

Should We Eat Our Research Subjects?

Advocacy and Animal Studies

Yvette Watt

University of Tasmania

Siobhan O’Sullivan

University of New South Wales

Fiona Probyn-Rapsey

University of Wollongong

Abstract: *This paper examines data from a survey of Animal Studies scholars undertaken by the authors in 2015. While the survey was broad ranging, this paper focuses on three interconnected elements; the respondents’ opinions on what role they think the field should play in regard to animal advocacy, their personal commitment to animal advocacy, and how their attitudes toward advocacy in the field differ depending on their dietary habits. While the vast majority of respondents believe that the field should demonstrate a commitment to animal wellbeing, our findings suggest that respondents’ level of commitment to animal advocacy is informed by whether they choose to eat animal products or not. We conclude that this reflects the breadth of the field as well as the fact that it is a relatively new area of study and as such is still evolving. In relation to the question posed in the title of this article – should we eat our research subjects? – it seems that Animal Studies scholars are divided on that issue; some do, some don’t, but for those who do eat their research subjects there is a degree of unease about the contradictions that such a choice implies.*

Keywords: *Animal Studies, Animal Advocacy, Veganism.*

Introduction

When the first member of the Australian Animal Justice Party, Mark Pearson, elected to an Australian parliament, was outed as a fish-eater, his response to having ‘strayed’ from party policy was to argue that ‘the people in the party have forgiven me and now we have to get on and do the work for animals’ (Nicholls). Pearson’s actions and the ensuing public furore raised many questions, not the least being whether or not one can be an advocate for animals while also eating them. While his own political party and Pearson’s critics would suggest that the answer is ‘no’, one cannot advocate for animals and also eat them, his own actions indicate that this apparent contradiction is anything but straightforward. The idea that one can effectively advocate for animals while also eating them is a point of contention within the animal protection movement, but is also pertinent to Animal Studies, as we will demonstrate through analysis of data from a survey of Animal Studies scholars undertaken by the authors in 2015.

While the survey was broad ranging, this paper focuses on three interconnected elements: the respondents’ opinions on what role they think the field should play in regard to animal advocacy, their personal commitment to animal advocacy, and how their attitudes toward advocacy in the field differ depending on their dietary habits. In order to collect data on these matters the survey asked a number of questions related to the respondents’ attitudes toward animals, their prior involvement in animal advocacy, and whether they feel that Animal Studies should work to improve animal wellbeing. In addition, questions were asked regarding the respondent’s diet (i.e. whether they eat meat and/or fish, are vegetarian or are vegan).

While the vast majority of respondents believe that the field should demonstrate a commitment to animal wellbeing, our findings suggest that respondents’ level of commitment to animal advocacy is strongly related to whether they choose to eat animal products or not. The survey results point to the conflicted status of Animal Studies within the academy, and the resulting tensions that have arisen in the field due to differing attitudes toward the level of political, moral or ethical engagement the field should have. In this paper we concentrate on a comparative analysis between vegans and non-vegans. This comparison is relevant as Animal Studies is an emerging field in which the decision to eat the subjects of their research is a point of tension among animal studies scholars.

Method

The survey was available online for six weeks and was promoted via Animal Studies organisations, such as Animals & Society Institute in the USA, and the Australasian Animal Studies Association (AASA). It was also publicised via social media and private networks, and Animal Studies scholars were encouraged to share the link widely among colleagues. The survey was in English and the recruitment process generated the largest number of responses from North America, Europe and Australasia (see Table 1).

Participants self-selected and no screening question was used. Respondents were encouraged to participate if they self-identified as an ‘Animal Studies Scholar’. This expression incorporates both students and academic staff. There were no limits on participation based on disciplinary affiliation. The survey was completed anonymously and was approved by the University of Sydney’s Human Ethics Committee. The total number of survey respondents was 485 (see Table 1 for select demographic information).

Highest Qualification (n = 482)	Number (n)	Proportion (%)
Undergraduate degree	34	7%
Postgraduate degree	430	89%
Currently enrolled in first degree	7	1%
No higher education completed	10	2%

Region where the respondent normally lives (n = 424)	Number (n)	Proportion (%)
North America	164	39%
Europe	108	25%
Australia/New Zealand/Pacific islands	96	23%
United Kingdom	35	8%
South America	4	1%
Central America	4	1%
India	4	1%
Africa	3	1%
South East Asia	3	1%
Middle East	2	< 1%
Japan	1	< 1%
Gender Identification (n = 401)	Number (n)	Proportion (%)
Woman	268	67%
Man	123	31%
Transgender	10	2%
Age (n = 410)	Number (n)	Proportion (%)
20-25	16	4%
26-35	123	30%
36-45	105	26%
46-55	88	21%
56-65	55	13%
66-75	21	13%
Older than 75	2	< 1%

The survey consisted of 39 questions. The n value for each question varies as the questions were not forced responses, meaning respondents were able to skip questions as they wished. The n value is provided for each specific question under consideration in this paper. Questions were overwhelmingly closed. Some required respondents to choose from a selection of options. Others asked that survey participants respond using a five-point Likert Scale. Four open questions were included. They asked survey respondents things such as ‘what comes to mind when you hear the expression “animal lover”?’ and ‘what has been the most rewarding aspect of working in the field of Animal Studies?’ (see Appendix 1).

