Using Feminist Theories to Explore Human-animal Relationships: Pigeons in the City

by

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Abstract

The unequal human-animal relationships regard human beings as superior to other species. They exit in various kinds of human-animal interactions (i.e. our consumption of animal products, and our use of animals as tools or entertainment). This human-dominant relationship is the result of the hierarchy culture and the dualism view rooted in the western society. Embedded in the culture, it plays a profound role in affecting how we regard the nature and treat other species nowadays. The human-animal hierarchy has generated a lot of ecosystem problems and is regarded as problematic. Therefore, a new kind of human-animal relationship is needed, which is more harmonious and sustainable. This paper examines the unequal human-animal relationships with a feminism view, and advocates to apply the feminist theories to animal study filed to call for a new human-animal relationship. A feminist view illustrates inequitable hierarchical relationships between social groups, provides insights on the implications of these relationships, and seeks liberation of marginalized groups. The idea of linking feminism to speciesism points out the similarities between these two unequal relationships as they have the same origin and both the marginalized ones (women and non-human animals here) suffer from this hierarchy system in many ways. In addition, sharing the same goal of decentralization, the liberation of all marginalized groups can be addressed simultaneously. With the guidance from a set of feminism theories, the paper reveals how these feminism ideas can be applied to and benefits the animal study by providing new dimensions of thinking. Focusing on the case of urban pigeons, the study examines it in details with a feminism perspective, especially the feminist standpoint theory. The results again confirmed that animals tend to suffer from human development and the underlying reason is rooted in the western hierarchy system. At last, the study suggests that we should change our way of thinking and shift towards a new human-animal relationship.
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1. Introduction

Animals have played an important role in human history. Various evidence and literature have revealed these unequal human-animal relationships, where we human beings regard ourselves as superior to other species. We domesticate animals, let them work for us (Swann, 2006) and treat some of them as pets (Daly, 2006). We hunt them for fun. We take it for granted that human beings play a dominant role in this human and non-human animal relationship. As a result, other species tend to sacrifice for our welfare. We kill or harm animals when they interfere with our benefits (Serpell, 1996). Although there may be some circumstances where certain animals benefit from this human dominant relationship (e.g. human kills wolves, and thus leading to the short-term welfare of deer population), or even both human and animals can benefit (e.g. companion animals), these unequal human-animal relationships are generally quite unsustainable. They not only raise ethical problems, but also contribute to our unrestricted exploitation of nature and other species (Serpell, 1996). As a result, they harm animals and nature, and also in turn undermine our own well-being.

With the development of human civilization, we have increased power to shift nature and therefore increased impacts on animals. At the same time, the effects from these unequal relationships are also amplified. With pristine landscapes being shifted into residential areas and roads, the wildlife originally living in the area faces the problem of habitat loss and fragmentation (Gullo et al, 1998). This leads to conflicts between the well-being of humans and that of these wild animals. Each year, about 17 million
hectares of tropical forests are cleared. Since the area supports the highest biodiversity in the world, the loss of these habitats is regarded as one of the major threats to species extinction (WWF, 2016). And with the emergence of city life, there exist new forms of human-animal interactions, such as zoos, where animals are displayed to the public as a way of recreation (Anderson, 1995). It is estimated that more than 750,000 animals are kept in zoos and aquariums worldwide (Statistic Brain, 2016), and at least 10,000 of these captive wild animals begin to form abnormal symptoms referred to as “zoochosis” (Mason et al, 2007). The industrial livestock operations is another example of the unequal human-animal relationships. Animals are raised in prison-style plants to fulfill human's demand of meat, to generate jobs, and to boost national economies (Emel, 2015). And over 58 billion farm animals are killed by human every year (One Green Planet, 2014). Animals’ lives are greatly changed through their interactions with human beings. Humans tend to shape other species’ way of life basing on our own wills, while these animals have to adopt new living strategies in response to human development (Palmer, 2003). For example, animals that featured as ‘pests’ will be eliminated when existing in human living space; and species like squirrels are treated as public pets and change their way of searching food as a result (Benson, 2013).

And generally in these relationships, humans are the ones who benefit from these new forms of interactions at the expense of other species’ welfare, since we think ourselves are superior to other non-human animals (e.g. we clear the natural habitats for human-developing purposes). However, we may also be negatively affected by this
unsustainable relationship. For example, the antibiotic used in intense livestock production might harm human health. Therefore, for the benefits of both animals and ourselves, we need to change the way we interact with the animals in this context of rapid urbanization.

Fortunately, feminism, as a relatively more mature discipline, offers us a good starting point to inspect this problematic relationship and to rethink our relationship with other species. Both the gender inequality and the species inequality have the same origin, similar mechanisms, and share the common goal of decentralization. Therefore, in this paper, I would like to use a feminism perspective to examine the cause of these unjust human-animal relationships, and to suggest a new human-animal relationship, a relationship where we are willing to learn about others, to understand and to respect the differences, and where all species can live harmoniously within fully functional ecosystems.

