

# Teaching about Animals: Incorporating Nonhuman Animals into Sociology Classrooms

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## Abstract

The topic of human–animal studies (HAS) remains largely ignored within the sociology classroom. While a few sociologists have encouraged teaching about animals, none has assessed whether incorporating nonhuman animals into the curriculum is effective. In this study, three instructors at two universities incorporated animal-related materials in their sociology courses in a variety of ways. Data analyzed from course exam responses and student papers as well as end-of-semester student surveys indicate that student learning and enjoyment were enhanced. We provide suggestions for instructors on how to incorporate such material in their courses. We argue that teaching about nonhuman animals can serve as a powerful gateway to introducing students to a wide variety of social issues and concepts, thereby adding another useful instrument to our pedagogical tool kit in sociology.

## Keywords

animals, human–animal studies, inequalities, teaching activities

Despite the tremendous role nonhuman animals (NHAs) play in culture and in our own lives (and those of our students), the topic of human–animal studies (HAS) remains a largely ignored topic in most sociology courses. It is revealing that a search for “animal” in titles of *Teaching Sociology* publications produces just one book review (Willets 2015). In this article, we argue that incorporating HAS into the sociology curriculum not only provides students with a more accurate understanding of society as one that is shaped by NHAs in profound ways but also helps students understand conventional sociological topics seemingly unrelated to nonhuman animals. After all, many students hold a deep fondness for animals, consider companion animals to be “family,” and miss their companion animals when transitioning to college (Adamle, Riley, and Carlson 2009). By capitalizing on students’ deep love for and fascination with NHAs, their engagement and

learning are enhanced, and they learn about the important ways NHAs are woven into the fabric of our social world, thereby broadening their sociological perspectives.

This article is intended to heighten awareness of HAS as an important area within sociology and to introduce creative and simple ways to incorporate the subject into the sociological curriculum, both as a topic in its own right and as a way to illuminate sociological concepts. While a few sociologists

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have encouraged teaching about animals and offered concrete strategies for doing so (Irvine 2009; Smith-Harris 2010), none has empirically assessed whether incorporating NHAs into the curriculum is effective. In this study, we present a variety of pedagogical strategies (from simply using NHA examples to illustrate sociological concepts to fully incorporating sections of a course devoted to HAS) and assess students' perceptions of their effectiveness using data from student writing, exams, and end-of-the-semester student surveys.

## ANIMALS AND SOCIOLOGY

In 1979, Clifton Bryant made a compelling case for the sociological study of NHAs, what he called the "zoological connection," in order to better understand human behavior (Bryant 1979:399). Forty years later, HAS remains one of the most neglected areas in sociology. Our discipline remains a strongly anthropocentric one, focusing almost entirely on humans (who, of course, are also animals), and speciesist, elevating the status, importance, and needs of humans above all other animals (Arluke 2002; Nibert 2003). Mead (1934), for example, argues that only humans have the capacity for culture and language, and sociobiologist Edward Wilson (1998:128) asserts that "human beings differ fundamentally from all other animal species" due to culture—tenets that have since been refuted (Arluke and Sanders 1996; Emery and Clayton 2004; Goodall 1986; Krutzen et al. 2005; Sanders and Arluke 1993; Sapolsky 2006). When the topic of NHAs is raised in current disciplinary conversation, it is commonly done to assert human superiority over nonhuman species or the importance of human social issues over those of other animals (Irvine 2008; Nibert 2003).

Perrow (2000:473) posits that the study of animals is a "boutique issue," unimportant in comparison to issues such as "human poverty and social injustice." Irvine (2008), however, notes that such challenges fail to see the connection between humans and NHAs, including the link to poverty, oppression, and injustice; for example, "significant environmental degradation occurs through farming practices, which are being exported to parts of the world where they make poor people poorer" (Irvine 2008:1965). She argues that NHAs "are so tightly woven into the fabric of society that it is difficult to imagine life without them" (Irvine 2008:1954). York and Mancus (2013) similarly argue that NHAs remain largely invisible within sociological theory despite the fact that they have played

essential roles in human history and sociocultural development. Ignoring these interconnections leaves wide gaps in our sociological understanding and theories of human society.

From even a cursory glance, one would be hard-pressed not to see the role that NHAs play in virtually every dimension of social life: food, family, fashion, entertainment, economy, environment, media, medicine, and so on. For example, HAS scholars have established linkages between NHAs and domestic violence (Akhtar 2013; Ascione 1999; Bright et al. 2017; Fitzgerald 2007); childhood socialization (McCardle, McCune, Griffin, and Maholmes 2011; Melson 2001; Sussman 1985); health and medicine (Beck and Katcher 2003; Rogers, Hart, and Boltz 1993); poverty and homelessness (Irvine 2015); language and culture (Kalof 2007; Malamud 2010; Smith-Harris 2008); crime and deviancy (Beirne 2002; Bryant 1979; Fitzgerald, Kalof, and Dietz 2009); disasters and resiliency (Baum 2011; Chadwin 2017; Zottarelli 2010); family formation and interactions (Owens and Grauerholz 2019; Laurent-Simpson 2017); symbolic interaction and the development of self (Cerulo 2009; Jerolmack and Tavory 2014); ecology, energy, the environment, and food systems (Cherry 2019; Scoville 2019; Whitley 2019; Winders and Ransom 2019; Wrenn 2018); advocacy and social movements (Cherry 2010; Fitzgerald 2019); and a host of social problems (Bryant 1979; Jerolmack 2008), to name a few. Thus, to understand human society fully, the human-NHA connection must be taken into account, and in failing to do so, we miss an important opportunity to help students understand the social world more fully.

In addition to their importance in better understanding the social world, we believe that HAS holds a pedagogical power that can engage students and stimulate their sociological imaginations. While some instructors offer "animals and society"-related courses (for more on this, see Irvine 2009, the American Sociological Association's Teaching Resources and Innovations Library for Sociology (TRAILS), and the Animals and Society Institute), most programs do not offer such courses, and instructors who wish to teach such a course sometimes meet resistance (Flynn 2003). In these cases, it may be more feasible to incorporate HAS into established courses. For example, Smith-Harris (2010) explores ways to infuse animal readings and films into her *Introductory to Sociology and Anthropology* course, Wrenn (2018) presents materials on speciesism and animal oppression within the food system to her

Introductory Sociology students and asks them to estimate how many animals are slaughtered for food, and some of the syllabi for Animals and Society courses published in TRAILS offer exercises that could be incorporated into such courses (e.g., Markowski 2016). It is interesting that NHAs have become a feature in many early-education settings to help children develop compassion, empathy, and prosocial behavior (Beierl 2008; Daly and Suggs 2010; Nicoll, Trifone, and Samuels 2008; Thompson and Gullone 2003), and incorporating HAS into higher-education courses may extend these benefits to college students to promote social justice as well as role taking and empathy toward others.