We use Chi-squared tests to test for statistical significance. We did this in SPSS. Where the p value is known, it is provided. We tested for statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

Due to the exploratory nature of the survey, in many cases the closed questions allowed respondents to provide further details under the selection ‘other’. As anticipated, the inclusion of the selection ‘other’ resulted in a wide range of responses. But in many cases the response offered was in fact a duplication of the closed options already provided. For example, in relation to a question particularly relevant to the issues under consideration here, when asked ‘how would you describe your dietary habits?’ one closed selection was ‘I eat meat’. In cases where respondents selected ‘other’ and then wrote ‘I eat organic meat (and veg) am actively increasing my veggie food’ or ‘I eat animal products but would rather not’, we manually coded them against ‘I eat meat’ to arrive at a quantitative total. We also used the open responses in a discursive way to aid analysis of the issue.

This paper is focused on six of the survey questions with much other survey data left aside for consideration elsewhere. This is a suitable approach as the survey was wide-ranging, exploratory in nature and not designed to be interpreted as a whole, within a single paper. A full list of the questions asked is available in Appendix 1. The survey included questions such as academic qualifications, research focus, amount of time spent teaching Animal Studies, research network membership, approaches to publishing Animal Studies research, and access to research funding.

A final note on the method, before proceeding to the findings, relates to the use of the expressions ‘vegetarian’, ‘vegan’ and ‘veg*n’, with the latter term being one that is commonly used to denote a group made up of both vegetarians and vegans. While we appreciate that the terms may be contested, in this paper we understand a vegetarian to be ‘a person who does not eat meat (including fowl) or seafood, or products containing these foods’ and that a ‘vegan, or total vegetarian, eating pattern excludes eggs, dairy, and other animal products’. We also acknowledge that within these two groups ‘considerable variation may exist in the extent to which animal products are excluded’ (American Dietetic Association 2009). In this survey we are unable to account for those possible variations, and instead are guided by survey respondents’ dietary self-attribution.

Moreover, according to widely accepted, popular use, the term ‘vegan’, goes beyond diet, to include other ways in which animal products are consumed. For example, a statement on the Vegan Australia website informs visitors that:

Vegans aim for a world without exploitation and so try to avoid as much as possible all goods containing animal products or tested on animals as well as entertainment where animals are used. There are vegan alternatives for nearly all non-vegan goods, such as fur, skin and leather clothes and shoes, wool and beauty products tested on animals.
(Vegan Australia nd)

Given the wide variations between meat eaters, pescetarians, vegetarians and vegans, in order to make the necessary comparisons, and test the data for statistically significant differences, we have decided to group the survey respondents into two groups: vegans, and non-vegans (i.e. those who eat meat, fish, eggs, dairy, wear leather, et cetera). We believe that given the wide variety of approaches one can take to incorporating and excluding animal products from one’s life, the most suitable way to divide respondents, (especially given the need to do so for the purposes of statistical analysis) is into ‘vegans’ and ‘all other survey respondents’. We believe that given the impact that dairy and egg production has on the lives of animals, which should be evident to the majority of Animal Studies scholars, it is more reasonable to group vegetarians with meat eaters, than to group them with vegans.

Finally, while we are using the survey data related to diet as an indicator of the level of commitment to animal advocacy, we acknowledge that there have been some recent arguments raised around considerations of ethical eating being extended to plants (see for example Michael Mardar's work in this area). As the survey does not provide data we can use to test for the respondents' attitudes to ethical eating beyond veganism, and as our concern here is with diet in relation to attitudes toward animals, the discussion and findings do not attempt to draw any conclusions about plants as ethical subjects.

Findings

We asked the Animal Studies scholars who completed the survey 'how would you describe your dietary habits?' The results are available in Table 2. We found that of the 417 people who answered that question, 37 per cent eat meat, 33 per cent are vegan, 21 per cent are vegetarian and 9 per cent are pescetarian. As noted in the method section, to aid interpretation, we consider the remaining survey data via a comparison between the responses offered by vegans versus all other survey respondents. As shown in Table 2, 138 people, or 33 per cent of survey respondents, identify as vegan. That means that a further 67 per cent or 279, do not.

Response (n = 417)	Number (n)	Proportion (%)
I eat meat	154	37%
I am vegan	138	33%
I am a vegetarian	87	21%
I am a Pescetarian (eat fish/seafood)	38	9%

The number of veg*ns (vegetarians and vegans) who participated in the survey is noteworthy as it is a much higher proportion than the rates found among the broader population. For example, a 2015 Vegetarian Resource Group survey concluded that 3.4 per

cent of Americans are veg*n (Stahler), while a Roy Morgan Poll conducted in 2016 assess the proportion of vegetarian Australian adults to be 11 per cent ('The Slow but Steady Rise of Vegetarianism in Australia.'). Yet, as we shall see, when we read the dietary findings in relation to other survey findings, a puzzle soon appears in respect to the 67 per cent of Animal Studies scholars, who choose to consume and wear animal products. That is, what motivates these scholars' involvement in the field, and how do they reconcile their interest in consuming and/or using animal products with other values they hold in relation to the lives of nonhuman animals?

