ORIGINAL ARTICLE
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

She likes animals: The construction of veganism, a feminist analysis

Dr Angella Duvnjak – Independent Scholar

ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: This article explores the changes witnessed in the socio-cultural and political landscape related to animal rights/animal justice/animal liberation movements and provides a critical analysis of the notion that the topic of animals in social work is somehow a peripheral or fringe issue.

APPROACH: An autoethnographic approach is employed to examine the construction of veganism and animal justice/liberation within social work. The author reflects on her own personal journey as a vegan for more than 30 years and a vegan social worker for the past 20 years.

CONCLUSIONS: Using a narrative drawn from the author's own experience and informed by a critical intersectional feminist approach, this article uses key moments of tension, disruption, marginalisation or expansion as a vegan social worker within academia to explore how various discourses of 'othering' contribute to areas of both acceptance and resistance within social work toward inclusion of consideration of animals.

Keywords: Feminist, vegan, social work, social justice, autoethnography

This article will use autoethnography as a research method to explore my personal experiences as a vegan social work academic. It will examine the narrative of an event that took place while employed as a social work academic in Australia several years ago. The narrative is drawn from journal entries and notes taken at the time of the events. I use a feminist intersectional approach to assist me in identifying the multiple meanings, positionalities and discourses contained within my experiences. I situate my analysis within the broader social context of the construction of various identities such as that of vegan, academic, social worker and woman. The narrative example takes as its focus an interaction at a university social work planning day around the suitability of observing Melbourne Cup horse race "festivities". I have come to view this event as an example of how the consideration of animals within social work encounters both inclusion/expansion and resistance responses related to factors such as the neoliberal university context, broader social discourses and events and the relative alignment with feminist and other critical and intersectional orientations of both individual social workers and the teaching school within which they are located. My examination of this event alongside my own social work journey within academia also serves as a vehicle for exploring the terrain of insider/outsider status, marginalisation, assumptions, and dominant norms within academia and how these intersect with other aspects of my life as a vegan for more than 30 years. Themes of gender, power, exclusion, and difference will be explored using a feminist lens as I reflect on the role of animals and social justice in social work.

AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND SOCIAL WORK *37(1)*, 27–38.

CORRESPONDENCE TO:
Angella Duvnjak
a.duvnjak@westernsydney.edu.au

Feminist autoethnography as research method

I had intended to start with a "confession" of sorts, which is to say that this is the first time I have explicitly deployed an autoethnographical approach in my research or writing. And yet this is not strictly true. I have published on this topic previously (Duvnjak, 2011) where I used parts of my personal story yet the data or content being researched was not focused on my own experiences. Autoethnography differs in that it specifically allows for the author's lived experience or personal story to become the central data to be analysed (Ettore, 2017). If I reflect on the way I have inhabited the social work academic space over the years, as any of my colleagues and students could attest, I have always utilised a reflexive approach toward understanding and incorporating my personal experience in understanding social context and vice versa. Despite (or perhaps because of) my exposure to the "rigours" of positivist university research environments, feminist epistemology has always provided a helpful corrective to the institutional preference for the "abstracted objective" scholar. Feminist approaches foreground subjectivities and draw attention to the critical role that lived experience has in the production of knowledge. A feminist turning the lens toward oneself in the form of autoethnography is yet another invocation of the feminist tenet that "the personal is political" (Ettore, 2023). Sara Crawley contends that "feminist theory's greatest contribution to knowledge is an epistemological shift away from androcentric boundary specific methods that enforce traditional binaries – rational over emotional, authoritative voices over voices of the oppressed, public over private, transcendental truths over everyday experiences" (2012, cited in Ettore, 2017, p. 367).

As Witkin highlights, ethnography is not about identifying a "truth" but rather "enriching understanding" (2014, p. 4). Witkin explains that:

> [F]or autoethnographers, not only is the story itself generative of 'truths', but truth in the modernist sense is not the aim of inquiry. Rather, autoethnographic inquiry seeks to enrich our understandings, expand our awareness, increase our sensitivities, and provide insights that can lead to practical action. (2014, p. 10)

Witkin went on to argue that there exists a synergy between the social work orientation toward understanding behaviour within the social context and autoethnography, observing that "social workers understand that self/cultural narratives are inseparable" (2014, p. 7). Witkins suggested that:

> [F]or social workers, autoethnography provides a form of inquiry congruent with the values and commitments of the profession. There is no pretense of neutrality but an exploration of how we construct and represent realities in particular contexts while at the same time knowing that any telling will be partial and subject to revision. (2014, p. 12)

For feminists, the focus is also more explicitly on drawing attention to gendered power relations and the (re)production of inequality. Feminist autoethnography is "a method of being, knowing and doing that combines two concerns: telling the stories of those who are marginalized and making good use of our experience" (Allen & Piercy, 2005, p. 156). The question of how to make "good use of one's experience" is especially motivating for me as I find myself reflecting on the personal and the professional intersections of my identity as a vegan feminist social worker working within the university context over many years.