While a few excellent resources such as these exist, none of the strategies mentioned above has been empirically assessed to determine whether incorporating HAS into the curriculum is effective. In this study, we present data collected by three different instructors at two large universities who incorporated animal-related materials in various ways into their non-animal-related courses to show that such strategies are effective in helping students learn and engage with the topic. We also provide suggestions for incorporating HAS in a variety of courses.

## METHODS

For this study, six courses being taught by the authors integrated NHA materials. These included Sociology of Gender; Pop Culture: Race, Gender, and Sexualities; Family Trends (two sections); Consumer Society; and Introductory Sociology. Courses were taught during the fall 2018 and spring 2019 semesters. The courses ranged by size (8–156), instructional modality (fully online/in person), location taught (Midwest and Southeast), and type of institution (both classified as doctoral universities, one with high research activity and the other with very high research activity, according to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education n.d.). This study was approved by both universities' institutional review boards.

The strategies used ranged from simply incorporating examples related to animals to illustrate sociological concepts (as done in Family Trends) to using examples to illustrate sociological concepts and including at least one HAS reading (as done in Introductory Sociology and Consumer Society) to devoting a section of the course to animal-human connections that included multiple readings, class discussions, and lectures on NHAs (used in Sociology of Gender and Pop Culture).

## Courses

*Introductory Sociology (taught online by Grauerholz, spring 2019, 156 students).* This online course was structured around seven modules, and NHA examples were incorporated into four module lectures: The Discipline of Sociology, which introduced students to the idea of sociology as an anthropocentric discipline and implications for understanding the social world; Socialization, in which companion animals were discussed to teach about agents of socialization; Stratification, in which speciesism was used as an example to help students think about the many ways in which societies stratify groups; and Population Growth and Environmental Challenges, in which the effects of factory farming and defaunation on human health and communities were discussed. A (condensed) textbook (Ballantine, Roberts, and Korgen 2018) was used that makes minimal references to animals. References included incorporation of the Nonhuman Rights Project (a movement to give legal rights of personhood to certain NHAs, such as chimpanzees) as an example of a prosocial social movement, “humans as animals” in the section on “nature versus nurture” in the chapter on socialization, and a supplemental reading included in instructors' resources that emphasized the importance of including pets in sociological inquiry (Jacobs 2017), which was required reading for students in this course.

*Family Trends (taught online by Grauerholz, fall 2018, 74 students, and spring 2019, 70 students).* This online course was structured into seven modules. NHA examples were incorporated into six of these to teach how definitions of “family” have broadened over the past few decades (to include nontraditional arrangements, such as same-sex couples and companion animals), what historical trends in custody battles (which are increasingly fought over companion animals) reveal about family change and patriarchy (i.e., women, children, and companion animals being considered property), fertility trends and alternative pathways to parenting (adopting and raising “fur babies” rather than human children as one pathway), the family division of labor and how family change shapes these patterns (i.e., as companion animals become more central to family life, they require more work that typically falls into women's laps, adding to the second shift; Hochschild 1990), and recent family trends (including the emergence of interspecies families). A reader was used for this course (Skolnick and Skolnick 2014); none of the readings

makes reference to NHAs and their relationship to families.

*Consumer Society (taught in person by Kidder, spring 2019, 31 students).* This upper-level elective course explored trends and processes of life in a consumer society as it has transitioned from an industrial to a postindustrial society. NHA illustrative examples were incorporated into seven course topics to teach about conspicuous and vicarious consumption (Veblen 1899) and how consumption of NHAs is shaped by, and is an identity marker of, social class/status. Students read *The Commodity Frontier* (Hochschild 2004), and in discussion of the reading, NHAs were used to illustrate various concepts, such as outsourcing (e.g., dog daycare) and unpaid labor (e.g., cleaning up after and tending to NHAs), and how these patterns are shaped by class/status, race/ethnicity, and sex/gender in terms of cultural and social norms (e.g., who can afford to outsource animal care). Students read chapters from *The Consumer Society Reader* (Schor and Holt 2000); the only chapter from this reader that mentioned other animals or other-than-human species in terms of the environment and ecological living was Elgin ([1993] 2000). Additional HAS readings were assigned (Gunderson 2014; Shiva 2004) to inform students about how humans and other species are being exploited and destroyed through practices of globalization in order to maintain corporate domination.

*Sociology of Gender (taught in person by Weinzimmer, fall 2018, 30 students).* This course was structured into 10 sections, with 9 of those determined by the organization of the course reader (Spade and Valentine 2015). The addition of a 10th section created by Weinzimmer, “Sexism, Heterosexism, and Speciesism,” was covered over two consecutive classes and included three readings on gender, sexuality, and speciesism (Adams 2015:3–17; Herzog 2010; Nibert 2003). The central learning objective was to help students look at NHAs sociologically, paying attention to the connections and overlap between NHA oppression and oppressed human groups. In class discussion, students came up with their own examples from their lives (such as familial eating practices) and mass media representations and explored how devaluation of and oppression toward both women and NHAs are embedded across various social institutions, including the family, media, law, and the economy. Beyond this dedicated section, HAS was absent, with the exception of a piece by Robert Sapolsky (2014) on the

myth that testosterone causes aggression, where he discusses patterns of male aggression from studies of primates.

*Popular Culture: Race, Gender, and Sexualities (taught in person by Weinzimmer, fall 2018, eight students).* This course is an upper-level elective for the Sociology and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies programs. Two class periods were devoted to “Other Animals in Mass Media,” organized around three readings that specifically examined NHAs and media (Adams 2015:3–17; Grauerholz 2007; Malamud 2010) and application of Mulvey’s (1999) classic cinematic concept of the “male gaze,” which emphasizes the patriarchal underpinnings of how film is created and for whom. The core learning objective for this section was how popular culture today objectifies NHAs in order to uphold human privilege and capitalistic gain. As a class, students discussed all three pieces in detail and applied the authors’ concepts to their own original pop culture analyses of animal entertainment, including commercials, advertisements, zoos and aquariums, kids’ media, and animal-focused television programs and channels. HAS was not included elsewhere within the course.

### Course Objectives

Across all courses, a primary objective was to enhance students’ interest in the topic and engagement in the course. Student engagement and interest are important as they have been shown to be associated with academic performance (Abrantes, Seabra, and Lages 2007; Carini, Kuh, and Klein 2006) and career/academic major choices (Beggs, Bantham, and Taylor 2008). Given the variation in courses taught, cognitive learning objectives varied, ranging from lower-level learning (basic knowledge) to higher-level learning that involves more critical and sociological thinking. We used Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy to develop course-specific cognitive learning objectives consistent with the manner and purpose of introducing HAS.

