

Julie Urbanik

“Hooters for Neuters”: Sexist or Transgressive Animal Advocacy Campaign?

“It’s sexist because it promotes the stereotypical role of women as sex objects.” — (Ellie)

“Hooters for Neuters” is a phrase that will stick with me for a very, very long time which makes it a marketing dream come true. If a leftist-feminist-hippie-blue-state-liberal like me laughs out loud at that, then they did something right.” — (Kate)

With over 400 locations in 42 states and 24 countries, the United States-based Hooters Restaurant chain has become incredibly successful during its 26 year history. It is a neighborhood-style bar/restaurant that features good food, lots of sports, and, the main attraction, scantily-clad “Hooters girls” servers. According to their website, the company believes the Hooters girls are as socially acceptable as a Dallas Cowboy cheerleader, a *Sports Illustrated* model, or a Radio City Rockette. The chain, however, has also attracted its share of critics for promoting stereotypes of women as sexual objects purely there to serve and entertain men — note the innuendo of the word hooters (aka breasts). The link between Hooters and animal advocacy via “Hooters for Neuters” campaigns first came to my attention through a letter published in *Best Friends Magazine* in 2006 by “Disgusted.” Best Friends Animal Sanctuary is one of the largest no-kill shelters in the United States and is located in Kanab, Utah. Disgusted was “disappointed that Best Friends, a very classy organization, would align itself with something as demeaning to women as the restaurant Hooters,” and argued that not only was Best Friends promoting misogyny, but also that Best Friends would probably not align with a business that promoted bigotry against other groups (e.g., African Americans) (Disgusted 43). The editors’ response was to state that “saving animal lives was our prime concern, and getting dogs and cats fixed plays a huge part in this. It’s easy for the public to ‘tune out’ the regular spay/neuter appeals, but something like this cuts through the chatter and makes an impact” (*ibid*).

“Hooters for Neuters” clearly “cuts through the chatter” in multiple ways. The campaign intersects with issues of social movement strategies around animal advocacy, and with issues of gender and animals with respect to where and how stereotypical gender categories are challenged or reinforced in nature-society interactions. In this article I use the lens of animal geography to explore the controversy over the *place* of “Hooters for Neuters” in the animal advocacy movement at large. By place I mean both the literal, unique constellation of human and natural features that come together in a particular setting (e.g., a Hooters Restaurant) as well as a more metaphorical notion of place, as in role/location in “the order of things” (e.g., the place of gender in animal advocacy). While place does designate the particular, place is not static, in that the identity of a place can shift, as can its purpose and the identities of those

using/moving through it. The challenge from an animal geography perspective is to understand how and why literal places become, exist, or dissipate as particular sites of human-animal interactions, as well as how metaphorical placements of categories related to human-animal interactions move in and out of being.

The “Hooter for Neuters” campaigns have brought into being a new, literal place for human-animal interactions. The goal of this article is two-fold: first, to examine what this new place means in relation to existing spay/neuter programs run through shelters and clinics, and second, to explore how “Hooters for Neuters” “fits in” with other gender-based animal advocacy campaigns. The opening quotes and letter to the editor highlight the underlying controversy: Is “Hooters for Neuters” promoting sexist animal advocacy in the name of pet overpopulation? If so, is this wrong? In essence, are “Hooters for Neuters” campaigns “out of place” in the animal advocacy movement? Can “Hooters for Neuters” be understood as a transgressive campaign — one that helps bring the politics of animal overpopulation into people’s everyday lives in addition to providing a specific place where male attitudes towards companion animals can be recalibrated? Or is it something in between? To explore this controversy I have broken the article into five sections. After setting the context for both pet overpopulation and animal geography, I provide an overview of “Hooters for Neuters” before turning to the “sexist” or “transgressive” readings of this spay/neuter strategy. The data used for this research comes from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include publicly available materials such as websites, newsletters, and personal communications. Secondary sources include news articles, online blogs and public discussion boards.

Context of pet/overpopulation and spay/neuter campaigns. There is no doubt that the United States is a nation of pet lovers. According to the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), the nation spends over \$40 billion per year on companion animals, which include some 75 million dogs, 88 million cats, and untold millions of rodents, birds, reptiles, and fish (HSUS). There is a cable channel dedicated to all things animal (Animal Planet), and reality shows like *Dog Whisperer* and *It’s Me or the Dog*, which help humans relate to their animals so that the entire household is healthy and happy. Shelter adoption is promoted in such venues. Today many people know that adopting an animal from a shelter saves an animal’s life, but many people do not realize the full extent of the problem of dog and cat overpopulation. The HSUS estimates there are around 70 million stray cats and dogs roaming the country at any given time, due to abandonment, uncontrolled breeding, and running away/escaping. For animals who do make it to a shelter (between 6-8 million), only about half (3-4 million) are adopted out. The other 3-4 million are euthanized. That is anywhere from 342-456 dogs and cats per hour 365 days a year. It is not only a heavy emotional toll on the humans who have to “put down” such a constant stream of living beings that are otherwise healthy, but it is also an increasing financial burden to local state, county, city, and private shelters. Upwards of \$2

billion are spent every year on the intake, care, and euthanasia of these “surplus” animals (*ibid*).