As other feminists have done, I attempt here to use autoethnography as a way of "making sense" of past work experiences (Ettore, 2023; Newcomb et al., 2023). Here I focus on only one part of my work experience as a social worker, within the

Australian university context over the past 15 years. This context has its own culture, its own "rules" and is governed by an ever-increasing neoliberal corporate imperative (Sims, 2020). Universities also have a legacy of exclusion that is gradually being eroded on several fronts, yet this is an incomplete project. The discipline of social work, due to its explicit social justice values base, is in many ways located at the crossroads of some of the more urgent debates in this space (Feldman, 2023; Herrero & Charnley, 2021; McKenzie & Khan, 2023). A critically reflexive feminist autoethnography provides a means of connecting "one's personal experiences and beliefs to professional and political processes" (Mitchell, 2023, p. 235). It can be usefully applied as a way of understanding the intersectional experiences of women within the academy and in particular how this helps to make sense of our professional and political selves (Allen, 2023; Newcomb et al., 2023).

Autoethnography inevitably shines a light on the researcher's emotions and interior world. Feelings and responses that have multiple, sometimes not always obvious or knowable, sources despite the best of attempts to *locate* and *ground* within the social, political and personal context of the events. As Witkin observes:

> There is an element of courage in many autoethnographies. To write autoethnography is to go public with aspects or events in one's own life; to reveal thoughts, feelings, and actions that may not be flattering to the author nor known to others. It is to transgress the conventional boundaries of the personal and professional in the interest of generating insight and understanding. (2014, p. 9)

Ultimately, it is a form of exposure that can be uncomfortable for both the writer and (often) the reader (Ettore, 2023; Tolich, 2010). Here I wish to acknowledge that the narrative I share is a re-telling and analysis from the perspective of one participant. To preserve anonymity, I have edited the narrative to remove any identifying information other than to say that it took place while working in a social work department in an Australian university in the last 15 years.

Positionality and feminist autoethnography

Locating oneself, identifying one's *positionality* or *standpoint* is central to intersectional feminist approaches. Originating as a response to positivist, westerns claim to "neutral" knowledge production, positionality or standpoint theory draws attention to the role social, historical and cultural privilege play in epistemology (Crenshaw, 1991; Harding, 2001; Lykke, 2010). One's social positioning is the vantage point from which we come to know the world and it is also how the world comes to know us in ways determined by unequal power relations inscribed along the lines of class, race, culture, sexuality and gender. For intersectional feminists, drawing attention to one's positionality is also an important political act in the face of dominant discourses that work to obscure the influence of social location and lived experiences of oppressed or marginalised "others".

This article foregrounds the vegan feminist social worker aspects of my identity and yet this sits alongside other identities and positionalities I have navigated. While this article takes, as its focus, events within the social work academic world, this cannot be disconnected or separate from my personal history navigating the world with various identities and experiences. For this reason, I plan to highlight some personal histories that shape my interactions with the world, particularly in relation to the dominant power structures within the university. These formative experiences and identity markers have come together to create interwoven aspects both of who I am, how I see myself,

who I am seen to be and how I navigate the world.

Breaching the borders: A vegan feminist social work journey

I am a white woman of Irish Australian/Serbian heritage from a working-class background. I was the first in my family to attend university. Both my mother and father worked in factories when I was born, and I grew up with the constant absence of one or other of them as they tag teamed for being home when the other was working. My mum later worked night shifts as a cleaner at the local public hospital, I didn't see too much of her after school. My father spoke little to no English when he arrived in the wave of so called "new Australian" migration that "built Australia" in the 1960s and 1970s. Growing up in Australia as a working-class girl with a parent from a "non-English-speaking" background during the 1970s and 1980s contributed toward a growing awareness of notions of difference, inclusion and exclusion.

I have a "funny" surname, I am told. I am told this often. The borders of the "norm" being highlighted and reinforced. You learn to pick up the clues in everyday interactions. They range from the slight (or extended) pauses before saying my name to the more obvious and explicit "oh your name is *very difficult*, isn't it?" comment. I am greeted this way on my first day in a new academic social work position a few years back by my then supervisor. I am being introduced to my predominantly white/anglo colleagues. They follow it up with an exasperated "I won't even *attempt* to say your name". I'm used to it. I am familiar with this dance. I smooth it over. I laugh. I rush in to solve the "problem" by normalising the comment with a quick "yes, it is a bit tricky...".