In Family Trends, Introductory Sociology, and Consumer Society, where a few illustrative examples were incorporated, our goal was to enhance students’ basic knowledge of sociological concepts or phenomena. These objectives correspond to the level of *knowledge* within Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy, whereby students are expected to demonstrate their ability to recognize or recall information related to specific topics, trends, and concepts. In the current study, we used NHA examples to teach

students concepts and facts related to (1) the nature of the discipline, (2) agents of socialization, (3) stratification, (4) population growth and related environmental challenges, (5) how definitions of “family” have broadened, (6) historical trends in custody battles as they relate to family change and gender, (7) fertility trends and alternative pathways to parenting, (8) division of labor and how family change shapes these patterns, (9) emerging family trends, (10) conspicuous and vicarious consumption, and (11) how consumption is linked to social class/status.

In Sociology of Gender and Pop Culture, where HAS materials were incorporated more fully, students were expected to demonstrate *comprehension* as well as higher-learning skills as discussed by Bloom (1956), including *application*, *analysis*, *synthesis*, and *evaluation*. That is, students were expected to demonstrate a deeper understanding of concepts by describing various practices or conditions specific to nonhuman and human relations (comprehension); the ability to apply materials to a social problem or to one’s own life (application); an understanding of how our treatment of NHAs and the underlying ideology justifying such treatment are related and similar to human forms of oppression, such as sexism and heterosexism (analysis); an understanding of the relationship between the treatment of NHAs and larger social forces, such as media or the economy, and recognizing these as structural forces (synthesis); and the use of information to make judgments or defend one’s position, or “weighing values involved in alternative courses of action” (evaluation) (Bloom 1956:192). In short, the goal was to help students think more deeply, critically, and sociologically, using the topic of NHAs as a teaching tool.

### Measuring Engagement and Student Learning

All courses used an end-of-the-semester survey to measure self-reported learning and engagement and enjoyment. The survey was anonymous (administered online or via Qualtrics) and voluntary; no student received credit for completing the survey or was penalized for not doing so. If students answered fewer than half the questions, their surveys were discarded. The response rate for Introductory Sociology was 48 percent (75/156), 50 percent for Sociology of Gender (15/30), 63 percent for the Pop Culture course (5/8), 52 percent for Consumer Society (16/31), 57 percent for the fall semester Family Trends (42/74), and 65

percent for the spring semester Family Trends (46/70). Overall, 199 (54 percent) student surveys were analyzed. It should be noted that these response rates are similar to, and in most cases better than, those for many student surveys, where response rates are often less than 50 percent (Porter and Whitcomb 2003).

The same questions were asked across all sections, but some were modified so that they applied directly to the course being taught. For example, in order to gauge enjoyment, students in Family Trends were asked, “Did you find it enjoyable to learn about how animals are connected to families today?” and in Pop Culture, students were asked, “Did you find it enjoyable to learn about how animals are connected to pop culture today?” (responses ranged from 5 = *definitely enjoyable* to 1 = *definitely unenjoyable*).

To further gauge engagement and interest, we asked, “Was learning about the connections between [topic] and animals interesting?” (5 = *definitely interesting* to 1 = *definitely uninteresting*); “Would you recommend keeping these [materials] in future courses?” (5 = *definitely* to 1 = *definitely not*); “Would you like to see more sociology instructors incorporate information about animals in their courses?” (5 = *definitely* to 1 = *definitely not*). Students were also asked to briefly explain why they found materials enjoyable or not enjoyable, and if they answered “probably not” or “definitely not” to questions regarding recommending keeping materials and having more instructors incorporate NHAs in their courses, they were also asked to explain why.

To assess student learning, we used a multiprong approach, analyzing students’ surveys, exam data, and their writing. On surveys, students were asked, “Do you think these examples and discussions helped you to understand [topic] better?” (5 = *very much helped me understand better*, 4 = *somewhat helped me understand better*, 3 = *neither helpful nor unhelpful*, 2 = *somewhat unhelpful for understanding better*, 1 = *very much unhelpful for understanding better*). In addition, students were asked, “Do you think these [examples, discussions, readings, lectures previously identified] helped you to understand contemporary society better?” (5 = *very much helpful* to 1 = *very much unhelpful*). If students answered that they did not find these materials helpful, they were prompted to explain why not. Students were also asked an open-ended question: “What specific aspects of the discussion or lectures about NHAs were the most meaningful to you and why?” It should be noted that because entire

sections were not devoted to HAS in Family Trends, Introductory Sociology, and Consumer Society, we asked students if they could recall the NHA examples. In these courses, 97 percent said they could definitely or somewhat recall examples.

Although some scholars have called into question the use of self-reported learning gains to measure actual learning (Porter 2013), student perceptions of their academic experiences (i.e., learning, engagement) are generally considered appropriate measures and are relied upon heavily in scholarly studies (consider the wide use of the National Survey of Student Engagement). After reviewing an extensive literature on the validity of using students' self-reports of engagement and learning, Zilvinskis, Masseria, and Pike (2017:884) note that "taken as a whole, research on students' self-reports of their engagement and student learning suggests that self-reports can provide accurate and appropriate data regarding students' college experiences."

In four courses (two sections of Family Trends, Introductory Sociology, Consumer Society), knowledge of 11 concepts (see Course Objectives) were assessed using embedded multiple-choice questions on exams, an appropriate method for measuring basic knowledge (Bloom 1956). All students in Consumer Society answered these questions, but in the Family Trends and Introductory Sociology courses (taught online), questions were taken from a test bank (created by the instructor and publisher), and a subset of students was presented with any given question. Given that NHA and non-NHA questions are independent, there is not an appropriate test of statistical differences to compare the percentage correct. Nonetheless, exam responses provide descriptive evidence of student learning, and we present these results for the four classes where exam questions on NHAs were incorporated.

To assess higher-order learning, analysis of student writing is most appropriate (Grauerholz 1999; Bloom 1956). In the Sociology of Gender course, two sources of student writing (journals and final paper) were used. For the journals, students were required to pick three out of nine possible course sections to write on in a "gender journal," where they were asked to directly connect their own gendered experiences and reflections to all assigned texts and lectures for that section. More than half (16 out of 28 who turned in essays) chose to write on the HAS section. Eleven students (out of 28) also mentioned NHAs in their final gender journal papers, in which they were asked to look back on

their previous journals and cumulative experience across the course and analyze how/when/why their perceptions of gender changed over the semester. In total, the sample from this course includes 27 entries (essays) from a combination of journals and papers that discuss nonhuman-and-human animal relations.