Before moving on, it is worth also noting that the 'other' selection for the question about diet afforded us an instructive insight into the mindset of those who filled out the survey. The use of the 'other' allowed respondents to give more detail on dietary choices. Yet what we found was that many respondents' comments in the 'other' box were defensive, perhaps suggesting that they were cognisant of the potential for their meat eating to be perceived as problematic, at least within the context of a survey of Animal Studies scholars. For example, one respondent commented: "I eat meat" is somewhat blunt ... yes I eat meat but I try and eat as ethically as I can and I make an effort to reduce my meat consumption', while another wrote 'I eat plants too! This defining my diet by meat is not actually helpful. I think one of the solutions to "invasive" species is to eat them'. Others bracket their meat eating by reference to particular kinds of animals they do or do not eat. For example, 'I don't eat mammals' or 'I occasionally eat game meat, meat I know for sure wasn't produced for human pleasure.' Many comments indicate either confusion or obfuscation about the meaning of vegetarianism, as in: 'semi-vegetarian (I eat meat 2 times a week)', while other comments such as 'primarily vegan, but I probably a few times of year I might eat meat or dairy' [sic] indicated uncertainty about ingredients and/or the impossibility of successfully avoiding animal products at all times. That is to say, some sought to point to an inherent wrongness in the question, with reference to the imperfect nature of veganism.

We asked survey participants about their level of interest in animals prior to becoming an Animal Studies scholar, with respondents able to choose between a level of commitment that they considered to be 'very high', 'high', 'medium', 'low', or they could select that they were in fact 'not interested'. The results are available in Table 3. Starting with the results for non-

vegans, 72 per cent of the respondents rated their level of interest as 'high' or 'very high'. On the other hand, 83 per cent of the vegans said that their level of interest was 'high' or 'very high'. We also asked the participants whether they had an active commitment to animal advocacy prior to their interest in Animal Studies. As can be seen in Table 3, there was a big difference in the responses from the vegans and non-vegans, with 79 per cent of vegans reporting that they have an active commitment to animal advocacy prior to their interest in the field, while only 43 per cent of the non-vegans did. Those results are statistically significant.

We asked the survey participants to rank their level of agreement with the statement 'the sort of Animal Studies scholarship I value is committed to improving the lives of animals'. As shown in Table 3, 83 per cent of the vegans and 73 per cent of the non-vegans either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with this statement. Only 7 people overall, or 2 per cent, strongly disagreed. However, when we look only at the data for those who 'strongly agreed' we see a striking and statistically significant difference, with 67 per cent of the vegans strongly agreeing that they value the sort of Animal Studies Scholarship that is committed to improving the lives of animals, while only 34 per cent of the non-vegans strongly agreed with this statement.

To further get a sense of the values Animal Studies scholars feel we should be bringing to the research table, we asked survey participants to respond to the statement 'Animal Studies should have a commitment to animal wellbeing'. Looking at the responses offered by vegan Animal Studies scholars compared to the non-vegan scholars, once again we find a large, statistically significant difference. The vegan respondents strongly agreed with the statement 62 per cent of the time while the non-vegans strongly agreed with the statement at half the rate, of 32 per cent of the time. It is clear from this that while most Animal Studies scholars believe that academics working in the field should have a commitment to animal wellbeing, that feeling is most acute among vegans.

The final question in Table 3 asked whether survey respondents identified as 'animal lovers'. We purposely did not define that expression and in a follow-up question we asked survey participants to tell us what they think that term means. Curiously, here we can see that difference between vegans and non-vegans is less marked, with 76 per cent of non-vegans identified as being an animal lover, but only 62 per cent of the vegans comfortable with that

expression. As noted above, after asking survey participants to answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the question ‘do you identify as an “animal lover”?’ we then asked ‘what comes to mind when you hear the expression “animal lover”?’ A small but representative sample of the 375 open responses we received to the second question are provided below. Despite the fact that 71 per cent of survey respondents overall were willing to classify themselves as an ‘animal lover’, the responses to the open question make it clear that the meaning of that expression is problematic for many Animal Studies scholars.

Close to half of the open responses tended to regard the animal lover concept in primarily positive terms. Examples of those responses include ‘empathy and deep concern for the non-human other’, ‘someone who tries to do the best for animals’, and ‘at a basic level, someone who thinks of animals as minded and worth considering in terms of their individual subjectivity’. Yet despite an array of positive responses to the open question, thirty seven percent of the survey participants chose to problematise the expression “animal lover”. Some respondents pointed to a level of cognitive dissonance encapsulated in the term, with comments such as ‘the average meat eater who keeps pets’, ‘hypocrisy’, and ‘paternalistic affection for domestic pets, yet routine consumption of agricultural animals’. Other responses highlighted the respondents’ discomfort with being seen as an ‘animal lover’ while also working as a scholar, a role that some view as encapsulating a commitment to impartial knowledge. Examples of responses from that group include ‘sounds like a facile phrase that a non-animal lover would apply to undermine an animal scholar’s work’, ‘it is frowned upon by my colleagues’, ‘in terms of animal studies scholarship it is often used to demean the field’ and ‘a problematic term in the academic realm’. A smaller sub-group of respondents associated ‘animal lover’ with the animal rights movement, telling us that the terms means ‘radical, left-wing, zealot’ or ‘radical animal rights groups’. Finally it is worth noting that a small group of around 25 respondents tended towards an overwhelmingly negative interpretation of what an ‘animal lover’ might mean, with one respondent describing it as ‘apolitical, negative, sentiment’ and another as ‘pathetic, apolitical’. In short, the majority of the surveyed scholars consider themselves to be ‘animal lovers’ (albeit ones who are likely to be uncomfortable with the term) whose interest in the field is primarily based around a concern for animal wellbeing.