I began my training as a social worker just over 20 years ago in Australia. When I commenced, there was little to no mention of animals in the curriculum nor in the field except for maybe the beginnings of conversations around "assistance" animals. By the time I enrolled in my postgraduate social work degree after completing an honours degree in politics, I had already developed a firm conviction based on my feminist beliefs that the "personal was political". I had been vegan for over 10 years before entering social work and I had a growing awareness of the intersectional nature of oppression, something that informed my career choice. At that time, I can safely say I was somewhat of a lone voice wanting to talk about animals and social work in my cohort or with my lecturers. It would be rare that I would mention my thoughts on the connections between the treatment of animals and that of humans or the role that compassion or empathy for animals might have in assisting social work in developing a more holistic social justice lens. When I did, the response was usually dismissive or minimising in some way. The most common response was usually "admiration" for my stance but, of course, with the caveat that as "important" as it was, this issue did not rightly belong in social work. The dominant view was that it was just not a serious topic to be considered by professional social workers. Another common reaction was to be "admired" for being so *caring*, *sensitive* or *emotional* about animals. Most vegans will be familiar with versions of these kinds of responses, both of which serve to silence or contain the powerful critique of speciesism and anthropocentrism that is made explicit by the presence of a vegan. Another layer to this is the gendered connotations of reducing the vegan perspective to one of emotion. Gendered constructions of the inferior nature of caring and emotionality have been long observed by many feminist writers (Donovan, 2006; Held, 2006; Keller & Kittay, 2017). Indeed, gendered assumptions about care also inform mainstream views of veganism and the animal rights movement which is dominated by women (Donovan & Adams, 2007; Duvnjak, 2011; Gaarder, 2011a; Kemmerer, 2011). A privileging of

the rational, reasonable and detached was to be found even within social work, a caring profession, but one also intent on ensuring that the profession was taken as seriously as other allied health professions (van Heugten, 2011). The gendered and speciesist parameters of care and justice have been reinforced in subtle and explicit ways throughout my training.

As a vegan feminist, the personal has always been political and indeed my life work choices have seen me interweave my personal political commitments with areas of focus such as domestic and family violence, substance use and human–animal relations. Gender has always been part of the vegan experience. Somewhere near 80% of vegans in the western context are women (Gaarder, 2011b). The relationship between the construction of women, gender and animals has been extensively studied, drawing attention to the mutually reinforcing aspects of sexism and speciesism (Adams & Donovan, 1995; Duvnjak, 2011; Gaarder, 2011b; Kemmerer, 2011). Social work is also dominated by women and many of us who came to this profession did so as a natural progression of making links between our personal and political commitments (Couturier et al., 2022; Hill & Laredo, 2020). Yet I quickly realised that my personal political commitments around veganism did not intersect well with the "legitimate" borders of my chosen profession. I began a process of navigating the outsider status of my veganism utilising *trojan horse* tactics usually via my feminism. In other words, early on, I snuck it in.

This has changed in recent years. In the courses I teach—ethics, theory, domestic and family violence—I routinely and explicitly refer to animals and draw attention to the linked oppression between species. Often though, I am the only person within my school introducing such content and I cannot be assured that it remains when I have moved on to another university. I have witnessed an explosion of interest in the academic world on topics related to veganism and indeed this special issue is evidence of this. Despite this, it can be observed that social work has made slow progress toward meaningful inclusion of animals (Duvnjak & Dent, 2023, Gray & Coates, 2012; Hanrahan, 2014).

The vegan 'boom'?

Veganism and more specifically *plant-based* foods have become increasingly mainstream, surging in popularity in recent years (Budger, 2017; Buttney & Kinefichi, 2020; Doyle, 2016). Unlike when I first become vegan, the term is generally well understood and many more food options are readily available. I am no longer the "lone vegan" in workplaces and this shift has translated into "accommodations" and "adjustments" that I would never have envisaged when I first became vegan over 30 years ago. Veganism worldwide, however, remains low with estimates ranging from between 2 to 5% depending on the country (Mathieu & Richie, 2022; Vegan Society, 2024). Some argue that the increased popularity of plant-based diets across the western world has not translated to a significant increase in interest in veganism or animal rights (Quinn & Westwood, 2018).

