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This Little Piggy Went to Press:

The American News Media's Construction

of Animals in Agriculture

by Carrie Packwood Freeman, PhD

THIS LITTLE PIGGY WENT TO PRESS: THE AMERICAN NEWS MEDIA'S CONSTRUCTION OF ANIMALS IN AGRICULTURE

Abstract

This textual analysis examines the representations of farmed animals in national print and broadcast news discourse in over 100 stories published from 2000 – 2003. Findings show these American news media largely support the speciesist status quo by favoring elite viewpoints and failing to provide balance. Although exceptions are provided, news media often objectify nonhuman animals discursively through: 1) commodification, 2) failure to acknowledge their emotional perspectives, and 3) failure to describe them as inherently-valuable individuals.

Keywords: farm animals; discourse; representation; animal rights; news media

> Big corporate operators have taken over the bulk of Iowa's pork production, with dire results not only for the small farmer but also for those of us who were raised on succulent pork chops and pork roasts. …Raised in close quarters inside enormous metal buildings, the hogs foul the air for miles around, and their meat is bland, dry and tough when cooked. (Apple, 3/29/00, *New York Times*, p. F1)

This *New York Times* dining cover story emphasizes the negative consequences humans face at the hands of today's corporate hog farming conglomerates – poor meat quality, poor air quality, and poor family farming communities, however, it makes no similar critique of what it might be like for the hogs themselves to live in these admittedly overcrowded and foul conditions. Anthropocentric news frames like this and others miss an opportunity to balance agriculture stories with an animal welfare or rights perspective. The social responsibility theory of the press (Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947) advocates for a "comprehensive" view of the news that fairly represents all constituent groups and serves as a "forum for the exchange of comment and criticism" (Peterson, 1956, pgs. 87-88). When it comes to farmed animals, or the animal protection groups that represent their interests, there is a particular need for the media to serve as this public forum because so much modern animal farming is otherwise invisible to the public.

While there are billions of animals grown or caught for food in the U.S., many Americans do not have direct contact with these animals until they cross their plates as food. In our increasingly urban society, Americans are more likely to interact with animals such as cats and dogs than cows and chickens. Therefore, our understanding of the existence, interests, attributes,

and treatment of farmed animals relies less on empirical knowledge than it does on our existing beliefs and myths, built largely from children's stories and our exposure to farmed animals through the media (Singer, 1990).

Media portrayals are an important site of meaning creation for topics with which viewers have little direct experience (Murphy, 1991; Gitlin, 2003). Peter Singer (1990) asserts that the media do not do enough to educate the public on the significant ethical issues facing farmed animals today, "The average viewer knows more about the lives of cheetahs and sharks than he or she does about the lives of chickens or veal calves" (p. 216). Singer laments that viewers are primarily exposed to farmed animals in the media, not via the news, but through advertisements for food products gained at the animals' expense. He critiques this oversight in the news media by stating, "Their coverage of non-human animals is dominated by human-interest events like baby gorilla births at a zoo…; but developments in farming techniques that deprive millions of animals of freedom of movement go unreported" (p. 216).

This research study is informed by Singer's ethical theory on species discrimination (speciesism) as the basis for the argument that the treatment of farmed animals and their breeding for food constitutes a social issue which the news media have an obligation to present fairly for public debate. Foucault's theory on the power of discourse is used to explain that the nature of the news media's construction of farmed animals plays a key role in whether or not these animals are publicly defined and treated as sentient beings in need of justice or as mere commodities for continued use. Using a textual analysis method, 106 news stories on farmed animals were analyzed in national print and broadcast news over four years, from 2000 – 2003, (in the *New York Times*, *Time* magazine, *CBS Evening News*, and CNN) to answer research

questions evaluating ways in which these representations both reinforce the speciesist status quo and how they challenge it in favor of increased justice for animals.