While animal advocacy groups work to find ways to address pet abandonment and escaping/running away, shelters, animal control agencies, and veterinarians all agree that promoting and instituting spay/neuter programs is a key ingredient to getting a handle on pet overpopulation (Looney *et al.*; McNeil and Constandy).¹ The problem is that humans find myriad reasons *not* to participate in spay/neuter programs. Some of the more common ones include: it is cruel to the animal, it is too expensive, personal and home protection, they don't want the animal to get fat and lazy, they want to breed their purebred/special animal, religious views, and, perhaps most important for this article, people (mainly men) do not want to have “emasculated” animals (Blackshaw and Day; Neville and Jones; Oxford Lafayette). While there has been controversy among veterinarians about the age at which to perform gonadectomies, the evidence suggests that these surgeries help companion animals live longer, and help reduce the chance of fights, roaming, scent marking, or general animal delinquency, in addition to preventing overpopulation (Frank; Kustritz; Spain *et al.*). Furthermore, there does not seem to be a social stigma to being “fixed” among animals — but, according to groups on the front lines of why people are or are not getting their animals spayed/neutered, many men continue to view their male pets as personifications of their own egos and libidos. This concern about emasculation is so well-known that one company, CTI Corporation, developed neuticles — testicular implants for dogs, cats, and even livestock. With neuticles you can have the best of both worlds — neuter your animal, yet maintain the “intact” appearance. A high-end pair costs more than \$1100 — without the surgery (CTI). Since most people argue they cannot afford to pay for a gonadectomy, it is highly unlikely that neuticles will solve the problem of pet overpopulation.

The challenge, then, is how to convince the vast majority of the population to spay/neuter. Traditional campaigns like the one shown in Figure 1 attempt to guilt people into these surgeries.

The image is as depressing as it is shocking — seeing a puppy with pleading eyes in front of a pile of dead animals is certainly not the image most people want to take away with them as they adopt (or think about adopting) a companion animal. I argue that this image also reinforces negative ideas about animal shelters themselves. Instead of the shelter being a place to celebrate a new companion, these campaigns instill notions of shelters as places that are terrible prisons, places where all they do is kill, places that are not welcoming, and places of judgment and unacceptance. While the intended message is to show how shameful and thoughtless it is to



Figure 1

contribute to pet overpopulation, some psychologists argue that ads like this actually reinforce behavior, because it is subtly telling us that *not* spaying/neutering is the norm — and thereby actually reinforcing unwanted behavior (Battista). If you really want to change people's behavior, psychologists claim you need to define a new, preferred norm — in this case to spay/neuter —, and to encourage people to join in, rather than trying to shame them out of undesirable behavior. Apparently, shocking images and moral outrage are weak arguments, compared to the behavior of one's peers. As one advocate said: "like it or not, those of us in animal protection are in the marketing business," and in relation to the animal the undesirable behavior to change is the casual neglect and/or abuse of pets through refusing to spay/neuter (*ibid*). So the new norm should be thoughtful caregiving towards animals, especially by men. But how to change the message? One part of the answer may be to shift the message *and* the geography.

Placing geography, gender, and animal advocacy. As stated in the introduction, place is a complex term in geography and can be applied to actual geographic locations, as well as to more metaphorical or symbolic systems of classification. Geographers have been interested in understanding places in two main ways (Cresswell; Staeheli). The first is to explore how a particular place has been defined over time, what its purpose is/has been, and whether or not its use/existence is being contested in some way by different groups. The second is to examine the ways in which social identities are actively constituted in particular places. In other words, depending on one's social location, personal behaviors/ identities may be enabled or constrained because of being in a certain place. Mapping this interplay of identity and place becomes complicated, as neither places nor identities remain perfectly static over time or perfectly isolated from other places and other identities. Therefore, the task of the geographer studying place is to hold all of these notions in tension with each other to reveal a fully contextualized explanation of everyday life in everyday places.

The subfield of animal geography also takes as one of its central themes how place shapes, and is shaped by, different constellations of direct human-animal interactions, as well as the interactions of multiple human groups around one specific human-animal relationship (Philo & Wilbert; Wolch *et al.* 2003; Wolch & Emel). For example, Kay Anderson has demonstrated through an historical case study of the Adelaide Zoo how all zoos have shifted their meanings over time (e.g., colonial power, leisure, education), even as they are continually used to reinforce arbitrary boundaries between humans and animals (Anderson). And while zoos are places within cities, animal geographers have also done extensive work on the place of animals in urban areas as a whole. Animals (e.g., feral cats, livestock, "pests"), depending on their categorization by different human stakeholders (e.g., caregivers, law enforcement, ranchers, residents, scientists), are seen as "in place" or "out of place," and treated very differently by urban human inhabitants (Gullo; Griffiths *et al.*; Philo; Wolch 1995).