Sexism shows similar origin, mechanisms, and goals with speciesism. Both of them are the products of the hierarchical system rooted in the western society. Certain hierarchy ideology advocates the dualism view, which divides beings and matters into two contrasted categories and reflects one’s control or power over the other. Both suffering from this system, animal is regarded as sustenance to human, while women as subordination to the male society. It is the same social force that supports the exploitations of women by men and the oppression of non-human species from human. Moreover, such ideology denies the subjectivity of both women and animals and
supports objectification (Griffin, 1978). The identity and uniqueness of each individual women or animal also tend to be ignored by the dominant class. Therefore, the idea of linking feminism to speciesism points out their similarities as the products of the hierarchical system. When applying feminist theories to the animal study field, these similarities can help better understand the current unequal relationship.

Moreover, arising from the same origin, the issues of sex, race, gender and species are actually interconnected (Clark, 2012). As women’s study fights for equality in the gender realm, and animal’s study works on equality between species, they share a common goal of decentralization and both deny the simple homogenization of groups of beings (Collard, 2012). Therefore, animal study and feminism need each other, as the liberation of all marginalized groups should be addressed simultaneously to get the best results.

In addition, feminism also offers theoretical guidance to the animal geography field. For example, the idea of “intersectionality” in the feminist theory links all marginalized groups together (Crenshaw, 1989) thus strengthening the rejection of the dualism view generated from the western patriarchy system that undermines animal welfare (Donovan, 1990); And the feminist animal care theory, especially the idea of standpoint, argues that people should pay emotional attention to animals and listen to what they are telling us (Donovan, 2006). It values the experiences of the marginalized lives, encourages a way to develop an “oppositional consciousness”, and empowers the oppressed groups (Harding, 2004). Therefore it can provide us with better
understanding of animal’s position and also help us establish an alternative human-animal relationship.

With all these advantages, my research will apply the mentioned standpoint theory to the animal studies field, in order to arouse public attention to speciesism and animal wellbeing. Such connection would be quite meaningful to animal study as feminism has earned several achievements in its field and is better acknowledged by the public, linking it to speciesism can help people better understand the plight of the animals, and thus urge them towards a new human-animal (or even human-environment) relationship. This study has practical significance as it applies the theory to real life by examining the current human-animal relationship with a feminism view. It classifies several kinds of urban human-animal interactions based on their value to human. Certain animals that are regarded as useless or even undesirable by human tend to be classified into lower classes even among the non-human species regime, and the pigeon populations in the city are one of the examples. With interests in these species at the bottom of the hierarchy, the study will mainly focus on the case of city pigeons, which are regarded as pests by human. I will study it by examining them in details. The use of feminist theories here offers possible explanations of the mechanism why animals tend to suffer from human development. It also provides us with guidance on solutions of related issues. Since feminism seeks liberation of marginalized groups, they can help us to address the current unjust human-animal relations. By integrating feminism into animal geography field, the research suggests a new way of thinking to explore the
human-animal relationship. Moreover, as speciesism is closely related to other issues of oppressed groups, such as racialism and feminism, which requires a radical change in ideology, the research may also help tackle these social problems at the same time.

2. Methods

This report is conducted as a literature review, which includes the following steps: Define and refine a topic, design a search, locate research reports, evaluate research articles, planning and writing the review (Neuman, 2002). Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the topic, this study includes a survey of scholarly journals, scholarly books, and other reliable and valuable sources in the field of animal studies, feminism studies and social philosophy studies. Intensive amount of information sources were analyzed to gather information. The Queen's University Library Catalogue (QCAT) was used for detailed searches. Many academic books were also reviewed to capture key points, including Atkins’ Animal Cities: Beastly Urban Histories, Biehler’s Pests in the city: flies, bedbugs, cockroaches, and rats, and Harding’s The feminist standpoint theory reader: Intellectual and political controversies.

The research articles are then evaluated based on the following criteria: (1) whether it is a high-quality article with a well-defined purpose, (2) whether it focuses on a particular issue that is closely related to the topic of this report (Neuman, 2002).

After selecting the qualified literatures, this study organized them by topic, and then fit them together to present the helpful information and valuable thoughts in this paper.
In addition, the report also include a case study research, which enables the linkage between micro level, or the individual species in this work, to the macro level, or the society-scale structure and processes. In the case study, feminist theories, including standpoint theory and ethics of care, are applied to the animal studies field, and will be discussed in detail in later sections. This case study about human relationship with pests examines the use of feminist theories in addressing human-animal relationship in contemporary society, and can also bring heuristic impact that helps further learning.

