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Cute Enough to Eat: The Transformation of Animals into Meat for Human Consumption in Commercialized Images

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Abstract

In order for a culture that generally likes, even loves, animals to eat them, and especially not to make the link between the two, it is necessary to construct the consumption of meat-eating in such a way that the connection is blurred or erased. In this paper, I suggest that one way this is done is by transforming animals, which are loved, into meats, which are eaten, so that the concepts of "animals" and "meats" seem distinct and unrelated. Using content analysis of commercialized images of animals, I find that this transformation involves two key processes, the representation of meat as something that no longer resembles any animal origins and the "cutification" (making objects appear cuter than they usually appear) of animals, that promote the consumption of their animal flesh. I argue that these types of objectification are similar to other forms of objectification of oppressed groups in society, including women and minorities, and serve to perpetuate the oppression of animals in contemporary society.

Reflexive Statement

I have been active in the feminist movement since the 1970s and more recently have begun focusing on animal rights and environmental issues. While my past research has examined images of gender and race in media, the current paper turns a critical eye to images of animals in popular culture. This research grew out of a professional interest in the ways in which oppressed groups in society are represented in popular culture and how such images contribute to hegemonic beliefs, and a personal commitment to veganism.

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The most widespread and egregious forms of animal oppression and abuse surround the breeding and slaughter of animals for human consumption. Animals bred within Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) and slaughtered for their pelts and meat are subjected to horrific violence and neglect including beak searing, castration, dehorning, branding and tail docking without anesthesia; disease and neglect; continual pregnancies and premature weaning; and throat cutting and scalding of still conscious animals (Marcus 2005). So horrendous is the treatment of animals in these facilities that one scholar equates their methods of slaughtering animals with those used by Nazis during the Holocaust (Patterson 2002; also see Animal Welfare Institute 1987, Burt 2006, and Marcus 2005). Yet despite these practices, meat consumption remains high and is expected to increase (Smil 2002).

Paradoxically, Americans are extremely fond of non-human animals. The American Pet Products Manufacturers Association (APPMA 2007) claims that 63 percent of U.S. households have pets and estimates that in 2007 Americans will spend 40.8 billion dollars on their pets. The rates of pet ownership are higher in households with children, and studies show that children's relationships with pets are often extremely intimate (Melson 2003).

Thus, there exists a curious contradiction between persons' attitudes and behaviors: many people are quite fond of animals yet seem largely insensitive to animal abuses in CAFOs and slaughterhouses and give little thought to eating them. Many meat-eaters probably see little connection between what they eat and their feelings towards animals.[1] I suggest that this is due in part to the ways in which animals are used in commercialism to sell food and drink. To explore this connection, this paper examines the ways in which animals are depicted in commercialized images and considers ways in which such representations reflect and contribute to their exploitation in society.

Cultural Representations of Oppressed Groups

Studies of popular culture and of cultural artifacts have shown that members of less privileged groups tend to be depicted in ways that mirror their relative powerlessness. Gaye Tuchman (1978) suggests that women tend to be symbolically annihilated in the media through omission, stereotyping and trivialization. Indeed, extensive research on gendered representations shows that women and girls are represented in stereotypic and restrictive ways in a wide range of media including children's literature, fairy tales, novels, movies, magazines, organizational literature, and so on (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz

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2003; Buysse and Embser-Herbert 2004; Diekman and Murnen 2001; Kang 1997; Millard and Grant 2006).

Stereotypic representations in media exist for other less-privileged groups as well. For instance, criminals are likely to be represented as poor, men of color, immigrants, and uneducated (Christie 1986). Yan Bing Zhang and her colleagues (2006) found that elderly persons were underrepresented in advertisements, tended to be portrayed in minor or background roles, and were depicted in less positive ways than persons of other age groups. Media representations are not static, however. Bernice Pescosolido, Liz Grauerholz and Melissa Milkie (1997) found that images of Blacks in children's literature varied across the twentieth century in response to social change. In particular, during times of greatest racial unrest, Blacks virtually disappeared from children's picture books, only to reappear in "safe," distant images including those found in stories about African cultures.

Power relations and arrangements can be observed in places other than media—in cultural objects, for example. Steven Dubin (1987) analyzed cultural items including salt and pepper shakers and yard jockeys with Black caricatures on them that were popular during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He claims that these cultural items represented a form of symbolic social control and violence against minorities. Wendy Varney's (1996) analysis of popular food-imaged dolls, including "Strawberry Shortcake," suggests that such toys reinforce the idea that women should be confined to limited roles. Through these toys, she claims, "women are placed squarely within the context of consumability and made to fit there very cozily within this representational form" (p. 268).