With respect to animal advocacy practices, geographers have studied how place-based advocacy plays a large role in shaping human-animal relations (Urbanik). Kersty Hobson highlighted how advocacy work to save the Sun Bear from bear bile farms in China was dramatically helped by the first sanctuary that, as a place, allowed advocates and researchers to more fully understand the lives of Sun Bears and to educate others about their personalities (Hobson). Suzanne Michel also found that places are profoundly effective at shifting people's attitudes towards wildlife through her study of Golden Eagle rehabilitation centers and public education projects (Michel). By engaging people in an everyday politics of care through their relationships with the eagles, Michel argues that people's identification with and attitudes towards nonhuman others can be radically altered. I contend that the "Hooters for Neuters" campaign is a shift in where animal advocacy takes place — moving it away from traditional sites such as zoos and rehabilitation centers —, and assessing the effectiveness of such a campaign can help shed light on new forms of animal advocacy rooted in strategic geographies.

Those working under the umbrella of human-animal studies have long realized that gender plays an important role in human-animal relationships (a more detailed focus on sexism and animal advocacy will be taken up in a subsequent section). Whether the issue is gendered power relations within the animal advocacy movement or the relationship between male violence towards women and animals, it has been clear that "doing gender" is deeply entwined with the nonhuman (Adams; Adams and Donovan; Donovan and Adams; Kruse; Luke). Just as geographers have demonstrated that place is key to human-animal relationships as a whole, they have also explored how place is implicated in the male-female-nonhuman nexus. One of the earliest examples is Emel's study of how European masculinity, through notions of virility and progress, led to not only near total eradication of wolves, but also went hand in hand with the eradication of Native Americans in the American West (Emel). This notion of "frontier masculinity" is still having an impact on the treatment of wolves today in places like Alaska (Anahita and Mix; Connell). We saw above that zoos reinforce human-animal boundaries, but zoos and big game hunting have also gone hand in hand with colonization and consolidation of western male power structures over "other" lands, people, and animals (Elder *et al.*; Ryan). Even within urban areas, as seen in a case study of dog-stealing in Victorian London, which highlighted how both dogs and women were confined to domestic captivity, masculinity and femininity have been historically linked (Howell). Geographers have also explored how women's attitudes towards animals are dependent on their socio-economic location, and how gender influences perceptions of categories of animals (Wolch and Zhang; Wolch *et al.* 2000; Brownlow and Lassiter). "Hooters for Neuters" is a complex intersection of gender identities. The Hooters restaurants themselves are imbued with stereotypical gender roles, where heterosexuality is the norm and women are constructed as objects for men's pleasure. "Hooters for Neuters" is attempting to counteract a stereotype that men are averse to spaying and neutering, yet in a context that reinforces traditional male roles. It is a campaign that

attempts to disrupt and change gendered behaviors towards companion animals by taking advantage of the gendered behaviors themselves. As we will see, it is a controversial, but potentially transformative tactic.

What is key to glean from animal geography is that *how* humans construct interactions with animals is fundamentally connected to *where* these interactions happen. *Where* and in what *places* do we, as humans, build what Paechter calls “communities of practice” with animals? Paechter, focusing on gender, argues that “we can use the idea of communities of practice as a way of thinking about the formation and perpetuation of localized masculinities and femininities” (70). Indeed, if learning gender is situated in social contexts, then so too is learning “human” behaviors towards animals. While animal shelters have traditionally served as “communities of practice” with respect to companion animals, the messages *and* practices associated with positive animal treatment have been clearly limited to those who actually go to a shelter. If the problem of a lack of spaying/neutering can be attributed in part to a certain construction of masculinity, and men that identify themselves in this way will not come to shelters, then a new geographically-based strategy may be in order. If you change the *place*, can you challenge the masculine social construct that inhibits some men from acting to help solve the pet overpopulation problem? Enter “Hooters for Neuters.”

The “Hooters for Neuters” campaign and controversy. “No More Homeless Pets” is a program of Best Friends in Utah. The program’s directors were concerned about a lack of male participation in their “Big Fix” spay/neuter campaign, and wondered if there was a more effective way to target men. There was a thriving Hooters restaurant in Salt Lake City, and it turned out the franchise owner was a great animal lover, so the two decided to come together to “help the animals” (Fell). Hooters corporate structure permits local franchise owners to participate as contributing local corporate citizens in whatever ways they see fit. In fact, Hooters does have a large commitment to charity work, and has raised over \$8 million for a variety of charities since 1992.



Figure 2

The first “Hooters for Neuters” events were held in Salt Lake City in 2005 (see figure 2).