This paper's definition of "farmed animal" includes the main species of animals used as food in the U.S.: cows, chickens, turkeys, ducks, pigs, goats, sheep, and fish (whether wild-caught or farmed). Throughout, the term "farm*ed*" animal is used instead of "farm" animal to acknowledge that farming is something done to these beings against their will, not something inherent to their nature -- just as other scholars may choose to use the term "enslaved" person, instead of labeling someone a "slave" (Allen, 2006; Brown, 2004; Dunayer, 2001; and Spiegel, 1996). While recognizing that humans are also an animal species, this study's use of the word "animal" will indicate *nonhuman* animals. The following sections on animal agriculture and animal rights will provide contextual background for the topic of animal farming and its ethical issues, while a literature review will provide a theoretical framework on social constructions of meaning, discourse, agenda-setting, journalism ethics, media coverage of animal issues, and the role of language in oppression.

Background

Animal Agriculture

Animal Science scholar David Fraser (2001a) explains that, historically, people supported animal farming because they witnessed bucolic scenes and felt the animals led wholesome and natural lives, just as the agrarian family did. This follows the Judeo-Christian model of the pastoral shepherd. He explains, "The agrarian ideal puts the family farm on a moral pedestal, and the raising and killing of animals is seen as legitimate or even a virtuous activity so long as it happened in that context" (p. 5). However, in the last several decades, more and more family

farmers have been forced out of business because they cannot compete with larger corporate "factory farms." The status quo in agribusiness today severely deviates from the wholesome ideal of the "Old McDonald's Farms" of yesterday, as industry has largely confined the animals behind closed doors. "In the most restrictive of the confinement systems, animals spend most or all of their lives indoors with large numbers of others, and their freedom of movement and opportunity to perform natural behavior are greatly limited," (Fraser, 2001a, p. 5). Fraser explains that pigs and birds have the most intensive confinement, cows raised for dairy live in semi-confinement, and cows and sheep are the least confined until sent to a feedlot.

The mammals, fish and birds in agriculture have been proven to endure both physical and emotional pain during their lives and their slaughter (Sentience Report, n.d.; Singer, 1990; Curtis & Stricklin, 1991). The frustration of increased competition for food, restricted movement, and pressure on social relationships, including separation of mothers from their young, result in animals experiencing painful emotions like depression and fear. In addition to the varying degrees of suffering different types of farms inflict, both corporate and family farms are guilty of restricting animal freedoms, exploiting their bodies for profit, and killing them prematurely.

USDA statistics reveal more than 10 billion land animals are killed for food each year, which equates to more than a million animals killed every hour of every day in the U.S. (FARM, 2005). This figure does not count the millions of sea animals caught or farmed for food, as the industry measures them in pounds, not individual lives. Despite a growing interest in vegetarianism and increased demand for plant-based proteins, the number of animals killed annually continues to increase as many consumers switch to eating smaller animals like chickens (Maurer, 2002).

As intensive confinement systems become the industry standard in agribusiness, nonhuman animals are not the only ones who suffer. Human workers, consumers, and the communities that house these factory farms are beginning to feel the negative effects to their health and quality of life, with unpleasant or dangerous living and working conditions, and increased odor and pollution (Schlosser, 2002). Consumers also worry about the threat of infectious diseases, such as e-coli bacteria and mad cow disease, as well as the ill-effects of ingesting genetically modified organisms, hormones or antibiotic residue through animal products (Schlosser, 2002). Animal protection groups have mounted media campaigns against agribusiness, painting a bleak picture of factory farming's effects on people and the environment, while attempting to foreground the issue of animal suffering (Fraser, 2001b). This is what Fraser (2001b) calls the "new perception" (p. 1) of animal agriculture that the industry knows is threatening to kick animal farming off its moral pedestal.