Carol Adams (2004) draws explicit connections between the ways in which women and non-human animals are depicted in popular culture and language. She argues that discourse concerning and images of animals are at times sexualized, evoking women's experiences and bodies. Consider, for example:

> We may dine at a restaurant in Chicago and encounter this menu item: "Double D Cup Breast of Turkey. This sandwich is so BIG." Or, we may dine at the restaurant chain Hooters, which has a logo ostensibly of owl's eyes. In its menu, the restaurant explains how it came up with the name "Hooters" which is a slang for “breasts”; “Now the dilemma…what to name the place. Simple…what else brings a gleam to men's eyes everywhere besides beer and chicken wings and an occasional winning football season. Hence, the name—Hooters—it is supposed that they were into owls.” (P. 17)

Similarly, images and discourses concerning women can be imbued with references to animals or the treatment of animals. Adams notes, for instance, that

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language describing sexual violence against women often evokes images of animals such as "butchering of women," being treated like "a piece of meat," and so on.

Little sociological research has been conducted on the portrayals of animals, perhaps due to sociologists' perception that animals and humans have little in common that would be of interest to sociologists (Alger and Alger 2003). Jennifer Lerner and Linda Kalof (1999) note that "sociologists have rarely been interested in decoding animal symbolism, despite its overwhelming presence in our cultural imagination" (p. 566). Instead, the question of how animals are represented in cultural objects has been mostly explored from literary or philosophical perspectives.[2] Yet, examination of cultural representations of animals, especially commercialized representations, are critical to any sociological effort to address "social justice and the animal question" and reduce blatant exploitation and abuse of animals. As Steve Baker (2001) argues, "any effective cultural strategies on behalf of animals must be based on an understanding of contemporary cultural practice" (p. 5).

Animals do loom large in our cultural imaginations and are common figures in advertising. JoAnn Magdoff and Steve Barnett (1989) suggest that:

> The use of animals, both animated and real, in many TV ads is directly related to the ability of the animals to evoke powerful responses in viewers . . .The fastest way to make a point in a TV spot is to use a visual image whose meaning viewers agree upon. Using stereotypical animals in commercials is a standard tactic; animals are anthropomorphized and often animated to emphasize one essential product characteristic. (P. 94)

Magdoff and Barnett (1989) focus on the uses of animals to sell a wide range of products. One example is the use of the Budweiser Clydesdale horse to sell beer. Budweiser is marketed mostly to men; the horses symbolize "strength, vitality, and virility" (p. 98). Unfortunately, these researchers do not explore how animal images are used when the marketed product is, in effect, the very animal being represented, for instance, when cows are depicted to sell hamburgers or cheese.

Lerner and Kalof (1999) examined dominant messages about animals in 72 television commercials. They identified six themes in these commercials: animals as loved ones, symbols, tools, allegories, nuisances, and in nature. The most common category was animals as loved ones; the least common was animals as nuisance. One theme—animals as tools—has particular relevance to the present study. This theme pertains to animals being used for food, transportation, recreation or labor. An example provided by Lerner and Kalof (1999) is that of a detergent ad in which a woman is listing the tasks she needs to do that day, one of which is "prevent osteoporosis." The woman is shown sitting on a cow's back while balancing a glass of milk on her head (a white lab-

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coated scientist holds the cow's harness). Lerner and Kalof (1999) argue that "animals as tools" advertisements such as this convey "the overt message that it is acceptable and normal to consume animals or use them for labor" (p. 577); in this case, "we learn that cows are to be treated as tools—they are there to produce milk for our health, with the presence of the scientist suggesting the rightness and necessity of this use" (p. 575). Lerner and Kalof (1999) add:

> The ads go further, however, to suggest that only particular animals may be used in this way, reinforcing the standard Western divisions between pet and farm animals. By portraying animal use in a matter-of-fact manner, the ads also teach us that we should not feel any discomfort about our animal consumption. (P. 577)

In sum, images of oppressed groups in media and other cultural objects reflect hegemonic attitudes towards and expectations for these group members. Yet such images are not static, as mentioned earlier, nor are they uncontested. Baker (2001) provides a fascinating analysis of animal rights' activists' use of animal images as well as suggestions for the strategic use of images for promoting social change, noting that "the meanings of images…are constantly open to negotiation" (p. 226). In this study, I examine not only images used to promote the consumption of meats but also those designed to discourage meat-eating in order to document the extent and ways in which meat-eating messages are contested in cultural representations.