Despite, or perhaps because of, the above shifts, stigma and negative stereotypes and perceptions of vegans as "extreme", "radical" or "aggressive" persist (Buttney & Kinefichi, 2020; Sorenson, 2011). "Veganphobia" is often (re)produced in mainstream media depictions of vegans (Cole & Morgan, 2011). Research has pointed to increased negative perception of vegans who are perceived to be motivated more by animal rights than say, environmental or health reasons (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019; McInnis & Hodgson, 2017). In some ways it can be argued that the surge in mainstream popularity of plant-based veganism, understood as merely a dietary preference, has obscured the social justice and ethical critique that veganism offers (Doyle, 2016).

The recent cultural phenomenon of plant-based diets has reinforced a false ethical and moral equivalence where vegan and plant-based have become interchangeable with both constructed as about food or a diet. Indeed, to be vegan is to avoid animal products in one's diet. The original vegan society definition states that veganism is "*a way of living* [emphasis added] that seeks to exclude—as far as is possible and practical—all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing *or any other purpose*" (The Vegan Society (1979) 2024). Veganism encompasses a critique of anthropocentric and speciesist social structures and argues for social justice in its most expansive and inclusive form. That is, for all beings. This takes us way beyond the plate or dietary choices (while acknowledging the crucial role that this plays). Indeed, *veganism* and animal rights have been coined the "social justice issue of our times" intersecting with other social justice movements (Animal Justice Party, 2024; Brueck, 2017; Kemmerer, 2011; Singer, 2024).

'The race which stops the … planning day' – A vegan voice of dissent at the social work planning day

I now turn to explore a narrative drawn from my own journal entries and notes made shortly after an event some years back at a school of social work planning day at an Australian university where I was employed. For international readers it is worth noting that the Melbourne Cup is a horse racing event that attracts widespread national interest and is often referred to colloquially as the "race which stops a nation". It is observed as a public holiday in the state of Victoria in Australia but, across the nation, many workplaces hold events to celebrate the running of the race. Such events often involve a workplace sweep and such practices are widely supported. In recent years, however, spearheaded by the Coalition for the Protection of Racehorses (2024), a vocal minority voice standing against the race has emerged critiquing cruelty to horses, gambling, alcohol abuse and the relationship between the event and increased reports of violence against women (Forsdike et al., 2022; Lloyd et al., 2013; Markwell et al., 2017; Wilson et al., 2021).

> I can feel that familiar and uncomfortable feeling rising within me that something is not right. Something is not aligned or is 'amiss' somehow. What is it? What is going wrong here?

It's the annual social work planning day for social work staff at the university I am employed at. I have been in my role for a few years at this point. I love my job. If I be honest this is notable and rare. It's not always been easy to find my 'place' within the system so to speak. While this school, in common with previous schools I have worked in at other universities, lacks cultural diversity, there is a good mix of people most of whom seem to be dedicated to the job of educating the next generation of social worker professionals with a firm focus on social justice and ethics. Of course, things have been challenging on several fronts as the university sector moves ever steadily in the direction of corporate vocational style education but many of us remain 'true believers' in the purpose of social work and the inherent value of a university education. Throughout my time in this role, I have been seen to champion issues related to animals. I have supervised a student master's thesis on the topic, I have incorporated some of my knowledge and expertise in this area into the curriculum I teach in social work theory and ethics and a unit on family and domestic violence and, of course, I have been a 'visible' vegan at such events in the past—the vegan catering for myself and the few other staff who are also vegan is often noted with colleagues often remarking that they wished they "had ticked the vegan" option.

Back to the 'uncomfortable feeling'… We are more than halfway through the day. We have come back from our lunch break. I am sitting with a table of people who are mostly well known to me but there is also a 'coming together' of sorts on days like this and you may see people who you hardly come across all year as we all frantically try to stay on top of our teaching, research and the ever-increasing administration load. It's a large gathering as we are a big school. A member of the school executive stands to announce that we will be taking a short break soon. This is notable given we had only shortly before come back from our lunch break. It's nearing 2pm. I wonder why we are breaking so soon again. I can't quite make it out but there is some mention of a TV in the adjoining room. There is a bristle of excitement in the room. It's then that it hits me. It seems we are breaking for the annual 'Melbourne Cup' horse race…

Promoted as the 'race which stops the nation' it has in more recent times become as well known for displays of public drunkenness, anti-social behaviour, sexual harassment and violence against women, gambling and, of course, horse injuries and death.

