Men vs. Everyone

Women have been fighting for feminist rights for decades. The second wave of feminism took place between the 1960s and 1990s, focusing on cultural inequalities, gender norms, and the roles women play in society. Women had obtained various legal rights from the first wave, like the right to vote, but still demanded equality from a societal standpoint. However, the lack of women’s rights was not the only problem in that time span. Animal rights movements had begun around the time of World War II and became an important subject of discrimination. Both women and animals were lacking rights in a free world. Because of this, women are often seen as the more likely gender to participate in being an animal rights activist. Women direct their concerns about their own gender through the well being of animals. This is expressed through the picture of Tippi Hedren and her pet lion, Neil.

In this picture, Tippi is playfully spouting water at a lion from inside of her California pool in 1971. Her relaxed facial features and demeanor show how comfortable she is being a foot away from Neil. Although his mouth is opened, his relaxed paws and unaggressive behavior also show the level of comfort these two share. Tippi’s closed eyes also allude to the comfort level and show the bond they
have. Tippi is casually trusting Neil while actually putting her herself in danger. In “Panopticism,” Michele Foucalt claims that power is achieved through vision. He claims that by being observed, you are lacking power; especially if you know you’re being watched. On the other hand, the observer holds the ultimate power especially if he cannot be seen. According to Foucalt, the lack of vision Tippi is expressing results in a lack of power. Because Neil has vision over her, he is the one who has control. By giving up control to play with Neil and amuse him, Tippi is representing the sentimental capacity women have. The ability to give up power to make others happy is an ability males’ lack, according to Don Sabo. Sabo argues that men subdue to the pain principle, enduring amounts of pain in return for success. “[The pain principle] limits our expression. (Sabo)” This shows how men ignore emotions and will undergo anything to gain control. Unlike men, who would never give up power, women are willing to sacrifice to make others happy. This is an example of why men have control over women and animals. While women are busy making sacrifices for the well being of others, men are conceptualizing on it and in result obtaining power. This represents how men have control over women because of women’s gender concerns that they express through animal’s well-being.

In the picture, Tippi is confined to a space, also signifying a lack of power. She is restricted to the inside of the pool while Neil is free to roam around. His stance shows how he has power of whether she gets out. Tippi is consciously allowing this to happen in order to make the lion feel more comfortable. She is giving up control of the situation in order to keep him from feeling threatened. In this way, Tippi is ‘marking’ herself. Deborah Tannen claims that women are “marked”, judged by their
appearances and decisions, no matter what they do. By allowing the lion to have a position that alludes to control, Tippi is marking herself as less powerful and sentimental towards the lion. This, again, is something men cannot be expected to do. Not only does Sabo make claims about men being unable to give up power based on emotions, but he also states men compete with other men for power like Tippi is competing with a male. “The minority of men [dominate] the majority of men. This intermale dominance hierarchy exploits the majority of those it beckons to climb its heights (Sabo).” Intermale dominance leads to aggression. Each man thinks they are better than the next and are willing to fight for it and endure pain. Not only does this harm the males, but it can also have a resulting affect on minoritized and powerless groups. Violence is most likely to happen to a group who seems powerless – animals and women. These two groups are linked not only in the lack of power, but also susceptibility to aggressive behavior. This shows how men abuse their power over women and animals.

Tippi’s acceptance of the lion’s overbearing nature also represents how women can accept other forms over power imbalance. Women’s emotional vulnerability makes them susceptible to giving in to power demands. This again shows Tannen’s claims of markedness. They are vulnerable because they are women. For example, women may have a hard time saying “no” to men. According to Teri Aronowitz, Cheryl Ann Lambert, and Sara Davidoff’s findings in "The Role of Rape Myth Acceptance in the Social Norms Regarding Sexual Behavior", women are often subjected to rape myths. The suspects attempt to justify the means of the rapes. This is easier for them since the women are already marked as vulnerable.
Animals similarly receive this type of treatment. They are used to normalize rape culture by justifying the means of it. Mass production of pigs and cows are a result of constant insemination of the animals. When female animal rights activists’ focus on this mistreatment, they are also representing their own permissibility from men into the rape culture. Tippi’s representation of how women easily give up power also helps explain why women are objectified. Animal rights activists stand up for animals that are objectified, that’s life exists for the benefit of someone else. But by releasing power, they are also objectifying themselves. Women are often used as sexual props in the media or by identification of their bodies for the purpose of benefitting men. Being used for consummation or scientific testing objectifies animals. Female rights activists are representing their own objectification from men when they are raising awareness for the animals. This represents how female animal right’s activists fight for their own feminine rights through the expression of animal’s rights.

Although these women are trying to protect themselves by protecting the animals, this picture shows a potential backfire. Tippi thinks she is protecting the lion, but actually represents a woman giving power to yet another species. Sabo compares men to animals in his writing as he describes their behavior. “Being an animal meant being fanatically aggressive and ruthlessly competitive (Sabo).” Sabo’s claims suggest that men compete with women for power. Similarly to how men dominate women, the lion is also dominating her. He also states, “[Patriarchy] is a hierarchal system in which men dominate women in crude and debased, slick and subtle ways (Sabo).” The lion’s relaxed and comfortable behavior toward Tippi
shows a sign of a ‘slick and subtle way’ to remain in power over her. This shows how women are easily deceived when it comes to losing power.

Women are more likely to be animal right’s activists due to their predominant sentimental, emotional nature. They also connect with the animal’s vulnerability and lack of power. Like women, animals are objectified, shown violence, and used to normalize different aspects of culture, like rape. Women attempt to identify themselves to men and society through protecting these aspects of the animals. However, instead of gaining equality for themselves they are actually losing more power by subduing to the animals. By giving their effort and time to these animals, they are also giving them their power. Although they are helping the animals, instead of obtaining gender equality, they are giving up even more power. This results in a positive effect for animal rights but a negative effect on women’s rights in comparison to men.
Works Cited