Marketing Meat

Even though meat-eating is thoroughly ingrained in our culture, most of us do not want to be reminded that our meal was once alive and breathing, bearing close resemblance to ourselves and perhaps the pet dog sitting patiently next to us during mealtime hoping for a treat. As Lerner and Kalof (1999) note, "advertisers must…perpetuate a clear distinction between animals to be loved as family members (and lavished with pet goodies like toys and treats) and animals to be used as food or workers" (p. 570). Indeed, advertisers have a tough sell when marketing meat for human consumption, although they get a huge boost from the food industry and cultural ideologies that have convinced most Americans that they *need* animal meat for protein and calcium and that meat protein is superior to other protein sources (Adams 2004).

What marketing strategies are used to sell products that are not especially appealing? Andrew Wernick (1995) provides important insight into this process in his study of marketing funeral services. He notes the funeral industry made several changes in order to make the process more appealing to customers during

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the twentieth century. These included simulating immortality through embalming, dressing and cosmetically enhancing bodies; beautifying funeral homes and cemeteries; and romanticizing memorial services. In a similar vein, marketers make meat more palatable by disguising or beautifying it.

Disguising meat might involve presenting it in such a way that it no longer resembles any type of animal, allowing us to "experience meat and other animal products as distinctly separate from the animals that produced them …because we do not encounter the animal until it is a sanitarily cellophaned package at a gleaming white supermarket" (Lerner and Kalof 1999:581). Also, Adams (2004) points out that we disguise animals through our language: "After being butchered, fragmented body parts are often renamed to obscure the fact that these were once animals. After death, cows become roast beef, steak, hamburger; pigs become pork, bacon, sausage….[W]e say "leg of lamb" not a "lamb's leg," "chicken wings" not a "chicken's wings" (p. 59). We further disguise animals by "cooking, seasoning, and covering the animals with sauces, disguising their original nature" (Adams 2004:59). The process by which animals are disguised as meat is commonly understood but has not been empirically documented.

Beautification suggests a process by which a product is made more attractive than it is in its normal state. Unquestionably, attractiveness is a powerful marketing tool for selling animals for meat or any other product. Anna Gunnthorsdottir (2001), for instance, found that perceived attractiveness of an animal has a significant effect on an individual's willingness to contribute funds to the animal's preservation.

Although meat might be "beautified" through its presentation on a platter, I am more interested in the ways in which animals are represented in order to make consumption of meat more attractive. The process involved here seems to be less about "beautification," however, and more about "cutification," that is, the process by which an object is made to appear cuter than it is in its normal state. Daniel Harris (2000) makes it clear that "cute" is not to be mistaken for "attractive"; rather, "it is closely linked to the grotesque, the malformed" (p. 3). With respect to animal representations, there are three (non-mutually exclusive) major ways that animals can be cutified: through anthropomorphism, neoteny, and disnification.

Anthropomorphism refers to the tendency to think of animals as human and may include representations in cultural texts (e.g., in children's stories like *Winnie the Pooh*), through personification (e.g., dressing animals in clothes), or through attribution of motives to animals (Milton 2005; see Lockwood 1989 for other anthropomorphic strategies). One of the main motives for representing animals as human-like in cultural texts, which Randall Lockwood (1989) refers to as "allegorical anthropomorphism," is to make animals more appealing; this strategy is used in marketing to enhance the appeal of meat. Lockwood suggests

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that personification of pets reflects no more than the owner's desires and needs, but it is certainly true that marketers use personification as a gimmick to enhance an animal's cute-factor and to appeal to customers.

A second way to cutify animals is through neoteny, the "condition in which youthful characteristics are retained in the adult form of an animal" (Lawrence 1989:60). Neotenized features include rounded faces and heads, large eyes, and small bodies and small limbs (classic examples include Mickey Mouse and Snoopy). Neoteny produces strong positive reactions from humans and is one of the major ways in which animals are rendered as "cute" and used to sell toys, dolls, and entertainment (Lawrence 1989). Another way in which marketers might capitalize on neotenized representations is by using actual infant or juvenile animals to sell products.

A third process by which animals are cutified is through disnification, a term Baker (2001) uses to describe the tendency to make animals appear stupid when presented in visual form. Baker claims:

> There is a kind of pattern: when the animal is put into visual form, it seems somehow to incline towards the stereotypical and the stupid, to float free from the requirements of consistency or of the greater rigour that might apply in other non-visual contexts. (P. 175)[3]

Similarly, Harris (2000) maintains that "the process of conveying cuteness to the viewer disempowers its objects, forcing them into ridiculous situations and making them appear more ignorant and vulnerable than they really are" (p. 6). To some degree, neotenizing and anthropomorphizing animals results in disnification, but it also seems that some commercial images portray the animal as so blatantly ridiculous and stupid that it goes beyond simply cutifying them. For example, when an animal is portrayed as so stupid that she prepares and presents herself as a "delicious" meal for human consumption, the image takes on an additional quality of disnification (Baker 2001).[4]

In the current study, I analyze the extent to which marketers both camouflage meat and cutify animals in order to promote meat/dairy products or meat/dairy consumption. Given the overlap between anthropomorphism, neoteny and disnification, I do not attempt to distinguish among these tactics. Rather, I document animals that are cutified generally and determine whether this occurs by illustrating animals in cute ways, depicting actual animals in cute situations, or using baby/young animals. Thus, this study seeks to deconstruct animal representations in order to make obvious that which in our culture is often invisible or overlooked—the transformation of animals into meat for human consumption.