Table 3. Animal Advocacy and Animal Studies (vegans vs everyone else)

Level of interest in animals prior to becoming an Animal Studies scholar (n = 415)	Very high n (%)	High n (%)	Medium n (%)	Low n (%)	Not interested n (%)	Total
Vegans	83 (61%)	30 (22%)	15 (11%)	5 (4%)	4 (3%)	137
Non-vegans	121 (44%)	78 (28%)	61 (22%)	16 (6%)	2 (1%)	278
Chi-square, $\chi^2(4, N = 415) = 16.71, p = .002$						
Prior to your interest in the field, did you have an active commitment to animal advocacy (n = 417)	Yes n (%)	No n (%)	Not sure n (%)			Total
Vegans	109 (79%)	19 (14%)	10 (7%)			138
Non-vegans	120 (43%)	134 (48%)	25 (9%)			279
Chi-square, $\chi^2(2, N = 417) = 51.62, p < .001$						
The sort of Animal Studies scholarship I value is committed to improving the lives of animals (n = 410)	Strongly agree n (%)	Agree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Strongly disagree n (%)	Total
Vegans	91 (67%)	28 (21%)	16 (12%)	Nil	1 (1%)	136
Non-vegans	94 (34%)	107 (39%)	50 (18%)	17 (6%)	6 (2%)	274
Chi-square, $\chi^2(4, N = 410) = 42.76, p < .001$						

Animal Studies should have a commitment to animal wellbeing (n = 409)	Strongly agree n (%)	Agree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Strongly disagree n (%)	Total
Vegans	82 (61%)	32 (24%)	18 (13%)	1 (1%)	2 (1%)	135
Everyone else	87 (32%)	91 (33%)	64 (23%)	21 (8%)	11 (4%)	274
Chi-square, $\chi^2(4, N = 409) = 35.53, p < .001$						
Do you identify as an 'animal lover'? (n = 415)	Yes n (%)	No n (%)	Not sure n (%)			Total
Vegans	85 (62%)	27 (20%)	25 (18%)			137
Non-vegans	211 (76%)	29 (10%)	38 (14%)			278
Chi-square, $\chi^2(2, N = 415) = 9.59, p = .008$						

Table 4 shows the findings from a question which asked survey respondents to tell us what originally drew them to the field of Animal Studies. For this question respondents were asked to choose the response that best reflected their motivation. An 'other' box was provided where a response offered in the 'other' section was the same as a selection already available we re-coded the data. Certain responses were reported at very similar rates between vegans and non-vegans. These include 'an awareness of animal issues'; 'I started thinking about animal issues once I started my academic career and decided to make that my focus'; and 'I was introduced to the field during my studies as an undergraduate and it really engaged me.' However overall there was a significant statistical difference between vegans and non-vegans regarding their motivations for becoming involved in Animal Studies. The biggest difference between the two groups can be seen in the reporting rates for 'I was actively involved in animal advocacy,' which at 29 per cent was the highest reported reason among the vegan group, but was one of the lowest reported reasons for the non-vegans at only 5 per cent. On the other hand, 16 per cent of non-vegans responded that they saw an important gap in the literature as their main reason for

being drawn to Animal Studies, whereas only 9 per cent of vegans selected this response. A similar difference can be seen in the response ‘I was introduced to the field as a postgraduate and it really engaged me’ with almost double the non-vegans selecting this response at 15 per cent, compared to only 8 per cent of vegans. Concern for the environment inspired vegans just 1 per cent of the time, where at it was the most important factor for everyone else 5 per cent of the time, while only one respondent overall was drawn to Animal Studies because they thought it would be good for their career!

Table 4. Why scholars were drawn to Animal Studies (vegans vs. non-vegans)

Response (n = 416)	Vegan n (%)	Non-vegan n (%)	Total
An awareness of animal welfare issues	32 (23%)	66 (24%)	98
Other	17 (12%)	51 (18%)	68
I saw an important gap in the literature	13 (9%)	45 (16%)	58
I was actively involved in animal advocacy	40 (29%)	13 (5%)	53
I was introduced to the field during my studies as a postgraduate and it really engaged me	11 (8%)	42 (15%)	53
I started thinking about animal issues once I started my academic career and decided to make that my focus	15 (11%)	27 (10%)	42
I was introduced to the field during my studies as an undergraduate and it really engaged me	8 (6%)	19 (7%)	27
Concern for the environment	1 (1%)	15 (5%)	16
I thought it would be good for my career	Nil	1 (<1%)	1

Chi-square, $\chi^2(8, N = 416) = 57.76, p < .001$

Our survey data therefore presents us with a puzzle. On the one hand, 73 per cent of non-vegan respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: ‘the Animal Studies work that I value

is committed to improving the lives of animals.’ Likewise, 65 per cent of the non-vegan survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ‘Animal Studies should have a commitment to animal wellbeing’ (see Table 3). Yet at the same time, 46 per cent of those we surveyed reported that they eat meat or fish (see Table 2), while a further 21 per cent consume/use a range of other animal products that might be argued to generate animal suffering, such as eggs, dairy and animal fats. Taken overall, this means that around one quarter of the Animal Studies scholars we surveyed want animals to be simultaneously well, and their dinner.