Temma Martin, spokeswoman for “No More Homeless Pets” said at the time that: “we hope that this lighthearted approach to a serious issue will encourage pet owners to get their animals fixed at a very low cost in a safe environment” (Erickson). We can see in this flyer that the target audience is the “stereotypical” man. By using a police officer, a motorcyclist, a sports fan, and an “in-shape” man the organizers are trying to be inclusive of a variety of men who have companion animals (Fell). The use of three white men and one that appears to be Hispanic coincides with the

demographics of Salt Lake City. We also see dog breeds that most people would consider “manly” (German Shepherds, rottweilers, pitbulls); but also a small Chihuahua — a breed not unknown for its toughness, attitude, and “cuteness” factor. The Hooters girls are smiling and fawning over both the men and dogs — clearly making everyone happy. The event and advertising were designed to create an atmosphere of fun, sharing, and human-animal community at a place where many men already enjoy being — a far cry from judgmental or depressing.

Since 2005, there have been a variety of “Hooters for Neuters” events in at least twelve states (see Appendix 1 for a complete listing). Mobile spay/neuter clinics have been brought to restaurant parking lots, while car washes, bikini contests, yard sales, and dog washes have been used on-site to raise money for local shelters. Thousands of dollars have been raised and hundreds of animals spayed or neutered. The argument of animal advocacy groups is that this is helping to control the pet overpopulation problem, assist local private and state facilities with fundraising and reducing the number of animals they have to kill, and finally, it challenges men to change what their concept of “macho” is. According to one of the organizers, “there is definitely a mindset among some men about the importance of keeping males intact. We wanted to take on that mindset and those myths head on. It is our belief that spay/neuter is the answer to the pet overpopulation problem so we need to address myths and misconceptions like this” (Erickson). For the Hooters restaurants, this is a way of getting publicity; it fits in with their charity work on issues from childhood disease research and breast cancer awareness, to supporting strong families and a sense of community.

In 2006, “Hooters for Neuters” ran into a glitch in Los Angeles. Hooters approached L.A. Animal Services, saying they wanted to sponsor a bikini contest to raise money for spay/neuter programs. L.A. Animal Services, overwhelmed and underfunded, agreed and a flyer was posted to advertise the event (see Figure 3). After seeing the flyers, local feminists brought it to the attention of city council members who proceeded to criticize the event for being degrading to women — even though it was not city-sponsored. City Controller Laura Chick said: “Are we going backward here? We are a city with all kinds of progressive programs that empower women and end discrimination in the workplace, and now we’re being connected with a Hooters bikini contest. It isn’t right” (Associated Press). City councilwoman Jan Perry said the event “crosses the line” (*ibid*). Animal Services and Hooters tried to appease the critics by changing the flyer from a bikini clad woman to a dog in a Hooters shirt (see Figure 4), but the damage was done and



Figure 3

Animal Services said they would not accept any funds that were raised for them by the event (Pattanayak 2006).

In the end, the event was held, but all the proceeds went to a local private shelter, The Amanda Foundation, instead of into the LA system, which euthanizes around 19,000 animals per year (this number does not include privately run shelters in the area) (Hyman).



Figure 4

Women opposed to the event weren't the only women that were vocal in taking sides on this issue. *Playboy* covergirls-turned-animal rights activists the Barbi twins said that city leaders should take part in the contest. They argued that men are historically less likely to have their pets spayed or neutered, so a bikini contest was the ideal way to spread the message. Sia Barbi stated that "When it comes to animals, I think that sexism should (be secondary) to the epidemic of animal overpopulation," and added that "we'd rather the women get mad at us for doing *Playboy* than get mad at Hooters for trying to do a good thing" (KNBC). Here we have the crux of the issue – is this campaign selling sex to help animals or is it a subversive and effective campaign that is helping animals AND challenging stereotypical male behaviors towards nonhumans?

"Hooters for Neuters" as Sexist. According to the Hooters Corporation, "the women's rights movement is important because it guarantees women have the right to choose their own careers, be it a Supreme Court Justice *or* a Hooters girl" (Hooters). Being able to do what you want with your career *is* a goal of the woman's movement, and many Hooters girls feel profoundly empowered by their jobs – they are able to feel beautiful, learn how to stand up for themselves, and to earn a decent living (K.H.; Loh). But it is also a goal of the women's movement to encourage women to have an empowered sexual identity. What counts as empowered has long been up for debate and policing within feminisms.

The issue of sexuality has been a defining issue for feminisms. Many third wave (~1990s on) feminists have argued that a woman can and should be empowered by her sexuality. This has meant that the claim of second wave and/or more traditional feminists that the sexual objectification of women and the focus on extreme sexual femininity (e.g., Marilyn Monroe style) is part of the destructive system of patriarchy no longer holds as much sway as it once did. Instead, what has occurred is the rise of what has come to be called "lipstick feminism," in which women claim actively to choose the "sex kitten" stereotype and choose to feel

empowered by it (Levy 2005). These feminists are comfortable with pornography, attending strip clubs, wearing sexually suggestive clothing, and focusing on beauty. They also, however, see themselves as intelligent, driven, and with the capacity to do what they want with their lives. Many feminists have responded to these claims by arguing that these women are deluding themselves, and have so deeply ingrained patriarchal, sexist views of women that they have learned to objectify themselves — viewing themselves only through their sexuality, just like sexist men (Donovan and Adams). There is no doubt that women are objectified as sexual objects over and over again in society. One can browse the newsstands for publications like *Hooters Magazine*, *Maxim*, or *Playboy*, turn to catalogs like *Victoria's Secret*, or wildly popular softcore porn, like *Girls Gone Wild*. That sex sells is certainly not a new idea, and therefore some feminists argue that instead of an empowered sexuality, these “lipstick feminists” are simply giving the patriarchal system what it wants. Male subjectivity becomes even more dependent on objectifying women.