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METHODOLOGY

Data

The data used in this study were based upon images of animals used to sell or promote the consumption of animal products in the form of food or drink. Data were generated using Google search engine for "images." Several efforts were made to locate appropriate images for the analysis, including such keyword searches as "cute animals" or "eat cows." These searches were not very productive, yielding high numbers of personal weblogs with images of pets rather than commercial images. The most productive searches resulted from two keywords—"advertisements" and "products," preceded by either "chicken," "pig," or "cow" (e.g., "chicken advertisements" or "pig products"). Thus, six separate keyword searches were conducted: chicken advertisements, chicken products, pig advertisements, pig products, cow advertisements and cow products.[5] The first 500 images generated by Google images for each category were examined, for a total of 3000 images.[6] The unit of analysis is the animal.

Coding

Five criteria had to be met in order for an image to be coded and analyzed:

(1) Commercialized images. No personal webpages or weblogs were coded unless they depicted some type of commercial product, such as an advertisement or picture of a restaurant logo (in fact, several personal websites yielded useful information, especially images related to smaller-scale commercial enterprises).

(2) Original images. No duplicates were coded, although advertisements for the same product, if they represented different animals or similar animals in different situations (e.g., the "Happy Cow" and "Chick-fil-A" advertisements depict cows in a variety of settings), were each coded, but the same advertisements were not double-coded. If an image contained multiple animals that appeared distinct from one another, each animal was coded. For instance, if an advertisement featured a pig and a cow both were coded; if the picture showed a herd of cows, only one was coded.

(3) Images of animals that are commonly consumed as food or explicitly used to sell food/drink products from those animals. For example, a picture of a dog or a "guinea pig" (several of the latter were generated in response to pig ads/products) was not coded. Chicken nuggets in the shape of dinosaurs were coded, however.

(4) Pertinence to food or drink. Because the focus of this study is on the internal consumption (i.e., eating) of animals, all images that did not pertain to

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food or drink in some way were eliminated. Indeed, most images (65% of the 1294 images) did not pertain specifically to food or drink (e.g., these might include toys in the shape of animals, leather furniture, or costumes).[7]

(5) Pertinence to human food. Because I am interested in human consumption, I eliminated images pertaining to non-human food (e.g., the product was pig ears for dogs and pictured a pig on the package).

Based upon the first two criteria, 2509 images were coded. Application of criteria three through five resulted in 410 images that were ultimately used in the current study.

Variables

Purpose of image. Categories included (1) to sell similar food product, (2) to sell dissimilar food product, (3) to promote restaurant, (4) to promote a recipe or healthy eating, (5) *not* to sell product, (6) other, and (7) unclear. The fifth category was intended for those images that explicitly promoted vegetarianism. These were coded because they still met the criteria for inclusion (e.g., they pertained to food, even though the message was to not consume the food) and allowed me to document subversive messages.

Recognizability. Because images of meat are often far removed from anything that resembles an animal, I examined the way in which animals or parts of animals were presented. Categories included: (1) Whole—clearly recognizable as animal, (2) Mostly whole, some parts removed or missing but recognizable as animal, (3) Cut-up—pieces recognizable as animal parts, and (4) Cut-up—pieces unrecognizable as animal parts. The latter included images of meat that had been ground, powdered, liquefied, scrambled, or otherwise manipulated in some manner that no longer resembled the animal from which it originated.

Presentation. In order to document whether meat is disguised, it is important not only to determine recognizability but also how the animal is presented. For the most part, live or illustrated animals are clearly recognizable but dead meat can be more easily disguised. Thus, I coded for whether the animal depicted was (1) live, in a natural state; (2) illustrated, sculpted or photo-shopped; (3) dead, uncooked; (4) dead, cooked; (5) dying or abused; or (6) unclear. Although there were multiple images of dying or abused animals in CAFOs, these were documentary in nature rather than commercial, and no other such images were found, so the fifth category was dropped.

Cutification. Images were coded as to whether the depiction showed (1) the animal illustrated so as to appear cute, (2) a realistic looking animal in a cute, funny or ironic situation, (3) a baby animal, (4) the animal in a manner to make the consumption of animals unattractive, or (5) no obvious attempt to appear cuter than normal.