I look around the room at my colleagues, there's movement and people are getting ready to stand up and move. I gently ask for clarification from my table colleagues—"Is it the Melbourne cup? Is that what we are stopping for?". "Yes", comes the answer. Of course, it's not compulsory to watch the race just that we will stop the proceedings so that those that wish to, can. My mind is racing, and I can feel an ever-familiar sense of rising discomfort with the 'normality' of it all. Any vegan knows what I mean here. The way something involving cruelty, torture or death to animals is barely acknowledged or even noticed by most of those around us. It's a strange world to occupy and I have done so for many years, and I've never gotten used to it. In this case I am surrounded by social work academics, and I am frustrated that our actions are tacit approval of such an event that causes so much harm to both non-human and human animals. Surely, in this environment I could expect as a bare minimum that we would discuss this as a group. Is this something we believe honours our profession and reflects our values? I feel the frustration (and anger?) rising. Before I know it, I am on my feet saying these very words to the assembled group, the school executive member who made the announcement does not look impressed. I can feel my body shaking as I make my point—simply saying that I wish to register my disappointment and disapproval of this decision. I outline my reasons with as much clarity as I can and then sit down. I hear a few mumbles around the room. There's an awkward pause in the previously commenced movement toward the exit. People look uncomfortable. No one says anything … I get a smile of approval from a fellow vegan colleague nearby but still … there's a pause that feels like it lasts forever before there is a response from across the room from the school executive member. They are still standing. I detect a frustrated tone as they point out that they are "trying to cater for everybody" and that "you don't have to watch the race". We end up having a brief exchange across the large room. I reiterate that I don't believe this sits with our values as a profession and that we should not "cater" for this at all. I hear more rumblings around the room. Some people clearly want to get to the other room to watch the race. I catch a few disapproving glances and rolls of eyes.

I sit down and the group gradually disperses. A few people come up to me and say, "good on you" or "good point". I feel less alone on hearing this, but I am also conscious that I am probably being perceived by most in the room as

having caused 'unnecessary' trouble. A colleague and friend at the time comes up to me and rather gruffly says "what have you got against a little flutter? It's just a bit of fun". I'm almost speechless. I thought I had outlined comprehensively what 'my' problem was. He doesn't wait for my reply as he rushes by me toward the TV room.

I make my way out of the room having decided I need to get away for a bit. We are breaking for 30 minutes so I have time for a walk. As I exit the room, I am approached by the member of the school executive who made the announcement. They appear upset and confront me. I am told that this a compromise position and that many of the staff had felt strongly about being offered the opportunity to watch the horse race. They express disappointment that I had appeared to (at least from their perspective) challenge their leadership. At this point I become aware of people watching the interaction. All I could do was re-iterate my points and explain that I was not trying to be a 'troublemaker' but that I felt I could not be silent on such an important issue. 'A time and a place', 'a time and a place' this seemed to be the message and yet I felt this *was* the time and the place—wasn't it? I was also conscious as a rather lowly early career academic and new(er) member of the staff such interactions were probably not in my best interests. It became awkward as it was clear that the main issue was being interpreted as one of challenging the authority of the leadership in a way that was either inappropriate or embarrassing. I had intended neither, but I also felt that as social workers we need to say the hard things. Part way through this (increasingly tense) exchange a First Nations colleague with whom I had not worked closely, approached us and intervened, and I can remember the relief I felt. I can't even remember what they said but it worked to diffuse the situation and showed a solidarity that calmed my nervous system immediately. It was suggested we go for a walk along the river together and much to my joy and surprise several staff started off with us as we made our way out of the building. Some were friends and close colleagues and others, people I had had very little do with in the time I had worked in the school. Yet, it was a simple act of solidarity that held me and helped me feel less alone in a moment where I felt I was being cast as an 'outsider', 'disruptive', 'emotional', 'unruly/unrestrained' woman, an example of an 'extreme' vegan.

Making meaning of vegan disruption within the confines of social work in the academy

Despite an upsurge in interest in green and critical social work, the topic of veganism and the treatment of animals is largely avoided with social work (Gordon, 2017; Gray & Coates, 2012; Wolf, 2000). A focus on animals is often dismissed as a topic that is at best a peripheral or tangential to more substantive concerns and at worst irrelevant or a distraction (Duvnjak & Dent, 2023; Peggs, 2017). Critical animal studies, arising out of the animal advocacy movement, vegan and critical theory highlights the mutually reinforcing intersectional oppressions that are invisibilised when we overlook animals as part of the social justice picture (Nocelle II et al., 2019). While social workers around the world place social justice at the core of the profession this remains bound by the limited scope afforded with the profession's current human rights focus. It is still very much seen as a bridge "too far" even for those otherwise progressive academics I have worked alongside.