When the use of the “sex kitten” or “lipstick feminist” style is brought into the political realm of animal advocacy the result is the same. Instead of learning to see and understand the whole woman and the whole animal, both remain objects under the male gaze, because the presentation style reinforces sexist practices rather than challenges it (Adams). Ecofeminists, those who combine their environmental and feminist concerns, have worked hard to demonstrate the link between the patriarchal oppression/domination of women to the human domination of animals (Adams; Donovan and Adams). Their main argument is that *all* systems of oppression/ domination are interlinked, and that one can't alter one without altering them all. For example, in their view one cannot, as a feminist, work to liberate women if one is simultaneously a racist or engaged in animal abuse. It is the very hierarchical and dualist mindset that essentializes distinctions such as man/woman, human/animal, white/black, which leads to discrimination, mistreatment, objectification, and violence, which must be dismantled. To argue, as many lipstick animal activists do, that “if it helps animals, it is justified” (see next section) is like arguing that if animal exploitation helps humans, it is justified. From this ecofeminist perspective neither is justifiable. We cannot fight animal exploitation without challenging patriarchy, and we cannot challenge patriarchy without fighting animal exploitation. Using sexism to “sell” animal welfare is detrimental, because it reinforces social power systems that harm people and animals.

There has already been a history of controversial “sexist” campaigns within the animal advocacy community, with People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) as the key instigator. For several years now, they have provoked feminist outrage with a slew of campaigns about fur, meat eating, and cosmetics testing, using scantily clad and/or naked celebrities who volunteer their time and bodies. Some of the more famous women include model/actresses Pamela Anderson, Eva Mendes, Charlotte Ross, and Alicia Silverstone (see Figure 5).



Figure 5

While PETA points out that they are 1) willing to do anything to help animals, 2) use only people who volunteer their services – which includes both men and women, and 3) believe using celebrity and sexuality for a cause is better than using it for nothing, critics argue that their actions do nothing to help animals and everything to reinforce sexism as a social norm (Moore). For example:

The *Maxim*-like PETA ads, the Vegan Vixens, the strip club: All are saying it's *okay* to buck the stereotype of Real Men Eat Red Meat, because here are some naked ladies to reassure you that you're still a superhetero manly man! Almost as if they're saying, you won't even miss eating meat, because you'll get to look at so much of it! (Ann)

The only “message” of these ads, political speaking, is that in the pursuit of promoting vegetarianism/animal rights and encouraging people to stop objectifying animals, it's perfectly ok to objectify women as much as possible. (Ruxandra in Ellie)

But more than that, what do naked celebrities do for the animals? If it were so effective, why are celebrities not stripping to end the genocide in Darfur or for other causes? No one is questioning the right to be nude. It's a question of why it's done, and what's accomplished. (Ellie)

Turning back to the “Hooters for Neuters” events, it now becomes very clear why these events are seen as sexist and part of the same gimmicky practices that have long been considered problematic within the feminist and animal advocacy communities. “Hooters for Neuters,” following the feminist criticisms here, is not a *place* of gender transgression, but instead one directly rooted in the patriarchal mindset of women's bodies as objects only of pleasure. Indeed, it is a place where women are the “meat” just as much as the once living animals that are the literal meat being served to the male clientele by the women, even as they come to spay/neuter their animals – all objects and all there for male enjoyment.

“Hooters for Neuters” as Transgressive Gender-Based Animal Advocacy. While the above concerns and criticisms are very strong, I argue that there is a case to be made for “Hooters for Neuters” as a transgressive campaign. I will do this by situating “Hooters for Neuters” within a larger context of gender-based animal advocacy by both men and women to link to the role of place in creating new communities of practice with respect to gender and gender and animals. To begin, I'd like to start with two quotes from a protracted online debate about Hooters, sexism, and animal advocacy:

Although some may find a bikini contest distasteful (I do not. Yes, I'm female, and yes I consider myself a feminist). I find that the number of sentient, dependent, choiceless creatures killed daily in shelters across America is the real obscenity. (Ameme in Ellie)