This suggests that among Animal Studies scholars there is either a type of moral dissonance at play. Alternatively it might suggest that respondents struggle with impulse control, or for them, in the case of a nonhuman animals, being well includes allowing animals to be used in a variety of ways that privilege humans, rather than being based on a commitment to increasing the level of moral and legal regard we assign nonhuman animals. It is likely that the 46 per cent meat eaters in our survey do not necessarily see their consumption of animal bodies as remarkable given that veganism and vegetarianism are not, in the countries most represented by the survey, a majority position. Eating animals is not something that is necessarily seen as a problem to be avoided in the wider society.

Discussion

As Ken Shapiro noted in his ‘Editor’s Introduction’ for *Society & Animals* tenth anniversary issue in 2002 ‘The twin emergence of the contemporary animal rights movement (ARM) and HAS [Human Animal Studies] historically were, and no doubt will continue to be, intertwined’ (Shapiro 336). Just what this intertwining looks like depends where one situates academic work in relation to advocacy, and indeed, what use animal activists find for academic research, a matter raised by Elisa Aaltola in her 2011 essay ‘The Philosophy Behind the Movement: Animal Studies versus Animal Rights’. Aaltola here quotes Matthew Calarco who states that ‘[Much] of the contemporary animal rights politics is in fact another form of identity politics’ (394) and she reports that of the activists she surveyed ‘few referred to philosophical works as their main

inspiration' (Aaltola 404). On the other hand, Ralph Acampora suggests that a 'good portion of animal studies does have an advocacy background' (qtd. in Howard) but for Margo DeMello, Animal Studies is 'not about advocacy' and states that 'there is nothing in the field of HAS that demands that researchers, instructors, or students take an advocacy or political position of any kind' (17).

The tensions at play within Animal Studies is taken up by Rhoda Wilkie in her 2015 essay 'Academic "Dirty Work": Mapping Scholarly Labor in a Tainted Mixed-Species Field'. Wilkie proposes that these tensions are associated with two key matters: the extent to which Animal Studies scholars engage in what she terms 'emancipatory-type scholarship' (211), and whether animals are perceived and/or presented by scholars as being important in and of themselves, or as cultural constructions. In part Wilkie's essay responds to a rather agitated article written by Steve Best in 2009 where he argues that what he terms 'Mainstream Animal Studies' (11) academics can only 'advance [the field] by currying for respect, credibility and acceptance, which can only come by domesticating the threatening nature of the critique of human supremacism' (10). Best called for Mainstream Animal Studies to be superseded by Critical Animal Studies, calling the former 'morally bankrupt and incoherent' while asserting that the latter is 'engaged, politically radical and as concrete as possible in its language and orientation toward oppression of all forms' (26).

Our survey suggests that the decision whether to eat the subjects of their research is a particularly important consideration for those Animal Studies scholars who engage in emancipatory scholarship. Moreover, the question of whether or not to eat animals is generally highly charged and a frequent topic of conversation and research which lies at the heart of the tensions that Wilkie refers to. As such, Animal Studies is a counterpoint to a wider social norm which insists that the question of diet remains cordoned off as a personal choice, and therefore something that should not be politicised. This is an idea that is reflected not only by individuals themselves, but also institutions. For example, the Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Rajendra Pachauri, called for a reduction in meat consumption on environmental grounds and added that the whole issue was 'something that the IPCC was afraid to say earlier, but now we have said it' ('Lifestyle Changes Can Curb Climate

Change’). Despite animal agriculture contributing more to climate change than all the world’s transportation systems combined, the IPCC was reluctant, or even ‘afraid’ to call for the reduction in Animal agriculture, highlighting just how politicised this apparently ‘personal’ issue of meat eating is (‘Lifestyle Changes Can Curb Climate Change’).

Traci Warkentin addresses the ‘social pressures’ on meat eaters at Animal Studies events in her 2012 article ‘Must Every Animal Studies Scholar Be Vegan?’. Warkentin suggests that there is a ‘troubling rift’ that ‘keeps emerging’ at Animal studies conferences where ‘participants appear to feel the need to confess whether they are a “vegan” or a “carnivore”’ (501). She objects to this tendency as it ‘hints at an assumption that a vegan lifestyle is unquestionably good, and, perhaps, the *only* ethical choice among animal studies scholars’ (501). According to Warkentin:

Declarations of veganism may give participants (who may be new to animal studies and environmental ethics) the impression that one must be vegan in order to be an animal studies scholar and not to have the legitimacy of their research undermined, particularly if they don’t voluntarily self-identify. Such an outcome would be unfortunate and unnecessary, since many of us exist in the messy areas in between the extremes of veganism, vegetarianism, and meat-eating and yet are still allied with the goals and values of animal advocacy in multifaceted ways. (501)