3. Human-animal relationship in the western society

3.1 Western hierarchy system and the dualism view

The hierarchy system has a really long history in the western culture, and has been strongly affected by its religious content during the development (Verdier, 2006). Originated from Christian philosophy, the theory of “the great chain of being” shows a hierarchical structure of matter and life. It starts with God at the top, angels come next, and then demons, stars, moon, kings, princes, nobles, commoners, animals, plants, and stones (Lovejoy, 2011). For centuries, this hierarchical idea has been central to the western culture and has greatly affected the western social ideology (Nee, 2005). By classifying life and matter into different groups and ranking them in orders, the hierarchy system denies the equality between beings. Those at the higher parts of the system are regarded as superior to those at the bottom. Such hierarchical structures are developed by the dominant group to reinforce the power of those with high status in the
system (Carbone, 2016). By constructing dualistic attributes to distinguish the superiors from the inferiors, the unequal relationship between groups is emphasized and enhanced. As the product of the system, a set of dualisms is generated based on attributes such as race, gender, class, and species. Those associated with the valued traits are regarded as superior, while “being of color, being lower class, being a women or being nonhuman” is thought to be inferior (Matthaei, 2001). The hierarchical dualism thus resulting in not only the alienation between social groups and beings, but also discrimination and dominance of one group over the other. Rooted in the western history, such idea has a profound impact on the western ideology. Despite campaigns like anti-race movements or feminist movements, there’re still evidences of the hierarchical dualism in today’s western society. And the unequal human-animal relationship is one of them.

3.2 The Dominant Role of Human

If we examine our interactions with animals throughout the history, we would find that in most cases, there exist these unequal human-animal relationships, where human plays a dominant role. For example, human generally treat animals as economic products and exploit them for human benefits. The following context would discuss more details about this human-dominant relationship with animals. It also aims to find if there exist win-win circumstances for human-animal relationship.

The unequal human-animal relationships

Since the prehistoric times, human has already started their domestication of animals
(Zeuner, 1963). As time goes by, human has evolved and developed a more complicated set of mechanisms to exploit and treat animals unequally. The process of urbanization has greatly changed the nature ecosystems. With increased technology existing in the human society, there also emerge new forms of human-animal interactions under background of urbanization, where these unequal human-animal relationships still widely exist.

Here are three examples illustrating these unequal relationships:

Firstly, human domesticates animals as work force. This means human trains animals such as horses, cows and dogs for our own benefits. For example, since the old times horses are trained as the main transportation tool for human to ride. And nowadays, animal work force is estimated at about 300 million animals that these working animals supply approximately 50% of the agricultural power need (Swann, 2006). While these animals are considered as important components in the agricultural system, especially in the developing countries, they seldom consume a diet of optimum quality for work. As a result, many of the working animals are under the nutritional condition (Falvey, 1985).

Secondly, laboratory animals, such as cats, rats and fogs, also reflect this unequal human-animal relationship. Scientists use animals to do the experiments for human welfare, while animals suffer by drugs and surgery. Although nowadays there's growing voice for imposing the ban on animal experiments because of the moral problems and humanity, animal experiment is actually still continuing (Taylor et al, 2008). According
to Cohen et al. (2000), “Molecular biology and biotechnology has raised the number of mice for a PhD project to 1000-2000 animals from our own participative observations.” A conservative estimate of the worldwide laboratory animal use is 115.3 million each year (Taylor et al, 2008), which means every year great numbers of animals are suffered for human's interests.

Thirdly, the invasion and deprivation of non-human animals’ habitat is another phenomenon for unfair human-animal relationship. As population growth, human needs more land and resources to sustain the population, therefore people begin to occupy the natural habitats and reconstruct it based on their own will. Each year, about 17 million hectares of tropical forests are cleared (WWF, 2016). Deforestation destroys the natural habitat, breaks the balance of the ecosystem, and therefore leads to extinctions of many species (Brooks et al, 2002). As a result, habitat loss from human activities is identified as a main threat to 85% of all species described in the IUCN's Red List (WWF, 2016).

These three situations are all originally result from the unequal relationship between human and animals, as we take it for granted that human is dominant over other species. We can find a lot of other examples also illustrating this inequality.

**The underlying cause of the unequal human-animal relationship**

There may be a lot of explanations for this unequal relationship, where human plays a domination role in their relationship with other animal species. For example, human’s intelligence, more advanced technology, the large human population and the globally...
wide distribution etc. (Vitousek, 1997). The combination of all these factors gives human greater power to shape the ecosystem based on their will, and thus affecting other species. However, at the same time, we should not deny that besides all these objective factors, there's another reason – which is also the underlying cause – the western ideology of hierarchical dualism.

Due to the western hierarchy system and the dualism view associated with it, there's this tendency of “othering” in the western culture to distinguish “us” from “others” (Birke, 2007). With the master/slave duality running through the history, the western culture provided breeding ground for the idea of domination (Plumwood, 1993). It is this idea that shapes how we think about other species. With this idea embedded in the culture, we take it for granted that human beings are superior to other species, and that our welfare should be prior to other species’. We don't see there's anything wrong with killing a carnivore like coyotes, even though it doesn't tend to attack human (Alexander, 2012). Because they are a symbol of wild, which is at an inferior position in the wild/civilized dualism, we regard them as inferior to us and therefore we have the right to decide their life and death. We hunt them just because we think of them as a threat to our own welfare and therefore they have sins (Emel, 1995). We rationalizing our killing of other animals by emphasizing our dominant role in this human-animal relationship that other species should sacrifice for our welfare. Therefore, we don't feel guilty when we harm or kill other species when they interfere with our benefits. It seemed nature to utilize animals as tools, for consumption, or entertaining, because they are placed at a
lower position to human in this artificial western hierarchy system, just as it is nature for us to use resources and materials, which are also at the bottom of the great chain of being.