These 27 essays on NHAs were content analyzed, using five of Bloom's (1956) hierarchically listed (from most simple to most complex) criteria for measuring learning objectives: comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. A coding sheet was developed by tailoring each generalized measure to reflect NHA-specific learning; then this coding sheet and corresponding guidelines were used by all four authors. The essays were randomly divided into two sets, with each essay being coded separately by two authors for whether and how well students met each objective on a scale of *no*, *somewhat*, and *yes*. All coding discrepancies were resolved by a third author who was not involved in the original coding of the essay. The first objective, comprehension, was measured depending on if and how well the student was able to identify and explain specific practices of NHA exploitation by humans or conditions (e.g., removing dairy calves from their mothers so humans can consume their breast milk). For application, coding scores were determined by the student's ability to apply NHA textual or lecture-based materials to some aspect of their personal practices (e.g., connecting societal denigration of "farm animals" to their cognitive dissonance around eating meat). Students' ability to synthesize was measured by coding whether or not they accurately explained how treatment of NHAs are shaped by social forces, such as corporations, gender constructs, and mass media (e.g., how men are taught to eat red meat to prove their masculinity in Western societies). To evaluate students' ability to analyze this information sociologically and intersectionally, essays were coded for if and how well the student connected dominant NHA ideologies and practices to other societal forms of inequality (e.g., racism, heterosexism). Finally, essays were coded for evidence of students' evaluative learning, that is, their ability to use course-derived insights to argue a position (e.g., explain why people should reduce or eliminate animal consumption due to environmental degradation and displacement of indigenous and minority populations, or justify why they should not).

## ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND LEARNING

### *Student Engagement: Interest and Enjoyment*

One of our main objectives for using NHA materials across all courses was to capitalize on students' love for animals and thereby enhance their engagement and interest in the course materials. Our results indicate that levels of student interest and enjoyment when NHA materials were used in the learning process were very high. It is noteworthy that more than half of the students in Sociology of Gender chose (out of nine possibilities) to write about NHA and 39 percent opted to write about the topic for their final paper. The survey results further revealed strong interest in the material. For instance, 67 percent of students across all courses found the subject matter definitely interesting, and 24 percent found it somewhat interesting. The percentages are similar for responses to the question about whether the materials were definitely or somewhat enjoyable (66 and 24 percent, respectively). We did find that students rated their enjoyment lower in the Pop Culture and Sociology of Gender courses as compared to the other courses and were more likely to report that the material was somewhat unenjoyable. This is not surprising, given the instructor's choice to focus on the harsh realities of animal exploitation and oppression, as opposed to discussing companion animals as family members or commodification of NHAs in media. These NHA lessons in Pop Culture and Sociology of Gender called attention to students' own problematic behaviors around consuming animals and speciesism in a more raw and direct way than other courses did, which certainly may lead to powerful, albeit uncomfortable, learning experiences. Indeed, several students in Pop Culture and Sociology of Gender indicated this reaction. Some examples are the following: "Though its [*sic*] not 'enjoyable' to learn about the absolute oppression of animals, it definitely opened my eyes to the problem and is extremely powerful information" (Sociology of Gender). "Uncomfortable topic, especially when tied to the other topics on intersectionality. Easier to see how I am personally not doing all I can in this area" (Pop Culture). "I wouldn't use the phrase enjoyable due to the fact that it was very sad. However, I did find it very interesting and would love to take a class on it in the future" (Sociology of Gender).

Earlier we suggested that students' attachment to animals would stimulate their enjoyment and

engagement in the course material, and student comments support this hypothesis. Examples include the following: "I find these examples enjoyable because of my love for animals" (Family Trends, fall). "I found it enjoyable because I have a pet, whom I love dearly, and it's interesting to see how they have become our families" (Family Trends, spring). "I found it enjoyable. I love animals and think its [*sic*] interesting when they can be related into a lesson" (Introductory Sociology). "I love animals and seeing how they affect the social world of humans is utterly amazing" (Introductory Sociology).

Although enjoyment is not a measure of learning, it is interesting that some students alluded to a direct connection between their enjoyment and learning, such as learning about a concept, expanding their perspectives, or thinking more sociologically. Some examples follow.

I like how it diverged from the ordinary classroom lectures, it interested me beyond what the textbook or regular lectures could accomplish. It grabbed my attention and got me more involved in this course. (Introductory Sociology)

I think this topic did a great job at helping one fully grasp the concept of what is being taught as well as keep people interested since most individuals have had a pet at one point in their lives and can relate. (Family Trends, fall)

It helps add another way of understanding the concepts being discussed. (Family Trends, spring)

Please keep incorporating animals into your course. Not only is it very informative, but it also makes it easier to engage with the content. (Family Trends, spring)

It is interesting because I never thought about it in that way and I enjoy learning about things that give me an opportunity to expand my way of thinking and even if it doesn't change my mind it gives me a different perspective to think about. (Sociology of Gender)

I find it enjoyable because I never considered the connection between animals and consumer

society. I believe understanding will help not only advocate for animal rights but understand the complexities of communities involved. (Consumer Society)

Students overwhelmingly stated that they would recommend keeping the material in class (69 percent definitely and 19 percent probably would recommend) and would also like to see more instructors incorporate such topics (58 percent definitely and 25 percent probably). Comments from students reinforced these findings, such as “Please keep the examples. It’s refreshing to learn about the positive ways our families are evolving (Family Trends, fall) and “Animals are creatures and examples that I can understand. I’m not too crazy about complicated metaphors, and your animal examples were easy to understand” (Introductory Sociology).

### Cognitive Learning

*Self-reported learning.* The vast majority of students (88 percent) across all courses claimed that the NHA materials were either definitely or somewhat helpful in learning about society; just 1 percent said they were unhelpful. When students in nonintroductory courses were asked whether the materials helped them learn about the subject (e.g., family, gender, consumption), 85 percent said they were definitely or somewhat helpful. It is possible that students overestimate the amount of learning on a self-reported quantitative measure. Thus, we also asked students an open-ended question about which materials were most meaningful and why. More than half of students (59 percent) mentioned specific topics that they found meaningful when asked this question. These responses suggest that students could recall and articulate specific lessons. An example from each class illustrates this point:

The discussion on factory farming and its effects on the environment and human health...The inclusion of this topic in the module reinforced the knowledge I had on the topic and also helped illustrate the intersection between humans, nonhuman animals, and society as a whole. (Introductory Sociology)

Discussing how animals are treated in the food industry was meaningful because it

made me look at it through a different lense [*sic*]. I never really thought about animals as an oppressed group before this class. (Sociology of Gender)

The most meaningful lecture to me was on interspecies families because I did not know that there was a term given for people who consider pets as family or that half of the population also views pets as family members. Prior to this class, I did not think that this was something that was researched in sociology. So I’m glad this topic is taken seriously and shows how special pets are in families. (Family Trends, fall)

Readings that showed how women and animals are equated. This really opened my eyes to possible explanations of violence and the harming of women. (Pop Culture)

I really enjoyed the discussion on living vicariously through our animals/pets. It personally just amazes me how quickly and effectively the consumer market has adapted to incorporate these relationships into consumerism. They have commodified pretty much every aspect of owning a pet today. (Consumer Society)

For me I would have to point out how much people in general are connected to their pets. I knew, but now, I know. (Family Trends, spring)

In addition, several students mentioned particular readings that were impactful. The fact that students could articulate specific lessons they learned reinforces the quantitative results indicating a high level of learning occurred.