While Warkentin implies that vegans are prone to mistake their dietary choices for moral purity, we did not find evidence in our survey to suggest that the vegans we surveyed see themselves as pure. But we did find evidence to support the view that vegans are sometimes seen by others as wearing a ‘label’ that they ‘couldn’t live up to’. One respondent commented that: ‘many people I know continue to eat irresponsibly simply because they know they couldn’t live up to the label. It’s a shame’. Warkentin goes on to suggest that in contrast to Animal Studies literature, eco-feminist approaches are less prescriptive, less black and white, and have been neglected by the Animal Studies literature to its detriment. Warkentin cites Adams 1990/2010; Donovan 1990; Warren 1990; Adams 1991; Curtin 1991; and Kheel 2004, suggesting that eco-feminist work provides evidence of being able to ‘accommodate a diversity of viewpoints and account for the complexity of a given situation, thereby avoiding

counterproductive allegations of hypocrisy based on an all-or-nothing type purity' (500). However all the authors cited¹ do advocate veganism as a political project, somewhat complicating Warkentin's suggestion that such advocacy is off-putting or having a deleterious effect on the field's sustainability. It should be noted that scholars such Dinesh Wadiwel, Richard Twine and Esther Alloun, who are vegans themselves, have cautioned against seeing veganism as a panacea given that it cannot *alone* lead to the kind of radical system change needed if we are to see any meaningful improvement in the relationships between humans and other animals. While we would agree that veganism is no solution in and of itself, our data suggests that vegans are more likely to be actively committed to animal advocacy generally, including advocacy that goes beyond diet alone. Vegans engaged in Animal Studies are also more likely to be doing the sort of political work that is not limited to diet alone, and more interested in pursuing broader social change than those 'allies' in what Warkentin describes as the 'messy areas in between the extremes of veganism, vegetarianism, and meat-eating' (502). While that 'messy area' may well describe the field as a whole, it does not quite adequately describe what vegans are doing in the field: politicising veganism beyond diet, challenging meat-eaters along the way and possibly messing up any expectation that they are in pursuit of some sort of 'purity'. Their level of interest in advocacy suggests that rather than only being focused on diet and ideas of purity and individualised consumption, they may be more clearly aligned with the sort of 'aspirational veganism' (153) as described by Lori Gruen and Robert C Jones, where vegans aspire towards relations that are as non-violent as possible rather than as the be-all and end all of their political orientation. Indeed, rather than insisting on purity, vegan Animal Studies scholars are perhaps getting 'dirty' and are in the process being 'tainted' by being labelled as animal advocates, to invoke the counterphrase deployed by Rhoda Wilkie.

The relationship between ecofeminism, Animal Studies and dietary choices is also taken up by Alloun, who proposes that ecofeminist theories can provide a useful platform for Animal Studies scholars to challenge the anthropocentric, hierarchical and dualistic attitudes that are the basis for so many interactions between humans and nonhuman animals. Alloun is quite clear that veganism, while not a solution in and of itself, 'is an essential step in the right direction' (150).

The fact that almost half the survey respondents eat meat must of course be put into

context, by acknowledging that virtually every human society is still based on the proposition that animals are property and that humans have a right to use animals as a resource, despite the fact that many also believe animals deserve at least some protection against harm (Rifkin). This inherently flawed desire to, on one hand ‘protect’ animals from harm, while at the same time allowing exploitation of them for our own purposes, is at its most profound when it comes to the breeding, raising and slaughtering of animals for food. In most cases, the animals are entirely under human control with little or no regard given to the inherent violence of their deaths, even if we can somehow convince ourselves that they did not suffer in life. Wadiwel provides a rationale for the persistence of this ‘continual pleasure for the victors – a freedom of unending satisfaction’ by linking it to human sovereignty and its guarantee of ‘unending flow of pleasures’ (Wadiwel 23). The flow of pleasures is culturally sanctioned and endorsed, such that it is not surprising that 69 per cent of those we surveyed consumed animal products in some form (meat, seafood, and/or dairy and eggs—see table 3). Again, this is despite 78 per cent of survey respondents also telling us that the type of Animal Studies they value most ‘is committed to improving the lives of animals’ (see table 2). This is less likely to seem contradictory if it appears in the vein of ‘pleasure’ and even the ‘care’ described by animal welfare approaches. It is interesting to note that two respondents also explained that their meat eating habits were changed by their engagement with either Animal Studies issues or Animal Studies scholars: ‘I am neither vegetarian nor vegan but do tend to eat less meat as possible and more fish (since dealing with animal studies' issues)’ and ‘I do eat meat but am increasingly picky in view of a myriad of concerns (and social pressures from animal studies people I've come to hang out with)’.

Conclusion

Some years have passed since Best warned of the ‘moral bankruptcy’ of so-called Mainstream Animal Studies, domesticating the radical edges of Animal Studies overall. Our survey provides evidence that the ‘domestication’ of Animal Studies within academia is a real risk that the field faces. Jennifer Howard noted in an article also from 2009 that ‘If there's one thread that ties together practitioners of animal studies, it's that the old ways of thinking about humans and (other) animals must be discarded or transcended’. The decision by Animal Studies scholars whether or not to eat their research subjects is, as our survey shows, an indicator of the extent to which Animal Studies scholars are willing to fundamentally challenge established norms, and whether they wish to stringently advance the wellbeing of nonhuman animals.