Therefore, it is this idea of hierarchy and dualism that rationalizes our oppression upon others, and further drives us to exploit the nature and other species for the sake of our own.

3.3 Who Benefits From the Relationships

In order to study the unequal human-animal relationship, the interests and benefits of this relationship is very important to discuss. This not only makes the inequity between the human and nonhuman animals clearer, but also helps to reveal the causes and effects of this unequal relationship.

Generally, human plays a dominant role and tends to be the beneficiaries in these unequal human-animal interactions, while nonhuman animals generally suffer. Human get the food source such as meat by slaughtering animals. Take the industry farming as an instance, the industrial livestock operation, as a product of the innovated human technology, illustrate a relationship where human feed animals and use them to survive inhumanely. According to the Charts Bin statistics collector team's figure, the world average meat consumption is 41.90 kg per person per year (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2013). In another word, over 58 billion farm animals are killed every year to feed humans, and this figure does not even include those fish and other aquatic animals that are consumed by humans (One Green Planet,
With people’s rising demand for western diets and styles of consumption, especially in developing countries, the global meat production is expected to double from the 2002 level by 2030 (Miele et al, 2013). Along with this increased number of animals is the mounting pressure on livestock (Porcher, 2006). The milk produced per cow increased by about 60% during the 1960-1995 period, and the time required for a chicken to reach maturity decreased from 91 days in 1954 to only 37 days in 1996 (Miele et al, 2013). In this situation, these animals are only treated as human’s food sources. Animals are forced to be fed to produce food for human that we cannot even set up a real relationship with the livestock. Just as de Jonge (2005) comments, “Although he provides feed, shelter and protection against predators and illness, he cannot physically set up the relationship with animals”. In other words, these animals are “things” rather than lives. However, at the other hand, human generally benefits from such unequal human-animal interactions as these animals are raised to fulfill human’s demand for food, to generate jobs, and to boost national economies (Emel, 2015).

Moreover, natural habitats are destroyed by human for development and buildings. Humans deprived animals’ places to establish cities and homes for themselves. As a result, declines in both habitat quality and quantity lead to loss of ecosystem services and extinctions of species (Dobson, 2006). Also for those animals which are trained and domesticated by human, they work for and serve human to make people’s life easier. For example, in the history, horses have facilitated human’s transportation to different
places, and cattle have offered great help in crop cultivation (Ho, 1977). The only benefit for these animals in this relationship might be food, shelter and protection from human, that they have no rights to choose their life.

**Is There Any Win-Win Circumstances**

The unequal human-animal relationship has generated a lot problem to animals, and even the whole ecosystem. However, there are still some win-win circumstances. For example, eco-tourism is a pretty modern example to give the clues for human to reconstruct human-animal relationship. This means by introducing the ecological idea to humans, people are more willing to explore the nature during the leisure time. It definitely arises awareness of human to protect animals and environment, and also it offers a great time for people to relax themselves from the busy city work, which would also be beneficial to human health (Berg *et al.*, 2015). Animals also benefit from it as human consciously protect their habitat as national park. Moreover, in the case of protecting certain endangered species, both human and the species may be well off. Since the endangered species are protected from extinction, the increased biodiversity contributes to the field of medicine and therefore benefits the human population (Alves, 2007).

The case of companion animals is also an example of the win-win circumstances. Scientific research indicates that such human-animal interactions can greatly benefit human physical health and psychological well-being (O’Haire, 2010). And at the same time, these companion animals also benefit as they can receive care and love from
humans (Podberscek, 2005).

Therefore, there do exist several win-win circumstances, but we cannot deny that human is still playing a dominant role in these relationships. These examples are still the expressions of the hierarchical dualism and there still exist inequity in these cases.

**Is Human Always the Winner?**

It seems human is generally better off by using animals, but does human really benefit from this unequal relationship in long run? The following example may give us the answer.

Based on the hierarchical dualism, humans regard themselves as superior to other species and therefore have the right to alter the nature according to their wills. However, this can disturb the balance of the nature. Aldo Leopold’s *Thinking Like a Mountain* (1949) tells us a story where the hunting of wolves by human led to the prosperity of deer population. Although the deer population benefited as a result of human protection of them from their predators, and human hunters also seemed to be the beneficiaries in this case, the long-term interests are questionable for both human and deer. As problems like deer overpopulation arose in the long run, these benefits vanished. Humans also suffered from such unbalanced and malfunctioned ecosystem since vegetation was damaged and the entire food web was disturbed.