Social work attracts those of us who make connection between oppressions of all kinds—race, class, gender, sexuality and ability. This hasn't always been a smooth road of course, and we remain on a

continuing journey as a profession to truly hear voices of First Nations people, members of the LGBTQIA+ community and those living with disability, for instance. Perhaps one of the differences for animals is that their voice is not directly heard, that they cannot *speak* their experience into spaces. Their cause is by necessity championed by others. As humans we cannot claim to speak directly from the *standpoint* of animals and, as such, our own positionality becomes central to the meaning of the encounter. Being the vegan voice in the room often casts one as a "disruptor", the person who at any moment may bring into focus the widely accepted (yet invisibilised) conventions of anthropocentric, speciesist culture. It is in these moments, within encounters such as the one outlined above that I have found various opportunities for connection, expansion and inclusion often coming from other "outsiders" within social work and at the same I have experienced the strong resistance and push back from those entrusted with "policing the borders" of anthropocentric containment that define social work ensconced within the walls of the neoliberal university. Many have observed how within an increasingly neoliberal corporate university context "outsider" or marginalised perspectives and voices meet resistance (Deshner et al., 2020; Fraser & Taylor, 2016; Sims, 2020). Motivated by a corporate agenda, governed by managerialism and consumer demand, universities have ironically become increasingly difficult places for questioning the status quo.

In reflecting upon this encounter, I am moved to consider the role care, connection, emotion and small acts of solidarity can have in a context driven by individualism and competition. The notion that to care for animals is in some way trivial or overly emotional (read: irrational) has a long history that aligns with feminised and reductive ideas of vegans and animal rights advocates (Duvnjak, 2011). And yet to *care* is of utmost importance as social workers, perhaps now more than ever. In the encounter above I am conscious of how the readily available trope of the *irrational vegan* may be deployed with additional impact in an academic setting where claims to objectivity and reason are prized and often deployed against minority voices. I view the actions of my colleagues on the "solidarity" walk as an act of resistance against this. It was powerful.

The reaction of my male colleague who stated "what have you got against a little flutter? It's just a bit of fun" *also* stands out to me. Sara Ahmed (2017) highlighted how the figure of the "feminist killjoy" has come to be deployed against feminists who dare to disrupt the "fun" and name the sexism in the joke or racism in the room. By disrupting the "happiness order" in the room Twine argued that "vegan-feminists constitute an especially poignant killjoy position" (2014, p. 626). There is always a choice to be made. While I recall feeling an immediate urge to stand up and speak out, the choice to remain silent frequently prevails in such contexts. As Twine explains, "[P]oliteness constitutes another social norm that is the enemy of the killjoy. Sometimes a vegan will preserve the 'happiness' exactly by deciding not to speak out" (2014, p. 626). On one assessment, my speaking out did not preserve the happiness in the room yet it produced an opportunity for a different kind of happiness, one that emerged from a moment of resistance and within the experience of solidarity displayed in the group walk making space for the disruptive voice.

The navigation of hostile discursive and social spaces is a central part of the lived experience of a being a vegan and this comes with its own set of somewhat predictable and familiar features (Buttney & Kinefichi, 2020; Twine, 2014). I am aware that over many years I have developed a tool kit of "survival" strategies. Chief amongst these is how to protect oneself, "choose your battles", while also ensuring that you stand up when it counts. It occurs to me that in some ways this mirrors the path of social work within universities where the desire to be "taken

seriously" as a profession can come into conflict with our more subversive and radical inclinations around social change. The vegan critique is still very much seen as a bridge "too far" even for otherwise progressive social work academics I have worked alongside. For those that do make room for consideration of animals it often sits adjacent to, yet seemingly separate from, other important political topics. It is my contention, however, that this separateness can no longer be maintained. Disruptive feminist vegan incursions into social work spaces are a critical part of this journey inviting us into a new radical social justice paradigm of liberation and justice for all beings.

Conclusion

Social work is not unique in having areas of oversight and failure that has perpetuated social injustice. Like many other helping professions, social work has had a role to play in social injustices against First Nations people, members of the LGBTQIA+ community and people with disabilities, for instance. Incongruence between social work values and the treatment of animals over the years is but another example of this. I also recognise the unique opportunities that my profession has offered to explore feminist vegan social work practice in meaningful ways. My analysis of my own experiences reveals the complexities of navigating the various identities and positionalities that come with being a vegan feminist voice in such settings. As we move ever closer to meaningful consideration of animals in social work as the next social justice frontier, we need to be aware of the mechanisms of inclusion, silencing and containment that have been deployed over the years in relation to the "disruptive" voices for an idea whose time has come.

Received: 1 July 2024

Accepted: 24 October 2024

Published: 7 March 2025

References

Adams, C., & Donovan, J. (Eds.). (1995). *Animals and women: Feminist theoretical explorations*. Duke University Press.