Exam questions were used to measure students’ knowledge. In Table 1, we present the overall average of correct responses to exam questions covering NHA materials in comparison to other questions. With a few exceptions, students tended to score higher on NHA-related questions than on non-NHA-related questions overall, indicating that students attended to this material and could recall it on the exam and that incorporating NHA materials into the curriculum enhanced student learning.

Analysis of students’ writing in their journals and final papers for the Sociology of Gender course indicates that the topic of NHA facilitated

**Table 1.** Percentage of Correct Answers on Quiz Questions Testing for Knowledge of Concepts for Select Courses.

Topic/Concept	Course	NHA-Related Questions (%)	Non-NHA-Related Lecture Questions (%)	All Questions (Lecture and Readings) (%)
Discipline of sociology	Introductory Sociology	85 <sup>a</sup>	<b>88</b>	<b>83</b>
Socialization	Introductory Sociology	84	<b>80</b>	83
Population and environment	Introductory Sociology	88 <sup>a</sup>	90	<b>81</b>
Definition of family	Family Trends	79	<b>74</b>	68
Custody decisions and family property	Family Trends	58	<b>74</b>	66
Parenting	Family Trends	89	<b>85</b>	75
Division of labor	Family Trends	91	<b>75</b>	73
Current trends	Family Trends	84	<b>85</b>	75
Conspicuous and vicarious consumption	Consumer Society	100	<b>89</b>	89
Consumption as identity marker	Consumer Society	86	<b>90</b>	89

Note: NHA = nonhuman animal.

a. Testing of these concepts included NHA-related questions from both readings and lecture. Bolded percentages indicate most appropriate comparison to NHA-related questions based on whether questions covered only lectures or both lecture and reading.

higher-learning skills in accordance with all five levels of learning objectives per Bloom's (1956) taxonomy. As seen in Table 2, all student papers met the most basic learning objective: knowledge of NHA exploitation or human–NHA relations (100 percent were measured as either *yes* or *somewhat*, with 93 percent coded as *yes*). Reflecting the instructor's selected materials and lecture content, most students mentioned conditions under which farmed animals are raised or how human and non-human relations are gendered. Nearly all students (97 percent coded *yes* or *somewhat*, with 93 percent coded *yes*) demonstrated application by relating NHA materials to their personal life. Similarly, 97 percent (67 percent coded *yes*, 30 percent coded *somewhat*) demonstrated some level of synthesis or an understanding of how NHA relations are shaped by social forces, including norms, ideologies, and social institutions. Examples follow.

Dominant ideologies have naturalized the thinking that eating meat is a way of life, and the only people silly enough to fight for animal rights are vegans and vegetarians. However, more people need to realize, especially those who are oppressed, that they are experiencing the same treatment as these animals just disguised in different forms.

People want to impose their power and authority over people and creatures that they view as weaker than themselves. Government

institutions reinforce this by creating policies that encourage the powerful and elite. Oppression of people and creatures is only beneficial to people that hold power in any given society.

Women get criticized when they eat a heavy meat diet but men don't. The double standard is present and will always be unless we shift this divide. My stepbrother is vegan and my dad says all the time that he isn't a real man, but my sister is too and says nothing to her about the subject of being a real woman.

About half of the students clearly connected NHA exploitation to other forms of inequality (52 percent coded *yes*, and another 33 percent *somewhat* did so). Examples follow.

Non-vegans argue that becoming vegan would put a lot of people out of work as one of their main arguments. My argument is that ending slavery probably cost people a lot of money but that doesn't mean it shouldn't have happened.

Reading about this week's theme on sexism, heterosexism, and speciesism, I grasped the idea of how much animals are like humans in the sense that, regardless of how intelligent or worthy they are, their value will always be reduced by those in power.

**Table 2.** Percentages and Frequencies (in parentheses) Demonstrating Evidence of Higher-Level Cognitive Learning ( $N = 27$ ).

Criterion	Yes	Somewhat	No
Demonstrates awareness of NHA exploitation or conditions (comprehension)	93% (25)	7% (2)	0% (0)
Applies NHA materials/lessons/etc. to some aspect of one's personal life or social problems (application)	93% (25)	4% (1)	4% (1)
Discusses how human–NHA relations are shaped by sociological forces (synthesis)	67% (18)	30% (8)	4% (1)
Connects NHA materials to other forms of inequality (analysis)	52% (14)	33% (9)	15% (4)
Uses information to make value/moral judgments or to justify a stand or position (evaluation)	67% (18)	22% (6)	11% (3)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding. NHA = nonhuman animal.

[W]hen I go to the zoo I do feel guilty but it doesn't stop me from going and I still enjoy going. Partly because I enjoy seeing and learning about different animals that I wouldn't otherwise have the chance to see and partly because I'm intrigued. But historically African Americans were put on display in the same manner for the entertainment of whites and it makes me conflicted about what I am doing.

When tackling speciesism, I believe it is important to use an Eco/Indigenous feminist lens, after all these standpoints are rooted in understanding environmental domination and the subordination of women as connected. I believe that a person's veganism and/or eco-consciousness should be rooted in these as well, simply eating vegan does not at all mean that the food you consume is ethically sourced, plus it's important to realize that not everyone can afford to change their diet in such a way. Farmers of the Global South and migrant agricultural workers are disproportionately affected, does the lack of animal products mean the mistreatment of humans isn't as bad?

Finally, most students (67 percent coded *yes*, 22 percent coded *somewhat*) met the highest level of learning on Bloom's (1956) taxonomy, evaluation, by using class materials about NHA to make judgments or to justify a position:

Eating meat and dairy causes many many environmental issues and my question is: is it worth it? When our planet is so warm that . . . the human species dies off, will it be

worth it because we got to eat cheeseburgers? Side note: writing this makes me want to go vegan like immediately.

This week's readings also opened my eyes to the fact that I cannot sit here and claim to love animals and want them to be treated right when I eat meat. If I am going to rally behind animals being treated right, I have to support all animals, and not just the domestic ones like cats and dogs.

These articles were topics that I had never considered and never believed I had a reason to consider them. In a way it made me sad that I have been blindly living my life without really considering what I needed to do to attempt to make life better for other people and creatures that I may run across.