Moreover, local extinction of key species can contribute to the onset of natural disasters by increasing ecosystems’ vulnerability to disaster (Adger & Brooks, 2003). The world is facing natural disasters on an unprecedented scale. This increased number of
disasters and the associated greater impacts are the signal for the negative effects of these unequal human-animal relationships. As a result of increased number of extreme events, more people tend to be affected by the disasters, and this can also lead to greater economic cost (Guha-Sapir, 2004).

Therefore, these unequal relationships can be very unsustainable for the development of human and the whole ecosystem that in the long run, we may actually also suffer from them.

3.4 Why a new human-animal relationship is needed

The dualism view advocates separation rather than connection (Gilligan, 1982). As Birke mentioned (2007), “we separate ourselves from ‘other animals’ in the belief that we have ‘dominion’ over them. We are whether human or animals, this gives rise to a strong contrast between us and “the others”. As a result, the similarities and interconnections between different species tend to be ignored by the human.

But this idea that human is completely different from other animals is actually quite wrong. There’re arguments claim that human are unique due to their unique social organization (Birke, 1991), or due to their self-awareness (Birke et al., 2004). However, there’s increasing support from scientific area that nonhuman animals have as complex social organization and culture as, if not more than human (Bekoff, 2002), and that they are more conscious than we thought (Rogers, 1997). Therefore, the artificial boundaries that humans set to make themselves stand out seem to be weak and precarious.

With the western hierarchical dualism in mind, we assumed other species to be
hard-wired, and only instinctively adapted to their environment (Birke et al., 2004). However, actually they are also actors of life, like us, instead of merely objects of study (Birke, 2007), that “both human and animal are engaged in mutual decision-making” (Game, 2001). Nonhuman species and human are interrelated and conjointly reconfigure the world (Birke et al., 2004). This means not only human can affect other species’ behaviors, these nonhuman animals can also shape our lives. Since the western dualism encourages separation, and tends to focus on individual entities while overlook the relationship between them, we failed to recognize our close relationship with others. This idea of separation makes us to think of nature as something out there, instead of something that both human and nonhuman animals engage in and create together (Haraway, 1992). But actually human and other species are interconnected, that how we treat other species can in turn affect our lives. As Birke mentioned (2002), stallions can act differently depends on human beliefs, that “if people believe stallions are hormone-crazy males, difficult and dangerous, they will probably be so; or, they can be docile and easy to handle, if associated people believe they can be and act accordingly”. And their actions (whether to be dangerous or easy to handle) can in turn affect our behaviors and lives. Another example of interconnection may be the industrial farming. The antibiotic used in the livestock production not only shows how human try to govern and affect other species, but also reveals how human and other species are actually closely interconnected with each other. The antibiotic used on livestock would eventually threat human health via consumption of animal products as well as through
widespread release into the environment (Silbergeld, 2008). Therefore, our ignorance of interconnection may not only harm other species, but also in turn negatively affect ourselves.

Moreover, due to the human/nonhuman dualism, all the other animals are categorized into the same group, which contrasts to the human group. This human-centered classification denies each species’ own specificity and differences (Plumwood, 2002). The failure of recognizing nonhuman species’ identity and subjectivity then contributes to the failure of recognizing other species’ feeling and pain, which rationale our unjust relationship with other species (Donovan, 1990). As the urbanization process enables new forms of human-animal interactions and increases human’s power to impact the nature and other species, the negative effects brought by this unjust human-animal relationship is also amplified at the same time.

Therefore, for the benefits of both human and nonhuman animal species, a new human-animal relationship is needed, where we are willing to learn about others, to understand and to respect the differences, and where all species can live harmoniously within fully functional ecosystems. And undoubtedly, recognizing the uniqueness and the subjectivity of other species and acknowledging our relationality with them are important steps toward a new animal-relationship (Birke, 2007). Enabling a serious interspecies communication and enhancing our understanding of others, such approaches can help create a more harmonious ecosystem.
4. Feminist Theories

Recognizing there’s the need for a new human-animal relationship, I advocate that we should apply feminist theories to the animal study filed. These theories can help us to get a better understanding of the current human-animal relationship, and also provide us with guidance on how to deal with our interactions with nonhuman animals. Moreover, feminist theories are helpful as the feminism study and animal study can actually reinforce each other.

4.1 Why feminist theories

The first reason why applying feminist theories to animal studies is helpful is that they share a lot of similarities.

As discussed in the previous section, the western hierarchical dualism divides beings and matters into two contrasted categories and reflects one’s control or power over the other. The man/woman and the human/nonhuman dualities are two representative examples of the polarized western dualism, in which both woman and nonhuman are placed on the inferior positions to man and human. This lower status of women and nonhuman, as one of the similarities between these two marginalized groups, indicates the potential to link feminist ideas to animal studies. Both suffering from the hierarchy system, nonhuman animals are regarded as sustenance to human while women as subordination to the male society (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944). It is the same social force that supports the exploitations of women by men and the oppression of non-human species from human.
Another similarity between women and nonhuman animals is that the western hierarchical ideology supports the objectification of these two groups by denying each individuals agencies and subjectivity (Birke, 1991; Griffin, 1978). As a result, both women and nonhuman species are considered as a homogeneous and undifferentiated group respectively (Elmhirst, 2008). The identity and uniqueness of each individual women or animal tend to be ignored by the dominant class. This homogenization exacerbates injustice between genders and species.