Ahmed, S. (2017). *Living a feminist life*. Duke University Press.

Allen, K. (2023). Feminist theory, method, and praxis: Toward a critical consciousness for family and close relationship scholars. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 40*(3), 899–936.

Allen, K., & Piercy, F. (2005). Feminist auto-ethnography. In D. Sprenkle & F. Piercy (Eds.), *Research methods in family therapy* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.

Animal Justice Party. (2024). *Law and social justice*. https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/

Brueck, J. (Ed.). (2017). *Veganism in an oppressive world: A vegans of color community project*. Sanctuary Publishers.

Budger, L. (2017). Veganism on the rise. *Gale Academic OneFile*, 22(1), 38–39.

Buttney, L., & Kinefichi, M. (2020). Vegans' problem stories: Negotiating vegan identity in dealing with omnivores. *Discourse & Society*, *31*(6), 565–583.

Coalition for the Protection of Racehorses. (2024). *Horseracing kills*. https://horseracingkills.com/

Cole, M., & Morgan, K. (2011). Vegaphobia: Derogatory discourses of veganism and the reproduction of speciesism in UK national newspapers. *The British Journal of Sociology 62*(1), 134-153. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2010.01348.x

Couterier, Y., Lamatrier, T., Guiletter, M., Gagnon, D., Belzile, L., & Wankah, P. (2022). Evolution over time in choosing a career as a social worker. *Social Work Education*, *41*(8), 1785–1801. https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2022.2039731

Crawley, S. L. (2012). Autoethnography as feminist self-interview. In J. F. Gubrium, J. A. Holstein, J. A. Marvasti, & K. D. McKinney (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of interview research* (2nd ed., pp. 143–160). SAGE Publications.

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women. *Stanford Law Review*, *43*(6), 1241–1299. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1229039

Deshner, C., Dorion, L., & Salvatori, L. (2020). Prefiguring a feminist academia: A multi-vocal autoethnography on the creation of a feminist space in a neoliberal university. *Society and Business Review*, *15*(4), 325–347.

Donovan, J. (2006). Feminism and the treatment of animals: From care to dialogue. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *31*(2), 305–329.

Donovan, J., & Adams, C. (Eds.). (2007). *The feminist care tradition in animal ethics: A reader*. Columbia University Press.

Doyle, J. (2016). Celebrity vegans and the lifestyling of ethical consumption. *Environmental Communication*, 10(6), 777–790.

Duvnjak, A. (2011). Joining the dots: Some reflections on feminist-vegan political practice and choice. *Outskirts: Feminisms Along the Edge, 24*. https://www.outskirts.arts.uwa.edu.au/volumes/volume-24/duvnjak

Duvnjak, A., & Dent, A. (2023). The consideration of animals within Australian social work curriculum. *Australian Social Work*, *77*(3), 397–409. https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2023.2238697

Ettore, E. (2017). Feminist autoethnography, gender, and drug use: "Feeling about" empathy while "storying the I." *Contemporary Drug Problems, 44*(4), 356–374. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091450917736160

Ettore, E. (2023). Bullying, misogyny and feminist whistleblowing: An autoethnography of how Betsy's Box became a veritable "Pandora's box." *Women's Studies International Forum, 98,* 1–8.

Feldman, G. (2023). You have the right to remain silent: How social work academics cope with the neoliberal university. *The British Journal of Social Work, 53*(6), 3305–3322.

Forsdike, K., O'Sullivan, G., & Hooker, L. (2022). Major sporting events and domestic violence: A systematic review. *Health and Social Care in the Community, 30*(6), 2025–2040. https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.14028

Fraser, H., & Taylor, N. (2016). *Neoliberalization, universities and the public intellectual: Species, gender and class in the production of knowledge*. Palgrave.

Gaarder, E. (2011a). Where the boys aren't: The predominance of women in the animal rights movement. *Feminist Formations, 23*(2), 54–76.

Gaarder, E. (2011b). *Women and the animal rights movement*. Rutgers University Press.

Gray, M., & Coates, J. (2012). Environmental ethics for social work: Social work's responsibility to the non-human world. *International Journal of Social Welfare, 21*(3), 239–247. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2397.2011.00852.x

Gordon, H. (2017). Climate change and food: A green social work perspective. *Critical and Radical Social Work, 5*(2), 145–162.

Hanrahan, C. (2014). Integrated health thinking and the one health concept: Is social work for all for "one" or "one" for all? In T. Ryan (Ed.), *Animals in social work: Why and how they matter*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Harding, S. (Ed.). (2001). *The feminist standpoint theory reader: Intellectual and political controversies*. Routledge.