As expected, students showed higher mastery of basic learning objectives, such as comprehension, but even higher-level learning objectives (e.g., evaluation, analysis) were evident in these essays. It is also noteworthy that while only 26 percent of the sample clearly met (i.e., were coded *yes*) all five objectives, 56 percent were coded *yes* on at least four, 89 percent on at least three, and 100 percent on at least two criteria. In other words, these students were collectively successful in meeting learning objectives across multiple and majority levels of Bloom's (1956) taxonomy.

### Challenges

The overwhelming majority of students said they enjoyed learning about NHAs, were interested in

the topic, and recommended that it be included in the curriculum, but some students did not express such enthusiasm. In open-ended comments, several students objected to teaching about NHAs on several grounds. For some, it centered on the question of equivalency—they found equating NHAs to humans objectionable. Some examples follow.

To me, I do not see humans and animals as being in the same category. As such, it was difficult for me to see how oppression of animals was on the same level as oppression of human beings. (Sociology of Gender)

I have a dog and cat. I am not saying that I don't like animals. But being a parent as well as a pet owner, being a parent is much harder. Many people like to compare being a "pet owner" as being a mom or dad but they are not equal. Parenting is very challenging and not as rewarding and being a pet owner is a much easier responsibility. (Family Trends, fall)

A student in the Sociology of Gender course stated that the material did not belong in the sociology curriculum: "There are many different ways that you can teach. Using animals is weird. This isn't a science class." Another student from Introductory Sociology objected on religious grounds: "To me none of it was meaningful; I believe Gods [*sic*] most important creation to him are human beings. And, I think, we have been given dominion and authority over all the animals to govern them as we please and as God sees fit." A few students also found the material simply to not be relevant: "I believe it does not need to be discussed. It was nice but not pertinent information" (Family Trends, fall). Also, not all students like animals. One student noted, "I did not find these enjoyable because I really do not like animals foreal [*sic*]" (Family Trends, fall).

### Limitations

Although we have tried to be systematic and thorough in this study, it is not without its limitations. First, although the response rate was similar to or higher than that for many student surveys, about 45 percent of our students (across all courses) did not respond, raising questions about the representativeness of these responses. Students who were particularly happy with the HAS materials may have

been more likely to respond; thus, the results here may overestimate students' engagement, satisfaction, and learning. Providing incentives (e.g., extra credit) to students may increase response rates but can have its own drawbacks. Second, although we have attempted to measure learning using a multi-pronged approach (self-reported learning, answers on exam questions, content analysis of student writing), each measure is limited. Self-reported learning, although widely used, may not correspond directly to actual learning. Results based on answers to exam questions are difficult to interpret because it was not possible to ensure complete comparability across HAS-related and non-HAS questions. Student writing can alleviate some of these problems but was used in only one course in this study. Thus, future studies are needed to explore whether and in what ways incorporating HAS into sociology courses can be effective in helping students learn. We offer this study merely as a first step toward encouraging future scholarship that explores how human-NHA interaction, human/nature, and multispecies work can be incorporated into our sociological teaching and scholarship.

## INCORPORATING HAS INTO THE CURRICULUM

As these findings suggest, incorporating HAS materials into sociology courses can help students understand myriad ways in which humans and other animals are connected at global, institutional, community, and interpersonal levels and can enhance their understanding of the social world. These topics can also stimulate students' interest in the topic and their engagement. Here we discuss a range of ways that NHAs may be incorporated into various courses to teach sociological concepts, including discussion topics and activities.

### Exploring Sociological Concepts through NHAs

NHAs permeate all aspects of the social world; hence it would be possible to apply HAS content to illustrate virtually any sociological topic. Here we offer suggestions for teaching about some popular topics.

**Socialization/childhood.** Companion animals play an important role in children's socialization, although they are rarely included in discussions of children

and/or socialization experiences (Cole and Stewart 2014; Tipper 2011). Yet, one of the main reasons why parents report that they adopt companion animals is to help their children learn responsibility and empathy, and companion animals may play an important role in children's emotional socialization (Fifield and Forsyth 1999; Melson 2001; Tipper 2011). Studies show that children with disabilities often form particularly strong ties with companion animals and that these companion animals can help them learn social skills and aid in their cognitive, social, and physical development (Byström and Persson 2015; Melson 2001). These examples may facilitate discussion surrounding agents of socialization and its outcomes. Instructors may wish to build discussion around readily available YouTube videos that portray interactions of children with companion animals, including children with disabilities. Instructors could also have students write sociological autobiographies (Kebede 2009), centered on socialization, and allow them to consider their animal companions as socialization agents to help them understand how others (human and non-human) shape their lives and to provide a fuller account of childhood. Students could also conduct an analysis of children's media, which is saturated with NHAs, to explore how NHA are used (largely through anthropomorphism) to teach children societal values and codes of conduct (good examples include popular children's shows *Peppa Pig* and *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood*) and to show parallels between humans' rich and complex emotional lives and those of other species (e.g., *March of the Penguins*, the *Planet Earth* series). See McEntee (2010) for additional ways to incorporate animals into lessons about socialization.

**Othering/marginalization.** The process of marginalization or othering (Collins 1990) is important to the maintenance of social inequalities. NHA examples can help illustrate this concept, especially in terms of how media perpetuates othering and marginalization (Hall 2014). Laura Mulvey's (1999) classic cinematic concept of the "male gaze," which emphasizes the patriarchal underpinnings of how film is created and for whom, can be extended to how we view NHA via the "human gaze" (Malamud 2010). In both situations, there is a hierarchy of power where the observer has complete access to and control over objectified bodies and sexuality (of both females and NHAs). Like women, NHAs are sexualized and devalued in advertisements and popular media (Adams 2015; Grauerholz 2007; Malamud 2010), in order to uphold human privilege and

capitalistic gain. Such oppressive, lucrative practices are also common in dominant, mainstream popular culture in terms of how people of color, women and girls, and queer peoples are represented (or symbolically annihilated) (Malamud 2010; Mulvey 1999; Pescosolido, Grauerholz, and Milkie 1997). Students can explore objectification through engaging in their own (individually or in groups) content analysis of media, exploring NHA representation in commercial and print advertisements for fast food, where both women and other animals are commonly hypersexualized and commodified. (Two excellent examples include the Burger King ad for the "BK Super Seven Incher" that will "blow your mind away" and alludes to oral sex with an attractive woman poised, mouth wide open, about to receive the sandwich; and the common media trope of depicting animals such as cows, pigs, and chickens in "sexy" pin-up poses to evoke the male gaze and entice men to consume more meat, thereby proving their masculinity.) Students can create posters or contribute to a collective slideshow to bring the subject alive visually.