You might find it interesting to consider that it is the societies that allow women to wear revealing clothing in which women have the most rights and the most power. Likewise, it is the societies that punish women for wearing revealing clothing in which women have the fewest rights and the least power — they are considered chattel who must do as they are told. Should women only be allowed to participate in activism if they promise not to show their bodies or use their bodies as a political statement? If a person chooses to use his or her physicality and sexuality to convey a message of his or her choosing, aren't those who would censor him or her, even if their motives are good, also somewhat guilty of disrespect and repression? (Vegswimer in Ellie)

These quotes demonstrate that not all feminists would read "Hooters for Neuters" as a reinforcement of sexism. They raise the issue of choice in defining one's own sexuality, one's moral compass, and one's linking of the two. In fact, many women today are choosing a self-defined empowered sexuality as an explicit part of their animal advocacy work. Three such examples include the Vegan Vixens, the Barbi Twins, and the Suicide Girls who did an anti-fur campaign for PETA (see Figure 6).



Figure 6

The Vegan Vixens are a group of four female "eco-entertainers" from Los Angeles who "educate the public about health and fitness, animal issues, planet stewardship and climate change in a fun, exciting way" (Vegan Vixens)(Figure 7). They have made multiple music albums, have an eco-friendly fashion line, and are in the process of developing a pin-up style cookbook. Their views of men include:

"Guys who fight dogs, rope baby cows or who hunt are not sexy to me, but mean...Vegan men are sexy, compassionate and strong and that is a big turn on!" (*ibid*).



Figure 7

The Barbi twins are “international celebrity models turned celebrity health spokeswomen turned animal activists” and conduct their animal advocacy work through their organization the Kitty Liberation Front (KLF)(Figure 8). These women have posed for *Playboy*, but have also publicly struggled with eating disorders and have published cookbooks advocating an “eco anti-diet.” The Suicide Girls are an online “vibrant, sex positive community of women (and men)” founded in 2001 “on the belief that creativity, personality and intelligence are not incompatible with sexy, compelling entertainment and millions of people agree” (Suicide Girls). Suicide Girls post photos of themselves and develop their own views and practices about sexuality regardless of mainstream conceptions and/or judgments. The website has been so successful that they receive over five million hits a month and have a clothing line and a new book of nude photos. In 2008, a few dozen Suicide Girls teamed up with PETA to do a print campaign to raise awareness about the cruelty of fur — the “ink not mink” campaign saying tattoos are much “cooler” than wearing dead animals (Eubanks).



Figure 8

What all three of these groups have in common is their commitment to female sexual empowerment and animal advocacy. These women enjoy feeling beautiful, feel empowered by their feminine sexuality, and want to be able to use it for a good cause; all of them agree that changing male attitudes towards animals can be very effectively done through more sexuality-based actions and don't see what they are doing as degrading (PETA; Subramanian).

A second point to consider here is that there is a larger history of women's “body activism.” Over the last several decades we have seen a variety of women's political actions based on practices that are stereotypically feminine, such as weaving yarn during the Women's Pentagon protests of the early 1980s, or weaving yarn through trees and logging equipment to protest logging. Recently, two women's organizations in California have taken the tactic that getting naked gets results (see Figures 9 and 9a). Breasts Not Bomb is a grassroots movement. They are dedicated to empowering women to “speak out for a world that remembers what is sacred and honors the mother” (Sglaser).



Figure 9

They use political street theater and bare their breasts in public, which, they argue, serves as an excellent forum to speak about the vulnerability of humanity and the earth.

Unreasonable Women Baring Witness has also been using nudity to protest the war in Iraq.



Figure 10

The justification, according to the organizer, is that “it gets your attention — doesn’t it?” (Sheehan). Albeit the women in these campaigns are not dressing or posing provocatively, we still see the same “objectification” of women’s bodies and the same mindset that “sex sells,” but I could not find any documented public examples of feminists or anti-war activists who felt that the tactic of stripping went over the line.

Why would it be acceptable in one case and not another, when in all cases the women are proactively stating their dedication to the cause and consenting to using their bodies as political statements? For example, on a blog by Breasts Not Bombs, a member writes:

Though some critics may say that we are acting inappropriately, indecently, immorally, we say that it is our right, guaranteed by the constitution to express free speech, using our bodies as signs and symbols as long as we pose no danger. We believe that breasts symbolize the most non-violent representation of the world at peace. Our breasts never hurt anyone and never will. The juvenile response of the police, media and socially retarded audiences are other reasons to restore respect and protection to women. (Sglaser)

And Donna Sheehan states in her vision of baring witness that:

It is no accident either that women would choose to get naked for the sake of peace and justice. For Baring Witness is about using the greatest weapon women have, the power of the feminine, the power of our beauty and nakedness to awaken our male leaders and stop them in their tracks. In this way Baring Witness is about heightening the awareness of human vulnerability. (Sheehan)

Should we also read these two campaigns as sexist and reinforcing sexist stereotypes of women as objects, or claim that these women are somehow deluded by internalizing a patriarchal mindset? These women, like those doing animal advocacy work, recognize that there is a need to try different approaches to reach into a masculine mindset, which they argue is rooted in violence, and to make space for new male behaviors — behaviors rooted in concepts of

compassion and caring for all living things. In essence, these women are doing the same thing as the Vegan Vixens and Barbi Twins: choosing to use an empowered femininity and celebration of women's bodies to conduct consciousness-raising campaigns among men.