Held, V. (2006). *The ethics of care: Personal, political, and global*. Oxford University Press.

Herrero, M., & Charnley, H. (2021). Resisting neoliberalism in social work education: Learning, teaching, and performing human rights and social justice in England and Spain. *Social Work Education, 40*(1), 44–57. https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2020.1747421

Hill, M., & Laredo, M. (2020). The personal is political: Reframing individual acts of kindness as social solidarity in social work practice. *European Journal of Social Work, 23*(6), 969–979.

Keller, J., & Kittay, E. (2017). *Feminist ethics of care: The Routledge companion to feminist philosophy*. Routledge.

Kemmerer, L. (2011). *Sister species: Women, animals and social justice.* University of Illinois Press.

Lykke, N. (2010). *Feminist studies: A guide to intersectional theory, methodology and writing* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Lloyd, B., Matthews, S., Livingston, M., Jayasekara, H., & Smith, K. (2013). Alcohol intoxication in the context of major public holidays, sporting and social events: A time-series analysis in Melbourne, Australia, 2000-2009. *Addiction, 108*(4), 701–709.

MacInnis, C. C., & Hodson, G. (2017). It ain't easy eating greens: Evidence of bias toward vegetarians and vegans from both source and target. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations, 20*(6), 721-744. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430215618253

Markowski, K. L., & Roxburgh, S. (2019). "If I became a vegan, my family and friends would hate me:" Anticipating vegan stigma as a barrier to plant-based diets. *Appetite, 135,* 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2018.12.040

Markwell, K., Firth, T., & Hing, N. (2017). Blood on the race track: An analysis of ethical concerns regarding animal-based gambling. *Annals of Leisure Research*, *20*(5), 594–609. https://doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2016.1251326

Mathieu, E., & Richie, H. (2022). What percentage of people say they are vegetarian, vegan or flexitarian? *Our World in Data.* https://ourworldindata.org/vegetarian-vegan

McKenzie, C., & Khan, M. (2023). The university and social work under neoliberalism: Where's the social inclusion for disabled faculty? *Social Inclusion, 11*(2), 136–146. https://www.cogitatiopress.com/socialinclusion/article/view/6241

Mitchell, S. (2023). Figuring out how to participate in the system: Using reflexive feminist autoethnography to explore intersectional experiences in the professional and political spheres of academia. *Journal of Family Theory & Review, 15*(2), 235–247. https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12502

Newcomb, M., Saxton, K., Lovric, E., Harris, S., & Davidson, D. (2023). Creating safety: Group reflections on surviving as a female, social work early career academic in the neoliberal academy. *Qualitative Social Work, 22*(6), 1092–1107. https://doi.org/10.1177/14733250221122361

Nocelle II, A., Drew, L., George, A., Ketenci, S., Lupinacci, J., Purdy, I., & Schatz, J. (2019). *Education for total liberation: Critical pedagogy and teaching against speciesism*. Peter Lang.

Peggs, K. (2017). What have animals to do with social work? A sociological reflection on species and social work. *Journal of Animal Ethics, 7*(1), 96–108.

Quinn, E., & Westwood, B. (Eds.). (2019). *Thinking veganism in literature and culture: Towards a vegan theory*. Springer.

Sims, M. (2020). *Bullshit towers*. Peter Lang.

Singer, P. (2024). *Animal liberation now*. Penguin Books.

Sorenson, J. (2011). Constructing extremists, rejecting compassion: Ideological attacks on animal advocacy from right and left. In J. Sanbonmatsu (Ed.), *Critical theory and animal liberation*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Tolich, M. (2010). A critique of current practice: Ten foundational guidelines for autoethnographers. *Qualitative Health Research, 20*(12), 1599–1610. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732310376076

Twine, R. (2014). Vegan killjoys at the table—Contesting happiness and negotiating relationships with food

practices. *Societies, 4*(4), 623–639. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc4040623

van Heugten, K. (2011). Registration and social work education: A golden opportunity or a Trojan horse? *Journal of Social Work, 11*(2), 174–190.

The Vegan Society. (2024). *Worldwide growth of veganism*. https://www.vegansociety.com/news/media/statistics/worldwide, accessed 17/6/24

Wilson, B., Thompson, K., & McGreevy, P. (2021). The race that segments a nation: Findings from a convenience poll of attitudes toward the Melbourne Cup Thoroughbred horse race, gambling and animal cruelty. *PloS One, 16*(3). https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33760873/

Witkin, S. L. (2014). *Narrating social work through autoethnography*. Columbia University Press.

Wolf, D. (2000). Social work and speciesism. *Social Work, 45*(1), 88–93. https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/45.1.88