**Intersectionality/oppression.** The oppression of NHAs and speciesism overlap with other forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, and so on; arguably, the underlying ideology of oppression is the same for humans and NHAs. For instance, dominant ideologies behind animal exploitation (such as hierarchical frameworks that legitimate the rights of humans over "inferior" others) are similarly used to justify female and queer oppression. The social constructions of the gender binary and hegemonic conceptions of masculinity and femininity (Connell 2002) have been/continues to be used to uphold male domination over women similar to how we justify our (mal)treatment of NHAs, by devaluing them as lower species to be controlled and exploited by humans. Some institutionalized examples of human-NHA exploitative relations that are ripe for discussion include the use of NHAs for vivisection/biomedical research/scientific experimentation; the animal-industrial complex for meat, eggs, and dairy; and abuse of companion/confined animals. Another example that can highlight the linkage between gender and NHA exploitation is dairy/egg consumption and veganism, specifically the linkage between human reproductive inequalities/justice and dairy/egg production. Many of our students do not realize, for example, that dairy cows, like all mammals, produce milk only after giving birth and that dairy production necessitates calves being removed from

their mothers so that their milk can be diverted to human consumption. Helping students understand how animal-food production exploits female members of various species' reproductive systems (namely, cows' and goats' milk, hens' eggs; see Adams 2015) can help them better understand that issues such as reproductive justice and gender inequality are larger-scaled, systemic practices. These topics are becoming increasingly relevant to students as the percentage of individuals who identify as vegans and vegetarians, especially among young adults, is rising (Forgrieve 2018). Meat eating and veganism can be further explored to show intersectionality, as these practices are gendered (cf. Adams 2015; Greenebaum and Dexter 2018), raced (Harper 2012a, 2012b; Ko and Ko 2017), and classed (Greenebaum 2017). The connections between veganism/meat eating and race, class, gender can be explored in class discussions and journaling, especially food journals.

Spiegel (1996) explores the similarities between the ways enslaved Africans in U.S. history were treated and the ways NHAs are used. For instance, both groups are "bred" and sold as property, with offspring often taken away from mothers/families at young ages; subjected to experimentation; and hunted. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) also draws parallels between slavery/the Holocaust and circuses/zoos/labs in its online media campaigns. While some students may object to these comparisons, as Spiegel directly discusses, the overarching lesson should be on how cultures rank and stratify various groups in order to justify the mistreatment of others. Students can also discuss the benefits and pitfalls of comparing other humans to NHAs in these ways. A classroom exercise adapted from one developed by Kim Korona (n.d.) asks students to divide into groups and write down reasons why humans oppress (e.g., to gain greater control over finite resources or power) and then specific ways in which humans oppress "othered" groups, including people of color, women, and NHAs. Alternatively, students could be asked to generate a list of the common terms and proverbs that equate women with NHAs (e.g., "she's a fox," "bitch"), or phrases that denigrate NHAs (e.g., "kill two birds with one stone") and women (e.g., the common use of "rape" to imply "messing with someone"), to explore how language serves to denigrate marginalized groups. Comparing these common phrases can help reveal the underlying, overlapping roots of oppression and ways in which these ideologies and social practices intersect and reinforce each other. For further

readings on the intersections, see *Animals and Society Institute* (2019) and *Smith-Harris* (2008).

*Emotion work/emotional labor/emotion management.* There are many opportunities to explore emotion work/labor with respect to our interactions with other animals. These experiences can be tapped to illustrate the concept of emotion work/emotional labor, in which workers or individuals must express or manage certain emotions in order to function in their roles (Hochschild 1983). For instance, many students have experienced the death of a companion animal and likely can relate to emotion work surrounding the experience, such as justifying one's grief to one's self and to others (McKinney 2019). Students may also have experience with animal shelters, training of service animals, or raising animals for 4-H projects. Workers, volunteers, and participants in these programs typically get involved because they love animals yet are forced to witness and participate in difficult practices, such as euthanasia (Frommer and Arluke 1999). Similarly, individuals who train service animals or animals for 4-H often grow deeply attached to these animals, but most relinquish them or sell them for slaughter at the end of the training/program (Ellis and Irvine 2010). Some students (especially those with biomedical backgrounds) conduct research on live animals (or dead animals killed specifically for research) yet believe that animals feel pain; indeed, some live with companion animals, including cats and dogs, that are commonly used in animal research (Phillips 1993). These examples are ripe for discussion about emotion work. Instructors can guide students through the process and necessity of managing these conflicting feelings and how animals come to be depersonalized or objectified, seen as "data" or "livestock," in order for humans to carry out their roles. It may also be helpful to explore how individuals make distinctions among animals of the same species based on context (e.g., a cat in an science laboratory vs. a cat as a companion animal, or a lab rat vs. a rat on the street) to help students understand how realities (and emotions) are socially constructed through language and social circumstances.

*Environmental degradation, population growth, concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), health, and illness.* The mistreatment and exploitation of animals (factory farming, destruction of habitat), fueled by population growth, urbanization, and capitalism, has resulted in major environmental and human health concerns. Instructors may wish to have students read a *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

report on the major environmental hazards caused by the voluminous amounts of manure produced in CAFOs (Hribar 2010) or other materials that recount the hazards of “manure lagoons” to human life and the environment, especially in times of disasters (e.g., Pierre-Louis 2018). In courses exploring food production, discussion of the effects on nutrition and health of losing pollinators can be explored. The rise in infectious diseases as a result of CAFOs and defaunation may be explored in courses dealing with health and illness (Keesing et al. 2010). A mini-research activity could involve tracking the epidemiology of common deadly illnesses—such as those associated with H1N1, avian flu, *E. coli*, coronavirus, and so on, which are typically zoonotic—and exploring their correlates to poverty and development (Grace 2012).

*McDonaldization, foodways, and environmental racism.* The McDonaldization of society (Ritzer 1993) certainly applies to animal-based food production, wherein the vast majority of the meat and dairy produced and consumed worldwide and in the United States comes from CAFOs, where farmed animals are subject to dehumanization, efficiency, and control. The goal of this animal–industrial complex is to produce as much animal-based food as possible, as inexpensively as possible, in the shortest amount of time. CAFOs are disproportionately located in lower-income, nonwhite, rural areas (Nicole 2013). One activity for students is to identify areas where local CAFOs are located (Food and Water Watch 2020) and correlate these with racial compositions of these areas using the racial dot map website to illustrate concepts such as environmental racism (Demographics Research Group 2020). Studies also suggest that CAFO workers suffer numerous health issues, that they are typically people of color/undocumented migrant workers, and that there is a link between presence of slaughterhouses in communities and domestic violence rates (Fitzgerald et al. 2009). Exploring these issues with students, especially those raised in rural areas, can illuminate issues of environmental justice and McDonaldization.