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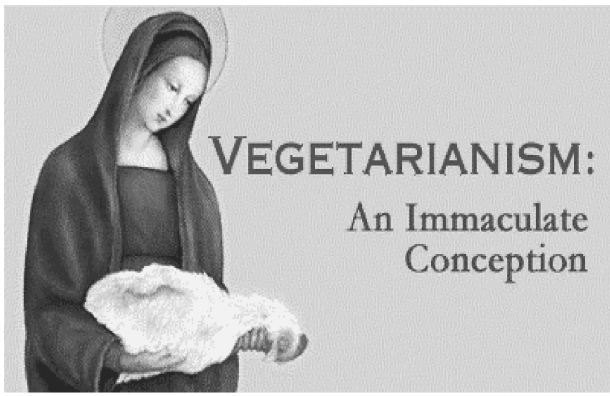
FINDINGS

Purpose of image

When analyzing images of animals used to sell or promote consumption of animal food or drink products, the vast majority (62.1%) were intended to sell or promote a food item similar to that being depicted. In other words, an image of a pig was usually used to sell pork products. The next most common purpose was to promote a recipe or healthy eating (18.5%). About six percent of images were used to promote a particular restaurant.[8]

Although relatively uncommon (7.4%), one of the more clever uses of animal images is the use of one type of animal to sell a dissimilar product. A well-known example is the use of cows to promote Chick-fil-A restaurants. Silk Soy Milk later capitalized on this idea by using a cow to promote soy-milk products. Approximately four percent of images were created in order to discourage the consumption of meat. For example, advertisements by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) often use animals in provocative ways to discourage the consumption of animal flesh (see Image 1).

Image 1: Purpose of animal image not to sell meat



Used with permission of the artist, Susan Saladino, and PETA.

Recognizability and Presentation

Contemporary marketing of animals for human consumption often presents animals in such a way that there is little or no resemblance to actual animals. In fact, the majority of images (56.2%) were unrecognizable as animals (see Table 1). The least common depiction was animals cut-up but still recognizable as animals. About one in four images (28.3%) showed a whole animal that was clearly identifiable, while nine percent showed a mostly whole animal with some

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parts removed but still recognizable as animal. The latter might consist of a packaged broiler chicken without a head and feet or an illustrated animal with only her head presented in the image.

Table 1: Recognizability of animal images

Image	Frequency	Percent
Whole—clearly recognizable	116	28.3%
Mostly whole, some parts removed but recognizable	38	9.3
Cut-up—pieces recognizable	24	5.9
Cut-up—pieces unrecognizable	228	56.2
Unclear	4	1.0
Total	410	100.0

In order to determine how common the practice of disguising meat is, it is necessary to analyze the way in which the animal is presented (see Table 2). Most images (56.8%) show the animal cooked, which is consistent with the lack of recognizability seen above. Only 10 percent show the animal as dead and uncooked. Interestingly, only 9 percent use live animals to promote the sell of animals for human consumption; a more common representation (22.9%) is that of an animal that has been altered in some manner (e.g., illustrated, photo-shopped).

Table 2: Presentation of animal images

Presentation	Frequency	Percentage
Live	37	9.0%
Illustrated/sculpted/photo-shopped	94	22.9
Dead, uncooked	40	9.8
Dead, cooked	233	56.8
Unclear	6	1.5
Total	410	100.0

Cutification

Given the high frequency of images that show dead, cooked animals, it is not surprising that the vast majority of images (70.2%) suggest no obvious attempt to make the animal appear cuter (see Table 3). However, about 25 percent do

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appear intentionally to alter images of animals, either by illustrating them in such a way that they appear cuter (19.5%), presenting actual or realistic-looking animals in cute, funny or ironic situations (5.1%) or, in rare cases, by presenting actual baby animals (.5%).

There is an abundance of illustrated or anthropomorphized animals selling a range of products in commercialized images. The anthropomorphism of animals certainly is not a recent phenomenon, as anyone old enough to remember Elsie the Cow will recall, and remains popular today.[9] Such images clearly illustrate how animals are neotenized (e.g., big eyes and ears) and often anthropomorphized (e.g., dressed in clothing). With developments in technology, especially photo-shopping, the ability to depict actual (or extremely realistic-looking) animals in cute situations has introduced new possibilities for using animals in modern advertising. Chick-fil-A's "Eat More Chikin"® campaign is probably the best known and one of the most successful, landing the campaign in the Advertisers Hall of Fame ("Chick-Fil-A Cows Enter Advertising Hall of Fame" 2007). "Big Rick's" advertisements for barbeque sauce shows actual animals in "cute" situations such as a pig pictured between human hands holding two skewers or chickens being picked up by someone yielding chopsticks (see Image 2).