It is clear that the majority of Animal Studies scholars surveyed believe that the field has an important role to play in advocating for animals. Most of the respondents base their research on a personal interest in and commitment to animal wellbeing and for scholars who identify as vegan this also comes with an added prior commitment to animal advocacy, that in turn appears to shape their expectations for what the field should aim to achieve. However the data also shows that there remains a reluctance by many Animal Studies academics to fully engage with the consequences of human exceptionalism, which is demonstrated by the large number of respondents who still eat meat and other animal products. The survey demonstrates a concern among some that research might be tainted by a perception of being driven by an activist imperative. But this was outweighed by a general commitment to use the research to benefit animals. The challenge for Animal Studies then is how to embrace the diversity of the field in a way that will not result in it stagnating in a state of safe domestication. Despite any tensions, the many Animal Studies conferences that the authors have attended over the last decade demonstrates that there is a genuine willingness to see the field as a broad church, albeit one where an engagement with the political and ethical dimensions of human-animal relations (including the question of violence) and a foregrounding of the animal *as such* is increasingly an expectation. Any concern we might harbor regarding some of the results of the survey in this regard, is outweighed by the determination of a substantial number of scholars to refuse to allow the field to be tamed.

Notes

¹ It should be noted that Warren does not do so consistently and did in fact distance herself from 'animal ecofeminism' in the 90s in her book *Women, Culture, Nature*.

Works Cited

- Aaltola, Elisa. 'The Philosophy Behind the Movement: Animal Studies versus Animal Rights.' *Society & Animals*, vol. 19, 2011, pp. 393-406.
- Alloun, Esther. 'Ecofeminism and Animal Advocacy in Australia: Productive Encounters for an Integrative Ethics and Politics.' *Animal Studies Journal*, vol. 4, no.1, 2015, pp.148-73
- American Dietetic Association, 'Position of the American Dietetic Association: Vegetarian Diets', *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, vol. 109, no. 7, 2009, pp. 1266-1282. Available online: [http://jandonline.org/article/S0002-8223\(09\)00700-7/fulltext](http://jandonline.org/article/S0002-8223(09)00700-7/fulltext). Accessed 24 November 2017.
- Best, Steve. 'The Rise of Critical Animal Studies: Putting Theory into Action and Animal Liberation into Higher Education.' *The Journal for Critical Animal Studies*, vol.7, no.1, 2009, pp.9-52.
- DeMello, Margo. *Animals and Society: An Introduction to Human-Animal Studies*. Columbia University Press, 2012.
- Gruen, Lori., and Robert C. Jones. 'Veganism as an Aspiration.' *The Moral Complexities of Eating Meat*, edited by Ben Bramble and Bob Fisher, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 153-71
- Howard, Jennifer. 'Creature Consciousness: Animal Studies Tests the Boundary Between Human and Animal - and Between Academic and Advocate.' *The Chronicle Of Higher Education*, 18 Oct. 2009, www.chronicle.com/article/creature-consciousness/48804. Accessed 20 May 2017.
- 'Lifestyle Changes Can Curb Climate Change: IPCC Chief.' *ABC News*, 16 Jan. 2008 www.abc.net.au/news/2008-01-16/lifestyle-changes-can-curb-climate-change-ipcc/1013982. Accessed 12 May 2017.
- Nicholls, Sean. 'Animal Justice Party MP Mark Pearson admits: "I strayed...for that morsel"' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 Apr. 2017, [www.http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/animal-](http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/animal-)

justice-party-mp-mark-pearson-admits-i-strayed--for-that-morsel-20170410-gvhrss.html. Accessed 15 May 2017.

Rifkin, Rebecca. 'In U.S., More Say Animals Should Have Same Rights as People.' 18 May 2015. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/183275/say-animals-rights-people.aspx> Accessed 16 November 2016.

Shapiro, Kenneth. 'Editor's Introduction: The State of Human-Animal Studies: Solid at the Margin!' *Society & Animals*, vol.10, no. 4, 2002, pp 331-37.

Stahler, Charles. 'How Often Do Americans Eat Vegetarian Meals? And How Many Adults in the U.S. Are Vegetarian?' *The Vegetarian Resource Group*, 29 May 2015, www.vrg.org/blog/2015/05/29/how-often-do-americans-eat-vegetarian-meals-and-how-many-adults-in-the-u-s-are-vegetarian-2. Accessed 15 November 2016.

'The Slow but Steady Rise of Vegetarianism in Australia.' Roy Morgan Research Press Release, 15 August 2016. <http://www.roymorgan.com/findings/vegetarianisms-slow-but-steady-rise-in-australia-201608151105>. Accessed 15 November 2016.

Twine, Richard. 'Ecofeminism and Veganism – Revisiting the Question of Universalism.' *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*, edited by Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen. Bloomsbury, 2014, pp. 191–207.

Vegan Australia, 'Getting Started: How to Go Vegan', nd. http://www.veganaustralia.org.au/getting_started, accessed 24 November 2017.

Wadiwel, Dinesh. *The War Against Animals*. Brill, 2015.

Warkentin, Traci. 'Must Every Animal Studies Scholars Be Vegan?' *Invited Symposium, Feminists Encountering Animals*, special issue of *Hypatia*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2012, pp. 499-504.

Wilkie, Rhoda. 'Academic Dirty Work: Mapping Scholarly Labor in a Tainted Mixed-Species Field.' *Society & Animals*, vol. 23, 2015, pp.211-30.