*Changing definition/composition of families, parenting, and communities.* Definitions of families have changed and broadened significantly since the latter part of the twentieth century. Considering cohabiting, childless couples and same-sex couples to be families is increasingly likely in the United States, as is counting companion animals as family members. Studies show that the majority of U.S.

households with companion animals consider them to be family members, and some adults consider themselves to be parents to their companion animals (Owens and Grauerholz 2019; PR Newswire 2015). Animal companions also provide an alternative pathway to parenthood and may influence women’s and couples’ childbearing decisions (Laurent-Simpson 2017) and may discourage intimate relationship formation (Stallones et al. 1990). These findings can serve as an excellent jumping-off point to explore important shifts in families, such as delayed age of marriage, declining fertility, and the deinstitutionalization of marriage. Instructors may wish to poll their students on who considers companion animals to be family as a way to explore how and why definitions of families have changed. Students may be surprised to learn that companion animals are more likely to be counted as family than are same-sex couples (Powell et al. 2010). Many communities and businesses have changed to accommodate these NHAs (e.g., allowing dogs in eating establishments or on airplanes). Instructors could ask students to research and document types and prevalence of local and national businesses that accommodate other animals and discuss the implications for communities and social conceptions of families.

*Consumption.* NHAs are consumed by humans in myriad ways—as food, clothing, entertainment, prescription drugs, social media memes, and so on—and any of these can be fodder for lessons about human consumption patterns and factors that shape them. Instructors may obtain readily available images or have students collect their own that exemplify how identity and social status are associated with how we consume NHAs (e.g., eating filet mignon as opposed to ground chuck or showing celebrities with their “animal accessories”). Students can also research the impact of NHAs on the U.S. economy (e.g., animal agriculture; veterinary care, food, and accessories for companion animals; the entertainment industry; their role in the shared economy, e.g., Rover.com). Instructors might also discuss research summarized by Wade (2015) on the impact of popular dog movies on canine adoptions to explore the impact of media consumption on human behavior (Wade also poses questions about how these patterns are shaped by social class and parental status that could provoke interesting discussion). Instructors may also have students maintain a daily journal documenting their animal consumption to increase awareness of the many ways in which human consumption is centered on

NHAs. Irvine (2009) offers an excellent suggestion for structuring these journals: personal reflection(s), sociological insight(s), and action step(s) or ways students will share their new knowledge (e.g., discuss the animal–industrial complex with a roommate).

**Social movements.** One of the easiest ways to incorporate NHAs into the sociology curriculum is to illustrate various key concepts related to social movements, including types of social movements (e.g., veganism as a lifestyle or new social movement; Cherry 2006; or the Great Ape Project as a prosocial movement; <https://www.projetogap.org.br/en/>); frames, framing, and boundary work (Cherry 2010; Freeman 2010); social movement organizations (e.g., PETA or Direct Action); activism (Cherry 2010; Gaardner 2011); or social movements' role in shaping legislation (e.g., “ag-gag” laws or the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act; Fiber-Ostrow and Lovell 2016) and corporate practices (e.g., PETA’s “Murder King” campaign to protest Burger King’s treatment of farmed animals and success in getting the corporation to change its practices). Many animal rights groups have highly visible media campaigns (most well known is PETA) that are easily accessible and can be analyzed for messages and organizational features. Examining these media campaigns can illuminate other issues noted earlier, such as gender exploitation (e.g., PETA’s objectification of women’s bodies to promote its causes; see Wrenn 2015). For additional resources, instructors may wish to review Munro’s (2012) teaching and learning guide for teaching about animal rights movements.

## CONCLUSION

NHAs occupy a major role in our cultural imaginations, language, and practices. Because students often hold a deep affection for NHAs, capitalizing on this interest can enhance student engagement and facilitate their learning. Our findings suggest that bringing HAS into the classroom—whether simply through using NHAs to illustrate sociological concepts or by incorporating an entire section into the course—results in strong interest and enjoyment and, most importantly, learning. Helping students understand NHAs and their relevance to sociology, and to their lives more generally, is a useful and engaging way to enhance their sociological imaginations and assist them in gaining a more complex, holistic understanding of the social world.

Few sociology instructors teach or have taught courses solely focused on HAS. Our field largely upholds speciesism by failing to critically explore how the needs and desires of humans commonly rely on the exploitation and suffering of other animals. Similarly, we disregard the significant overlap between ideologies underlying the mistreatment of NHAs and of particular human groups, past and present. Given our societal as well as disciplinary biases, convincing a department to support an entire HAS course is challenging. One of the authors (Weinzimmer) created and instructed such a course twice, but it was unfortunately deemed a boutique issue and dropped by the department, in part because of low student enrollment. This is likely due to HAS being an elective course and also because students anticipate experiencing discomfort in studying animal exploitation and being challenged for their consumption practices. On the other hand, at University of Central Florida, we have taught an Animals and Health course nearly every semester for several years, to maximum enrollment, in large part because it was included in the popular medical sociology minor. HAS is a growing field and sociologists who are established experts in the field regularly offer HAS courses, including but not limited to David Nibert at Wittenberg University, Leslie Irvine at University of Colorado Boulder, Linda Kalof at Michigan State, Clifton Flynn at University of South Carolina Upstate, Tracey Smith-Harris at Cape Breton University, and Jessica Greenebaum at Central Connecticut State University. Many of these scholars’ syllabi, as well as other extensive HAS resources, are housed in TRAILS (available to American Sociological Association members) and by the Animals and Society Institute ([animalsand-society.org/human-animals-studies](http://animalsand-society.org/human-animals-studies)). We encourage instructors who wish to develop such courses to explore these resources as well as HAS texts, such as *Animals in Our Lives* (McCardle, McCune, Griffin, Esposito, et al. 2011; also see McCardle, McCune, Griffin, and Maholmes 2011), that may be used in these courses.

Like many challenging sociological topics that we introduce to students, teaching about NHAs can be met by student opposition or even be taken as offensive. Given prevailing attitudes toward NHAs in sociology and speciesism within the culture at large, such resistance should be expected. But, as with other difficult topics (such as racism, classism, and sexism), speciesism is perpetuated through hegemonic ideologies justifying social inequalities and thus merits coverage in the

classroom. As sociology instructors, we anticipate and prepare for student resistance, whether it arises when we challenge dominant worldviews that students cherish (such as the myth of meritocracy or the notion of being color-blind) or when we reveal their unearned privileges (such as by race, gender, or physical abilities). Such challenging lessons are certainly not enjoyable for students, but they nevertheless constitute a fundamental learning experience within sociology. Given that our discipline is founded upon and committed to the promotion of social justice, it is our contention that instructors of sociology must expand this concept to include the rights, desires, and experiences of *all* living sentient beings, not just those of humans.

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