With all these mentioned similarities to speciesism, the feminism studies provide us with a unique lens, through which we may get a better and more comprehensive understanding of the speciesism issue (the unequal human-animal relationship in the animal study field). For example, they can help us understand why we interact with animals in certain ways, and whether it is good, or problematic.

And the second reason why we should establish a feminism-speciesism connection is that the two subjects can reinforce each other.

Arising from the same origin, the issues of sex, race, gender and species are actually interconnected and deeply entwined (Clark, 2012). These issues are just different forms of expression of the western hierarchical dualism. According to Birke (2007), “our ideas of gender, race or animality depend upon and recreate each other”. As women’s study fights for equality in the gender realm, and animal’s study works on equality between species, they share a common goal of decentralization and both deny the simple homogenization of groups of beings (Collard, 2012). The issue of gender can never be
completely solved with the existence of speciesism, as they mutually reinforce each other (Birke, 2007). Therefore, animal study and feminism need each other, as the liberation of all marginalized groups should be addressed simultaneously to get the best results. The idea of “intersectionality”, which links all marginalized groups together (Crenshaw, 1989), strengthens the rejection to the hierarchical dualism that undermines the welfare of these marginalized group (Donovan, 1990).

Moreover, compared to speciesism studies, feminism, as a more mature subject, has already earned several achievements and is better acknowledged by the public. Therefore, applying feminism to animal studies can help people to understand the plight of the animals better, and therefore encourage a social transition towards a new human-animal relationship. In addition, animal study may also derive guidance from the feminism study by extending some of the feminist theories and ideas into the field of animal study. For instance, “interconnection”, “intersectionality”, “performativity”, and “standpoint” are examples of important feminist ideas that can contribute to the establish of a new human-animal relationship.

“The interconnected sense of self”, as a typical feminist thinking, focuses on the interconnectedness of all life rather than division (Gaard, 1993). And applying this idea to the animal study field encourages us to pay attention to our connection to other species, therefore facilitate the transition toward a new human-animal relationship. Besides

The “Intersectionality” idea explores the connection between sexism and speiesism, and
therefore can give us a better understanding of the current human-animal relationship and help us think about alternatives (Hovorka, 2015).

The “performativity” idea focuses on the processes through which social identities and experiences are constructed and performed (Hovorka, 2015). It offers us “a means of holistically getting to know the animal in relation to the human”, and reveals that “humans and animals are deeply intertwined with implications on their respective wellbeing” (Hovorka, 2015). Therefore, this idea can help us better understand the interspecies relations.

The “standpoint” theory asks us to explore the worldviews from those of the marginalized groups, and generate knowledge with them. It will be discussed in further details in the following part.

Therefore, based on these mentioned benefits, a connection between the feminist study and animal study will be quite meaningful in helping us explore a new human-animal relationship.

4.2 The feminist theories used

The feminist care theory asks people to recognize other’s need and therefore to respond to it (Cudd & Andreasen, 2005). It focuses on relationships between individuals rather than on separate individual identities (Clement, 2003). Developed in the 1970s and 1980s as a feminist critical theory (Harding, 2004). the standpoint theory proposes to make women’s experiences the point of departure, and incorporate such insights into the masculine society (Keohane, 1989). It examines the standpoint of those who have
been systematically excluded from the power (Harding, 1986). Since “marginalized groups are more possible to be aware of things and ask questions due to their social situation” (Hovorka, 2015), we should pay attention to those of the marginalized groups, and make effort to get their viewpoints heard (Donovan, 2006). Women’s lower position in the western hierarchy system enables them to have a deeper understanding of what it feels like to be marginalized and ignored (Donovan, 2006). Therefore, this idea points out the need to acknowledge and incorporate the perspectives of the marginalized groups into the construction of scientific knowledge. It can also be extended into the animal study field, where nonhuman species – which are also positioned as inferior in the western culture – is greatly discussed and concerned.

The standpoint theory asks us to understand significant differences from individuals to arouse empathy (Gruen, 2007). As Gilligan (1986) claims that such care stems from a self which is intrinsically connected with others, the idea emphasizes concern and a dialogical mode with others (Larabee, 1993). According to Donovan (2006), the feminist animal care theory requires people to pay emotional attention to animals and listen to what they are telling us. Through such processes, we can recognize other’s need and therefore to respond to it (Cudd & Andresen, 2005).