Table 3: Cutification of animal images

Manner in which animal is manipulated	Frequency	Percent
Animal altered to appear cuter	80	19.5%
Actual animal in cute situation	21	5.1
Baby animal	2	.5
No obvious attempt to appear cuter	288	70.2
De-cutified-animal intentionally altered to appear less cute	0	0
Depiction of animal consumption negative	11	2.7
Unclear	8	2.0
Total	410	100.0

Not surprisingly, I found no examples of images related to food in which the animal was de-cutified, that is, represented in a way that made them appear less cute.[10] Even those commercial images designed to discourage meat-eating, discussed below, did not depict animals being, for example, slaughtered or bloody, although such images are easily accessible on the Internet on PETA's website (http://www.peta.org/) and others.

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Image 2: Cutification of an animal



Used with permission of Big Rick's Bar-B-Que Sauce

Sacrificial animals

As noted previously, most images of animals analyzed in this study are used to sell a product related to that animal (e.g., a pig is used to sell bacon), yet the consumption of the animal is only implied. One of the more interesting types of images to emerge in this study is that in which there is an explicit recognition of the connection between the animal and consumption of its own species. In fact, the animal is depicted in a cannibalistic, even self-cannibalistic, fashion—that is, as consuming, or preparing to consume, her own kind or herself. Although this tactic is not common, there are several noteworthy examples. One such image, which appears on the window of a restaurant, shows two chicks looking up expectantly at a mother hen who is scrambling eggs in a bowl (see Image 3). Another example is that of "Cudahy Curly," an enthusiastic pig who eagerly devours bacon, pork-chops and other pork products. In another image, a pig is seen slicing ham steaks from her own torso.[11]

Contested images

Very few images were explicitly designed to discourage the eating of meat (recall Image 1). Many of these included campaign advertisements from PETA. Overall, such images are rare; fewer than three percent of images coded deliberately show the consumption of animals in a negative way.

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Image 3: Cannibalistic chicken



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DISCUSSION

This study focused on the extent and manner in which animals are used in commercialism to sell food or drink. Using images generated from the Internet, I found many cases in which animals are used to sell food and drink, probably because animals evoke powerful and immediate responses in humans and are effective for selling all types of products (Magdoff and Barnett 1989). The manner in which animals are depicted varies widely, however, and most images coded in this study showed dead, cooked meat rather than live or illustrated animals. In these cases, animals were literally transformed into meat, and there was virtually no resemblance to any actual animal. In fact, images of meat—raw or cooked—that do resemble the animal (e.g., with ribs clearly visible) are the least common images found. Camouflaging animals in this way is the ultimate in

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disassociation: consumers not only bear no responsibility for killing animals for food, there is little to remind them that their food or drink is linked to an animal source.

A more interesting marketing strategy is the use of animals in clearly recognizable forms to sell meat products because such images make use of more complicated and often contradictory messages. The highly successful Chick-fil-A campaign discussed earlier is a case in point. By encouraging people to eat chicken, these clever cows (but not too clever for they cannot spell correctly) are transparently self-serving but in the process, they draw attention, if only momentarily, to the fact that some animals are being sacrificed. These anthropomorphized cows have obvious appeal to consumers (sells for Chick-fil-A increased from 5 million dollars in 1995, when the advertising campaign began, to 1.98 billion in 2005) but sympathy does not seem to extend to those chickens being served up at Chick-fil-A restaurants.

On the surface, it also seems illogical that "cute" animals such as the Chick-fil-A cows are so effective at getting humans to eat them or other animals. One might assume, for instance, that the presentation of live or cutely illustrated animals would humanize animals and make their slaughter and consumption more problematic by reducing the emotional distance between humans and non-human animals. Interestingly, the opposite seems to occur. Anthropomorphism and neoteny increase the emotional distance between humans and non-humans (Lawrence 1989; Milton 2005) and allow for the exploitation of non-human animals. Kay Milton (2005) argues that anthropomorphism, for instance:

> helps to sustain the myth that non-human animals are not 'real' persons but only metaphoric ones. As a consequence, we can use them in many ways without being impeded by moral sensibilities; we can experiment on them, eat them and use them for our entertainment, and exploit them in countless other ways that industrial economies…have devised. (P. 266)

In a similar vein, neotenized animals are not seen as equals. According to Elizabeth Lawrence (1989), "juvenilized creatures offer people no competition, and relieve us of the responsibility to understand and respect them for qualities intrinsic to their species" (p. 71). Cuteness in objects, in other words, is basically dehumanizing (Harris 2000).