Acknowledgments

The authors are grateful to the reviewers, and to our fellow Animal Studies scholars at the ASI ‘Fellow Travellers’ conference at Wesleyan University, for their extremely useful feedback which has allowed us to significantly improve this essay. We are also indebted to statisticians Phuc Nguyen and Jason Nunes for their invaluable expert assistance.

Appendix 1: Survey questions

1. What is your highest qualification?
2. How many years ago did you receive your highest degree?
3. In which field/discipline was your highest degree or the degree you are currently enrolled in?
4. As an undergraduate, did you have/do you currently have the opportunity to undertake formal study (including a single subject) in a field that you think might reasonably be considered to be ‘Animal Studies’?
5. If you did a dissertation/exegesis would you describe it as having a significant Animal studies focus?
6. At what point did you become interested in Animal Studies?
7. Prior to your interest in Animal studies as a field, did you have an active commitment to animal advocacy?
8. How would you best describe your commitment to animal advocacy?
9. Prior to your interest in Animal Studies as a field, would you describe your interest in animals and animal-human relations as: very high, high, medium, low, I was not interested in animal issues at all.
10. Which of the following areas of academic interest would you describe as being combined with your interest in Animal Studies? Environmentalism, feminism, philosophy, psychology, literature, film studies, anti-capitalism, sexualities, anti-racism, anti-colonialism/postcolonialism, vet science, wildlife ecology, zoology, human rights, social justice, legal studies, cultural studies, disability studies, I don’t combine Animal Studies with anything else, none of the above

11. If you had to pick only one major area of academic interest alongside your interest in animal studies which would it be?
12. Which of the below best describes what originally drew you to the field of Animal studies? I was actively involved in animal advocacy; concern for the environment; an awareness of animal welfare issues; I was introduced to the field during my studies as an undergraduate and it really engaged me; I was introduced to the field during my studies as a postgraduate and it really engaged me; I started thinking about animal issues once I started my academic career and decided to make that my focus; I saw an important gap in the literature; I thought it would be good for my career; other.
13. Have you published scholarly and/or creative works (meaning peer reviewed creative works) in the field of Animal Studies?
14. When selecting where to publish your Animal Studies work, do/would you generally prefer to publish in journals that are: explicitly animal focused; not animal focused, but do tend to include some animal focused work; not associated with animal studies at all; I don't publish journal articles; other.
15. When selecting a publication site for your Animal Studies work, what is your priority?
16. What region are you normally located in?
17. Did you work in an academic capacity in the last 12 months?
18. Do you consider your academic employment:
 - a) highly secure; b) secure; c) insecure; d) highly insecure.
19. In your experience, does an interest in Animal Studies: generally benefit an academic career; create challenges for an academic career; jeopardise an academic career; have no effect on an academic career; not sure.
20. Do you identify as an 'animal lover'?
21. What comes to mind when you hear the expression 'animal lover'?
22. How would you describe your dietary habits? I am vegetarian; I am vegan; I eat meat; I am pescatarian.
23. If Animal Studies were to be included in an academic curriculum, do you think the priority should be undergraduate or post-graduate?
24. In your view, which faculty (Department or School) is the best place to base Animal Studies?

25. In the last 5 years, what proportion of your research effort would you estimate has been in the area of Animal Studies?
26. In the last 5 years, what proportion of your Teaching effort would you estimate has been in the area of Animal Studies?
27. In your view, which statement best describes the field of Animal Studies? An interdisciplinary field that examines the complex and multidimensional relationships between humans and other animals; cross-disciplinary scholarship devoted to the investigation of the relationships between human and nonhuman animals and their environment; neither of the above; I don't know; make your own statement below.
28. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:
 - a. Animal Studies scholars should have a commitment to animal wellbeing;
 - b. Most of the Animal Studies work that I have read/heard does not consider the perspectives of animals themselves;
 - c. The sort of Animal Studies scholarship that I value is committed to improving the lives of animals.
29. What is your main source of information about the field of Animal Studies?
30. Which statement best describes the level of recognition Animal Studies receives at your university/college? There is little recognition of the field at my institution, so recognition comes mainly from outside the institution; there is little recognition of the field, I receive little recognition from anyone; there is support in the form of an informal (unfunded) Animal Studies network at my institution; there is a formal, funded Research Centre/Network at my institution; I am an independent scholar; I don't know.
31. In your experience, Animal Studies is broadly perceived within the academy?
Negatively, positively, neutrally, not sure.
32. In your view is it more difficult to attract funding for an Animal Studies project than it is to attract funding for other types of projects?
33. In your opinion, animal studies should be primarily focused on: native animals/wildlife; free-living introduced species ('pests'); animals used in agriculture/aquaculture; animals used in research; companion species; all animals; I don't know; none of the above.
34. Of the above, what are you currently primarily focused on?

35. Would you describe the field of animal studies as a growing field?
36. Are you currently a member of an association(s) or research network(s) of Animal Studies scholars and practitioners?
37. Do you identify as (select all that apply): woman, man, trans, queer, other (please specify).
38. What is your age?
39. Please answer the following questions as concisely as you can:
 - a. What has been the most rewarding aspect of working in the field animal studies?
 - b. What has been the most frustrating thing about working the field of animal studies?
 - c. What are your hopes for the future of Animal studies?