The third point to make here regarding gender-based animal advocacy work has to do with two other examples of targeted outreach to men, neither of which has suffered rejection or criticism for supporting stereotypes of men in specific ways. The first example comes out of Los Angeles through a program of the California-based Friends for Animals called "Downtown Dog Rescue." Originally started by Lori Weise to help the local homeless care for their animal companions, the program has expanded to include low-income areas such as Watts. Lori's special affinity for pitbulls, a breed popular among both groups for protection, and used by many for fighting and for displaying "manliness," has led her to work with people who have very different ideas than hers about what an animal is for and how to relate to it. She has noted that, after all, "these are people who kill people [speaking about those in gangs], why would they give a shit about dogs?" (Weise). It was apparent to Lori early on that another middle-aged white woman coming into these neighborhoods and telling people what to do was not going to work. After connecting with local trainers and community leaders, Lori became a trusted, legitimate presence on the streets. She claims that it was because "she didn't preach," and that she mostly listened and shared her stories.

The first major event she put together was "Pimp Your Pit" in 2006 (see Figure 11). With funding from a variety of sources and the City of Los Angeles's mobile spay/neuter program, she was able to bring together a temporary community of people who owned pitbulls and other big breeds. While the city itself and many local animal advocacy groups were worried about

gang violence, this event, and events since then, have all gone off without incident, thanks to Lori's street connections who help provide security and "put the word out" that these events are special.



Figure 11

The "Pimp Your Pit" event was a play on the then popular MTV show *Pimp My Ride*, on which mechanics would give people's car "cool" makeovers. The message of the flyer is clear — if these black men can "fix" their pitbulls and still be cool, then so can you. Subsequent events continued the play on popular culture ("Get Fixed or Die Trying" playing off rapper 50 Cent's hit song, "West Coast customized" playing off of the popular West Coast Choppers brand), as well as to the idea of family in the African-American communities with such events as "Family Dog" (see Figure 12). The message of "Family Dog" is that a "real" man takes care of his whole family, and that includes the animals.

These events and the daily work of the organization have resulted in the spaying/ neutering of around 1500 animals each year and have provided a different sense of community and human-animal relationships for those who have worked with the group. In Lori's view, what has made these events successful is their openness. She does not force people to get their animals into surgery; instead, people (mainly men) can mingle together and learn from her and from one another. In essence, these events provide a *place* where a new community practice can potentially take hold — in a way very similar to the Hooters events. Should these events be stopped because they play into a hyper-masculine gang culture and incorporate terms like “pimp”? While Lori concedes that it is possible to make this case, she believes that it would be “ignoring the reality” of the communities she is working with — a reality rooted in gangs, poverty, and urban survival, where just pulling off an event without violence is a victory in its own right.



Figure 12

On the other side of the country in New York City, is an organization called Rescue Ink (see Figure 13). The following self-description comes from their website: “You take a look at us, and maybe your first reaction is to cross to the other side of the street. Just remember to look both ways before you do. We're not a gang, vigilantes or a social organization, but we do have that certain ‘in your face’ style when it comes to animal abusers.”

These men came together based on their love of tattoos, various vehicles, and animals, but as the image makes clear they are very “manly” men. They are willing to do whatever it takes to help animals, even if it means pushing the limits of the law. They see themselves as working in conjunction with other animal advocacy organizations, because



Figure 13

they believe “the problem of animal abuse and neglect has grown beyond the resources of the existing animal welfare agencies” (*ibid*).

Isn't this group reinforcing the stereotype of the “macho” guy in the same way as those who charge Hooters, the Barbi Twins, and the Vegan Vixens with reinforcing the stereotype of women as “sextots”? They display the same uniformity in appearance (tattoos, shaved heads, big muscles, even a biker “uniform”) that we see with the sexy PETA girls (thin, pretty, sexy/slightly slutty uniform — unless they are naked). There are no skinny men, men without muscles, or men in frilly clothing. There is an obvious heterosexual norm as the undercurrent beneath all of these gender-based animal advocacy groups/events. So this group, like Downtown Dog Rescue, is playing into, and arguably promoting, stereotypes of men that have not been known for their compassionate behavior towards any living thing. But this, in my argument, is even more of a reason to read these gender-based animal advocacy projects as transgressive. While they might be fulfilling the stereotype of male biker in *appearance*, their *actions* to rescue animals transform that identity into something new, into one that says I'm more than a stereotype — listen to what I am saying and doing. In this case, like the “Pimp Your Pit” and “Hooters for Neuters” events, Rescue Ink is providing a new *place* for a new male identity — a literal and figurative place. Rescue Ink are saying that yes, you can be a biker and look as scary as you want, *and* still have compassion towards animals. For example, Big Ant states in his online self-description:

Big Ant feels that having a house full of wonderful creatures provides an environment that is both stress free and nurturing. Big Ant is an old school guy who loves Harleys and hotrods. He's a guy who can be warm and funny, or (if the situation merits) can be a scary and menacing presence. Big Ant believes that animal abusers are weak, and he will not tolerate them. (Rescue Ink)

It is in fact no long acceptable to be the stereotypical male biker/gangster who doesn't care about anyone else — human or animal.