In the current study, there were many examples of anthropomorphic and neotenized (illustrated) images but, curiously, very few examples of actual baby animals. On the one hand, we might expect to see many images of "cute" baby animals because their appeal is so great (Lawrence 1989), but the fact that baby animals are used so seldom to sell food products (though perhaps not non-food related products) suggests that marketers understand that the effect on consumers may be the opposite of what is desired. It is one thing to conceive of eating an

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adult animal but something entirely different to think about eating her babies. This may explain why not a single image advertised veal products.

Lockwood (1989) suggests that allegorical anthropomorphism—making animals more appealing or concealing their true identities—is basically harmless because there is no pretense of reality, but he was not examining these images in the context of consumerism. When such images are used in commercialization, it is more difficult to dismiss their potential harm to animals' well-being. Such images communicate to consumers that animals are not to be taken seriously and are even willing accomplices in their own slaughter and consumption. This is especially obvious in cases of cannibalistic animals sometimes portrayed in advertisements, but it is also strongly implied in the cases where animals are used to sell similar food products. Such images also support Baker's (2001) notion of disnification, whereby animals are rendered as stupid when presented in visual form.

Both camouflaging and cutifying animals are processes critical to understanding humans' willingness to exploit farm animals for food and to our sociological understanding of how animal oppression fits into large social systems of inequality. Disguising animals as meat allows consumers to dissociate from animals entirely; literally, to annihilate them. When animals are disguised as meat, when a "her" becomes "it" and is eaten, there is no question who is dominant, whether or not this domination is consciously experienced or acknowledged. Similarly, cutification reinforces humans' sense of superiority over nonhuman animals. Lawrence (1989:70) argues that we neotenize animals so that we can maintain a sense of control over them and so that their oppression is more easily justifiable. They become more childlike and therefore separate and unequal. Harris (2000), speaking of the trend towards "cuteness" in animals and non-animals, suggests that "the aesthetic of cuteness creates a class of outcasts and mutations, a ready-made race of lovable inferiors whom both children and adults collect, patronize, and enslave…" (p. 4). In this way, cutification allows for the exploitation and oppression of one species over another and solidifies hegemonic values and practices.

Cultural representations of animals bear close resemblance to those of other oppressed groups in society, especially women and girls, who are also offered up for symbolic consumption in media. Certainly the trend toward disguising meat can be seen as a type of symbolic annihilation (Tuchman 1978) of animals. There is also striking resemblance between the cutification of animals and the cutification of women (portraying pubescent women or women as girlish or "baby-dollish") in advertisements. Adams (2004) found striking similarities between the ways in which women and animals are portrayed in media or treated in society. Women are objectified, fragmented (e.g., their breasts or other body parts are emphasized) and visually consumed; animals, too, are objectified (e.g.,

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seen as objects to be used and exploited), dismembered and butchered, and literally consumed. Consider also advertisements that portray women as food, as in a Burger King commercial for Whoppers. In one advertisement, women (Whopperettes) dressed as sandwich parts (buns, tomatoes, etc.) fall upon one another to form a Whopper, while singing lyrics including "Yes we're tasty and eye-popping," "Our sole purpose is fulfilling your wishes…" and "Ask away, we're always willing."[12] The difference, of course, is that women in these advertisements are symbolically presented as meat/food parts, animals literally *are* the meat.

We can also see the similarities between the sacrificial animal representations discussed in this paper and representations of women in media, especially pornography, as masochists who enjoy being abused and raped, and who perhaps inflict self-abuse. Adams (2004) notes:

> One of the mythologies of a rapist culture is that women not only ask for rape, they also enjoy it; that they are continually seeking out the butcher's knife. Similarly, advertisements and popular culture tell us that animals like Charlie the Tuna and Al Capp's Shmoo wish to be eaten. The implication is that women and animals willingly participate in the process that renders them absent. (P. 66)

Cultural representations of any oppressed group often convey a taken-for-granted, natural quality until they are deconstructed. This is especially true for images of domestic animals who lack any power or voice in society from which to wage counter thematic messages. In the current study, there were relatively few messages that challenged the dominant meat-eating theme and they originated mostly from one organization: PETA. Nonetheless, such messages are important because they directly (and some would argue, effectively) challenge hegemonic beliefs about humans' dominance over non-human animals.

In our culture, we are not apt to reduce meat-eating nor are marketers likely to avoid the use of animals in commercialism as long as such images sell products. The prevalence and ubiquity of such images renders their underlying messages invisible because they reflect only hegemonic values (Adams 2004; Baker 2001). Thus, the deconstruction of commercialized animal images, especially those depicting animals "cute enough to eat," is important for sociologists and others interested in alleviating cruelty towards animals, and provides part of the answer to the "social justice and animal question."