Since the use of animal standpoint theory enables us to inspect the world from different views (Kahn, 2011), we can therefore better understand animals’ perspectives and re-establish a human-animal relationship, where animals’ viewpoints are also considered.
5. “Pest animals” case studies

The process of urbanization has greatly changed the land and its associated properties, such as vegetation, soil and hydrology (Lambin et al, 2001). To respond to such changes, some species chose to move into less developed areas, while others, which are usually more adaptable to the environment, stayed or even flourished in the urban area (Leedy, 1984). And the urban pests are among those species who succeeded to survive in the new urban environment, but are unwelcomed by human beings. Although such animals live alongside humans, they are seldom shaped by human, and therefore there’s still evidence of wildness in these urban pests (Palmer, 2003). The behavior patterns of these pests lead to their disease-bearing potential, and this is used by human as a reason to control or eliminate such species (Robinson, 1996). Also, their retained wildness is regarded as an inferior attribute in the western, and thus human’s killing of pest is rationalized by the western hierarchical dualism. Due to their disease-bearing potential, as well as their lack of instrumental value to human, the pests sometimes are regarded as even inferior to other nonhuman animals, which can be enjoyed or used by human (Palmer, 2003). We seldom feel guilty for killing a pest even though it doesn’t actually pose any threat to ourselves (Hardin, 1970). Therefore, the unequal human-animal relationship is more profound when regard to these pest species. So I would like to explore and discuss the urban human-animal relationship through the case study of these pest animals.

Pigeons have perfectly adapted to human environment through the process of
urbanization. Despite their entertaining role (mostly for the elderly and children), they are still regarded by many as pests because of their corrosive feces and the disease-bearing potential associated (Zimmerman, 1996). Therefore pigeon elimination is sometimes conducted in the city for public health. However, little evidence shows a strong relationship, if any, between human disease and pigeon population in the urban area (Palmer, 2003). The risk of disease associated with pigeon is in fact extremely low. Therefore, the pigeon control displays an unequal human-animal relationship, where human dominated and try to master other species life. On the other hand, comparing with pigeons, cats or dogs have higher disease-bearing potential that the risk of diseases associated with their feces are much better documented. However, as companion animals, cats and dogs are hardly faced with the destiny of being eliminated from cities. This reveals that such human-pigeon relationship is quite problematic as we only consider our own preference and ignores other species’ feelings. Therefore, I propose that a standpoint theory is needed to reform this human-dominant western ideology, as it advocates communications with other species and encourages us to care and understand other species’ feelings. This dialogical mode can offer us insights into pigeons’ current plight, since it enables us to understand their viewpoints. The standpoint theory is committed to eliminating separation between individuals and dominance of one group over the other. So with the help of standpoint theory, we can also establish a close relationship with these pigeons, and therefore recognize and respond to their needs.
Belguermi et al's study (2011) shows that pigeons in the urban area can discriminate between human feeders. The pigeons tried to avoid the hostile feeder – who disturbed the pigeon by intermittently vigorous arm waving – even after he exchanged clothes with the neutral feeder. This study indicates that through interaction with individual human feeders, pigeons are able to distinguish between people and learn quickly about humans’ different emotions toward them. And they are able to respond differently according to human's attitudes towards them. Based on these evidence, we may infer that despite the lack of a common language across species, an interspecies communication is possible through interactions. This provides a foundation for the application of animal care theory. Since pigeons are able to distinguish human individuals and understand them through their emotions expressed in the interaction, we can also use a similar way to listen to what the pigeons want to tell us. Through the feeding process, human may also learn about pigeons and recognize their need through their behaviors. For example, from a pigeon’s continuing visiting to a neutral feeder, which establishes a connection between human and pigeons individuals, we may recognize a pigeon’s need for food and understand its preference for the feeder as symbol of preference for a more friendly and harmonious human-animal relationship. And therefore, we may respond to the pigeons’ needs by avoiding harming them deliberately and calling off those unnecessary eliminations.

Pigeons as individuals have their own perspective and experiences. Their viewpoints can help us get a more integrate and comprehensive understanding of the world, and
also motivate us to establish a new way of interaction with animals and nature. With the help of standpoint theory, we can set up a close relation with them and therefore respond to their needs. This case between human and pigeon demonstrates the possibility of an interspecies communication. Therefore, the use of care theory can also be extended to other species to enable our understanding of animals. Just as Donovan claims (2007), we need to “call for a renewed emphasis on dialogue with animals, learning their communication systems, reading their body language phenomenologically, and taking these communication seriously in our ethical decisions.”

In addition, while we cannot say we have a common world with pigeons, or other pests, the use of animal standpoint theory reminds us that there’s shared suffering (Birke, 2007). For children, who have limited knowledge about pests, they hardly have incentives to kill a pest. And when a bug is killed, they are more likely to share suffering. As we grow up, we tend to be more affected by the social ideology, which advocates the human’s mastery role over other species, and therefore this shared suffering vanishes, and we seldom think about other species’ feelings. As Emel claims (1994), “Killing is a way to preserve mastery; it is a special form of cruelty—a cruelty that is related to power and powerlessness, but also to an absence of feeling, and yes, to hate”. The lack of animal standpoint view strengthens our overlook of other species’ feelings, and thus supporting the unequal human-animal relationship.
We cannot deny that certain species, such as rats and flies, do pose health threat to humans who shared the same community with them. Hence, the use of animal standpoint theory here is not to advocate for a no pest control community. Instead, I advocate that we should apply certain method to a broader range of species, who share the same habitat with us. We need to understand, and even appreciate the differences between species and individuals, to acknowledge that these animals are just like us: they are also meaningful actors in the society and lives worth living. Therefore, applying the standpoint theory to the animal study field facilitates the decentralization of human and supports the transition towards a new human-animal relationship.