In this section I have demonstrated that “Hooters for Neuters” is clearly not the only gender-based animal advocacy practice out there. Not only are there a variety of men and women using their own notions of empowered masculinity and femininity to influence human treatment of animals, but other women are using the “power of the feminine” in political ways to challenge the male culture of violence as it is related to war and environmental destruction. In the case of the gender-based animal advocacy, they may be drawing on stereotypical views/practices of masculinity and femininity, but they are also demanding new behaviors from those around them. Men are not “hot” for the Vegan Vixens unless they are animal-compassionate, and for Rescue Ink abusive men are not “men” at all. To interact with any of these groups one is forced to hear their political message about animals, and thereby see them as more than their

appearance, whether one wants to or not. In this reading, “Hooters for Neuters” is a *place* where men can test out new, animal compassionate, practices of masculinity.

Conclusion. “Hooters for Neuters” as a place-based campaign has raised hackles around the “proper” use of sexuality and gender identities for animal advocacy. As a specific place, the Hooters Restaurant, we see a variety of identities coming together — on the surface we have the stereotypical gendered male and female roles, along with animal advocates trying to raise money to get people to spay/neuter their animals to avoid having to euthanize so many. This can easily be read as a continuation of both stereotypical roles — women as objects and men only doing something so they can “get some,” and, therefore the claim that they are selling sex to promote animal advocacy is valid to a certain degree. However, simply claiming that “Hooters for Neuters” campaigns are *only* stereotyping and place animals *above* women in a hierarchy of oppression reinforces categories of men and women as good/bad *and* reinforces identities as static, rather than as evolving, shifting, or self-defined. The Hooters girls are actively choosing a life that they want. Many consider themselves subversive feminists and choose to be empowered to use their sexuality just like the Vegan Vixens, Barbi Twins, or Unreasonable Women Baring Witness. The men who attend these events and have their animals spayed/neutered can do so among other men and see that it is not so traumatizing to their egos to have their companions “fixed.” They can see also that there is a new culture of “macho compassion for animals” (maybe compassionate masculinity rather than frontier masculinity) out there they can be a part of.

Feminists, animal advocates, and animal geographers alike have written about the importance of developing “ethics of care and responsibility.” The attempts to judge, to police, and to refuse new forms of gender-based actions and identities echo the ultimately losing early spay/neuter campaigns. How can new identities and practices be created without a *place* for them to be tried out in? If communities of ethical animal practices are the goal, then policing and controlling how those communities come about seems counterproductive in the face of the alternative.

Appendix 1: Listing of “Hooters for Neuters” Events by State

CA: 1) City of Sacramento Animal Care Services
(www.cityofsacramento.org/generalservices/animal-care/documents/VolNews_Nov07.pdf)
2) “Hooters for Neuters” and LA Animal Services ‘near’ event

IL: Illinois Humane Society (www.illinoishumane.org)

KY: KY Humane Society (www.Kiss989fm.com/cc-common/news/sections/newsarticle.html?feed=283307&article=5630382)

OK: OK Alliance for Animals

(www.animalsheltering.org/publications/magazine/back_issues/asm_mar_apr05.pdf)

NJ: NJ Aid for Animals (www.njafa.org/homeindex.htm);

NM: NM No More Homeless Pets Coalition

(www.bestfriends.org/allthegoodnews/nmhpnews_081504.cfm)

NV: Heaven Can Wait Sanctuary (www.nootersclub.org/documents/)

OK: OK Alliance for Animals

(www.animalsheltering.org/resource_library/magazine_articles/mar_apr_2005)

SC: Humane Society of North Myrtle Beach

(<http://www.humanesocietynmb.org/NewsandEvents.html>)

TX: 1) Feral Friends Animal Rescue (www.feralfriends.org/specialevents_recent.php)

2) Animal Aid Humane Society Waco (Suzie Wiseman, personal communication, 14 April 2008)

3) Greyhound Adoption League of Dallas

(www.pegasusnews.com/events/2008/jun/21/102432/)

UT: No More Homeless Pets (www.utahpets.org)

VA: Prince William County SPCA (www.pwspca.org/events.htm)

Note

1. This is not to say that gonadectomies are without controversy. For example, Clare Palmer and Yi-Fu Tuan have thoughtfully explored the connections between spaying and neutering and notions of human power and dominance over “pet” animals. This article, however, is not focused on the debate over gonadectomies but on the strategies used by those who support this as one of the solutions to excess companion animals.

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