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ENDNOTES

[1]Clearly some individuals do see, and are concerned with, the connections between loving and eating animals. Stephen Kellert (1989) examines a range of attitudes towards animals such as "moralistic," "dominionistic," and "utilitarian." One's relationship to animals (e.g., whether one hunts or eats animals) is likely to be influenced by these attitudes. Lilly-Marlene Russow (1989) also explores how attitudes toward animals have been shaped by historical forces.

[2]Steve Baker (2001) refers to the literary approach as a study of "mentalite," i.e., the "inquiry into the symbolic and rhetorical uses of the animal, and into the implications those uses may have for our attitudes to animals themselves" (p. 6). An example of such work is that of Jane Desmond (2002), who explores the process by which dead animal bodies are manipulated through taxidermy and more recently, through animatronics (using electronic means to make animals "come to life"), and what these practices imply about the connection between humans and non-human animals. While these studies can provide sociological insights into the ways in which animals are represented in cultures, they lack systematic analysis.

[3]This notion of animal images becoming "free-floating" was also noted by Adams (2004) to explain how animal images are often used to reflect women's status. She claims: "Once the existence of meat is disconnected from the existence of an animal who was killed to become that 'meat,' meat becomes unanchored by its original referent (the animal), becoming instead a free-floating image…" (p. 14).

[4]A note about the use of pronouns is in order. Adams (2004) notes that language serves to distance humans from other animals when non-human animals are referred to as "its" or "living things," and recommends the use of gendered pronouns to render animals more real. Because, as Adams (2004) also argues, most meat consumed is *feminized protein*, I use the pronoun "she" to refer to an animal when gender is unclear.

[5]A web-based search seemed the most efficient and productive method of obtaining images used in marketing animal food products and did in fact yield a wide range of images—from the most popular (e.g., Chick-fil-A cows) to the more local (e.g., images used in local restaurants that were posted on websites). Disadvantages of this method are that it was not possible to document with accuracy whether the images were contemporary or historical, or cross-cultural, two factors that undoubtedly influence the ways in which animals are represented. My sense is that the vast majority of images located and analyzed are both contemporary and of U.S. origins.

[6]Even though the same number of images was examined for each of the six categories (500), there were slightly more images of cows (33.5%) and chickens (33.1%) than pigs (29.9%). The remaining (3.6%) were of other animals including goats, sheep and dinosaurs.

[7]Lerner and Kalof (1999) found that 22 percent of television advertisements that depicted animals were food or drink related. In the current study, 34.7 percent were related to food or drink. Although an analysis of the non-food related images is outside the scope of the current study, it appears that the vast majority of these images depict animals in cute ways in order to sell products completely unrelated to the animals themselves (e.g., electronics, concert tickets, cleaning products), a pattern also noted by Baker (2001).

[8]Keep in mind that duplicate images were not coded; otherwise, there would likely be more numerous examples of images promoting restaurants. Furthermore, images of

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animals were not coded as promoting a restaurant if the image promoted a particular item at the restaurant (e.g., an image of a Big-Mac sandwich was coded as "to sell similar food product" rather than "promote a particular restaurant").

[9]Although images are readily available on the Internet and in advertisements, I was unsuccessful at obtaining permissions from most corporations to use their logos in this paper. Where appropriate, I provide website addresses for readers to view images analyzed in this paper. For examples of images that anthropomorphize animals, see: http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.adpulp.com/archives/AmandaCow.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.adpulp.com/archives/2006/06/&h=395&w=296&sz=74&hl=en&start=47&um=1&tbnid=YLqW2YzxLMhVWM:&tbnh=124&tbnw=93&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dcow%2Badvertisements%26start%3D38%26ndsp%3D18%26svnum%3D10%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den%26rlz%3D1T4GFRC_enUS206US207%26sa%3DN or http://www.rosshorwood.com/FoodSuppliers/SimplyGrazinOrganicFarm.jpg

[10]There were some instances not related to food that were coded as "de-cutified" including skinned-pig masks and in one particularly hideous case, a full-size butchered pig made out of urethane poly foam that was covered in blood and came with a detachable head and meat hook.

[11]To view these images, go to: http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.lileks.com/institute/orphanage/orphans/pig3.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.lileks.com/institute/orphanage/orphans/cudahy2.html&h=237&w=150&sz=10&hl=en&start=418&um=1&tbnid=SHpBQGmc6hqJvM:&tbnh=109&tbnw=69&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dpig%2Bproduct%26start%3D400%26ndsp%3D20%26svnum%3D10%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den%26rlz%3D1T4GFRC_enUS206US207%26sa%3DN
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[12]To view the commercial, go to: http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-4186888463242782209

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