6. Limitation of the feminist theories

However, there are limitations of extending these two feminist ideas into the animal study ground.

Firstly, it is difficult for us to understand other species’ subjective viewpoints and to empathize with them. We need to figure out how to communicate with animals scientifically and ethically. One way to do this is to “use much the same mental and emotional activities in reading animal as we do in reading human” (Bovenkerk, 2016). However, there’s no way to examine the results we get as animals are unable to share their critical views with us (Donovan, 2006). Therefore, the reliability of “animal standpoint” theory is put into question, that we can never be confident to say we do share other species’ eye views.
Secondly, pest species and those living relatively freely in the city (e.g. wildlife which enter the urban regime, birds which are not confined to limited range by human and so on) tend to be more autonomous and independent, while species like domesticated animals and companion animals are more affected by human and can be considered as metaphysically unfree (Callicott, 1992). As a result, when applying the ethic of care to those without close relationship to us, or those threatening our welfare, it may be more difficult for us to figure out the way to communicate with them due to limited interactions and due to our tendency to avoid those “dangerous” species.

Thirdly, many critics argued that there is no universalizable feminist standpoint because individuals have different experiences and therefore different perspectives (Donovan, 2006). Therefore, due to the diversity of women experiences across time and area, no universalizable and reliable knowledge can be constructed as it is impossible to generalize these experiences (Benhabib, 1996). Likewise, with different evolutionary history, different species may vary greatly in their behavior and abilities, and therefore their experiences and feelings can be totally different (Birke, 1991). As a result, we can neither generalize a specific “animal standpoint”.

Moreover, another problem of applying the ethic of care is that when there is “conflict of caring, whose interests should we choose to uphold?” (Donovan, 2006). This may require us to consider the specific context of the issue, and the answer may be controversial, as different people may hold different opinions.
Conclusion

The western hierarchy dualism advocates separation of beings and reflects one’s power over the other. This generates the unequal human-animal relationship, where human regards themselves as superior to other nonhuman animals, and therefore satisfy their own needs at the expense of other species’ welfare. With the development of human civilization and technology, human gained increased power and impacts on other species. Therefore, new forms of human-animal relationship existed during the process of urbanization. However, human still plays a dominant role in this relationship and the negative effects associated amplified with human’s increased power to alter the nature. Originated from the same hierarchy ideology, feminism and speciesism share a lot of similarities that the liberations of these marginal groups can actually reinforce each other. Therefore, feminism study and animal study need each other. Not only because feminist theories and ideas can offer us guidance towards a new human-animal relationship, which is more sustainable than the current one, but also because the connection of the two subject can strengthen the power of reforming a less hierarchical ideology as they share a common goal of decentralization.

Summary of main points

• The Current Human-animal relationships are unequal that human plays a dominant role over other nonhuman species.
• The unequal human-animal relationships exist throughout the history. And the
process of urbanization brought new forms of human-animal interactions where the negative effects of this unequal relationship is amplified by the increased human impacts.

- The unequal human-animal relationship has led to a lot of problems. It undermines nonhuman animals' welfare and negatively impacted the natural ecosystem. And although human seems to benefit from such relationship in the short run, there's long run loss associated with it.

- A new human-animal relationship, which is harmonious and not polarized, is needed to address today's environment issues.

- Feminism issue, speciesism issue, racist issue, and issues related to other marginal groups, all have their origin in the western hierarchical dualism ideology, which divides beings and matters into two contrasted categories and reflect one's control over the other. Therefore the need to be addressed together

- Feminist study and animal study need each other. With similar mechanism derived from the western ideology and common goal of decentralization, the two subjects can reinforce each other. Also, since feminist study is more mature and well known by the public, applying it to the animal study field can help the public to better understand the issue related animals and therefore encourage a human-animal relationship transition.

- Feminist ideas, such as “interconnection”, “intersectionality”, “performativity”, and “standpoint” can contribute to the establish f the new human-animal relationship
• The ethic of care, especially the standpoint theory, asks people to recognize other’s need and therefore to respond to it. It advocates relationship rather than separation between individuals. This theory pays attention to those of the marginalized groups, and make efforts to get their viewpoint heard.

• We should call for a renewed emphasis on dialogue with animals, learning their communication systems, reading their body language phenomenologically, and taking these communication seriously in our ethical decisions.”

• Animal individuals have their own circumstance and experience. In the new human-animal relationship, we should acknowledge them as meaningful actors in society and as lives worth living.
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