U.S. Ecofeminism and Environmental Justice. *Feminist Formations* 23(2), 2011, page 2.

⁵⁴ “Environmental Racism” *Food Empowerment Project*, 2016, accessed March 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.foodispower.org/environmental-racism/>

⁵⁵ “Food Deserts” *Food Empowerment Project*, 2016, accessed March 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.foodispower.org/food-deserts/>

⁵⁶ Alice Walker, “Foreward” *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* by Marjorie Spiegel (Mirror Books, 1997).

animals allow us to justify other forms of violence against humans. It is our responsibility as humans to create a new language that dismantles the dominant narrative as we work to unlearn the oppressive behavior engrained within us. How can feminists justify the exploitation of animals when the exact same institutions are working to oppress marginalized human groups? How can we separate a cow's pain from human pain? Feminism and animal rights activism are coexisting worlds, both working tirelessly to end violence against vulnerable and otherwise marginalized groups. If those worlds can merge together, a future of liberation is possible.