

Ethical Issues in Media related to Nonhuman-Animals & Nature/Environment

TERMS: Anthropocentric – human-centered ethic; humanist; prioritizing human interests and often viewing humans as the most important/central species on earth (implicitly justifying using other species as a resource).

Ecocentric or Biocentric – holistic perspective that incorporates all life and views humans as part of an ecosystem; often prioritizes protection of ecosystems over individuals. Environmental ethic.

Speciesist – Discrimination against nonhuman-animals based simply on them not being human. Considers other animals as less worthy and less sentient/feeling. Other animals' value is often determined by the extent to which they are useful to humans (instrumental value not inherent value). "Animal rights" promotes a non-speciesist ethic and an end to nonhuman-animal domestication and exploitation/control by humans. "Animal welfare" is a more moderate view that believes in human superiority and domestication but asks for humane treatment of animals we use (a stewardship model of higher standards of care).

News

- Human and nonhuman interaction/relations and its effects often are not considered a high priority. Doesn't have its own section, so coverage is sporadic.
- Complex issues don't fit well into events-focused news. Protests do, so the more extreme end of a movement gets news coverage and becomes its "face" to the public (radical stereotype).
- Television news relies on dramatic visuals, which the environmental movement usually lacks (except for protests and disasters) and the animal movement usually can't get unless they go undercover in labs, farms, etc. (and in the latter case, it is often too graphic/disturbing/gross to air). If an exploitation is legal, standard practice, is it a story?
- Stories are often framed to prioritize human interests/needs/perspectives more so than the interests of nonhumans (anthropocentric more than ecocentric). Stories are often speciesist.
- News obligations to "objectivity" make it easier to promote status quo rather than progressive ideas. Social movements may be marginalized as radical and less legitimate, while unsustainable or inhumane industries (or govt agencies) may be seen as legitimate/credible because they are dominant/entrenched/official. Activist sources must be balanced with industry sources, but industry/government often are not balanced with activist sources.
- Plants have no voice and nonhuman-animals can't vocalize human languages (but they do have body language and their own spoken languages that could be conveyed via audiovisual media). Human representatives often need to be used as sources to speak on behalf of nonhumans or their perspective is left out of news stories on them.
- Need to include perspective of nonhuman species in other major news stories besides just "animal" or "environmental" stories (ex: war, crime, health, food/dining, energy, politics, science, etc)
- Use of speciesist language that describes nonhuman-animals as products or objects ("it" not "her").

Advertising & PR

- Greenwashing – exaggerating environmental benefits or compassion of a company or product in order to jump on the bandwagon of people caring about sustainability.
- Distracting consumers from a product's unsustainability or animal cruelty by promoting shallow attributes (sugarcoating its productivity for society and overlooking problems).
- Some unsustainable or inhumane corporations/industries put massive resources toward political lobbying (buying legal protection) and public relations to spin themselves and discredit animal or environmental movements.
- Many ads promote consumption and materialism instead of sustainability, simplicity, and responsibility. Message is: Buy more. Dispose of the old or unstylish and replace with new and improved stuff.

TV & Movies

- Consider behavior and values of characters on screen – what habits are they modeling? What is seen as normal, acceptable, or cool? (in real life off screen, many celebs *do* promote animal/eco causes).
- Do show themes often relate to eco or animal problems (or are animals and nature *the* problem)?
- Does entertainment just reinforce status quo and distract people (via mindless amusement) from working to solve social problems? It is just a numbing agent?
- Need a cable network devoted to programming with ecocentric and non-speciesist perspectives.
- Take care not to harm nonhuman animals or damage any ecosystems while filming.

For solutions, see animal coverage style-guide for media practitioners at www.animalsandmedia.org