The Rights and Welfare of Animals

While people have been advocating for the rights and welfare of other animals since ancient times, such as Pythagoras, Plutarch, Mahavira, and the Buddha, a coordinated movement did not originate until the nineteenth century in Europe and America, mainly focused around domestic animal abuse and vivisection (Beers, 2006; Finsen & Finsen, 1994). The movement lost some momentum during the two world wars but re-emerged stronger in the 1950s. The 1980s saw rapid growth and diversification with the emergence of organized animal rights groups with more radical ideologies than traditional welfare organizations (Beers, 2006; Jasper & Nelkin, 1992). As an indication of growth, consider that at the turn of the twentieth century there were approximately 700 nonhuman-animal protection organizations, mostly humane societies, and by

the twenty-first century that number had multiplied to approximately 7,000 organizations with over 10 million members (Beers, 2006, p. 3). Today, the largest U.S. organizations, such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and The Humane Society of the U.S. (HSUS), both of whom have major campaigns against factory farming, boast almost 2 million members combined.[1] Additionally, the environmental protection movement supports aspects of animal protection, particularly in its quest to save wild species from extinction and, in some cases, fight corporate animal farming (Beers, 2006; Jasper & Nelkin, 1992).

Singer's 1975 book *Animal Liberation* helped to jumpstart and legitimize the modern animal rights movement (Beers, 2006; Jasper & Nelkin, 1992). In it, he popularized the term "speciesism" to describe discrimination of a living being based on his/her species. As a utilitarian, Singer (1990) prioritizes a being's level of sentience, not species, as the moral divide; this emphasis on sentience is inspired by Bentham's quote, "The question is not can they *reason*, nor can they *talk*, but can they *suffer*?" (p. 7). Speciesism disputes the outdated but historically influential Cartesian dichotomy separating humans from all other animals based on its arbitrary notion of humans as conscious souls and animals as mere automata. While philosopher Mary Midgley (1984) believes some physical differences between species are relevant to a degree, she concurs with Singer in privileging beings with higher degrees of sentience for moral consideration (ex: mammals but not insects or plants). Both philosophers argue that our unconditional protection of human life is ultimately based on our respect for human sentience, not on intelligence or other qualities that different humans possess to varying degrees, so the same respect deserves to be extended to other sentient beings out of moral consistency. All sentient beings should be valued inherently, not instrumentally, and have their interests considered. Animal ethicist Tom Regan (2003) agrees that nonhuman animals, as conscious

individuals with interests, are not inferior to human animals and are morally equal "subjects of a life" (p. 94). However, Regan's stance privileges rights, as in the right to life, more than a utilitarian focus on reducing suffering.

Like racism or sexism, speciesism operates on the basis of discrimination where a group elevates its status by lowering the status of "other" groups, and there are strong parallels in how women and people of color have been discriminated against by being compared to so-called lowly and irrational animals (Spiegel, 1997; Adams, 1990). While Midgley (1984) sees race as a more arbitrary category, biologically-speaking, than species or gender, she still values and equates all these social justice causes as ultimately working not to eliminate difference but to defeat "unfairness" or "unreasonable biases" (p. 101). Biases enable hierarchies, which often lead to mistreatment, where the "superior" group feels justified sacrificing the major interests of the "inferior" group to satisfy their own minor interests (Singer, 1990).

Applying these ethical principles specifically to animal farming reveals that animal agribusiness is speciesist because it values animals instrumentally and controls and sacrifices their lives (their major interests) to satisfy humans' taste for flesh, milk, and eggs (our minor interests). Considering the fact that humans can healthfully live on a plant-based diet (ADA, 2003), Singer (1990) promotes vegetarianism by asserting that we should make it a "simple general principle to avoid killing animals for food except when it is necessary for survival" (p. 229). Regan (2003) adds that the "total abolition of commercial animal agriculture" (p. 1) is a goal of the animal rights movement. While ethical vegetarianism is considered a tenet of animal *rights* philosophy, by contrast, the animal *welfare* movement is more conservative and supports "humane" or traditional types of animal husbandry (such as "family farms"). But despite their different stances on the ethicality of eating animal flesh, both animal protection movements (and

their millions of supporters) generally agree that the current factory farming system represents a social justice issue in need of fundamental reform because of its inherent cruelty.

Theory & Literature Review

To study the meaning behind media representations, one benefits from first defining how meaning is produced and whether media are significant. According to Hall (1997), the meanings humans associate with anything are not derived from nature; they are social constructions created through human language. Meanings are based on the words and visuals humans create to signify objects, plus the emotions and values they choose to associate with those objects (1997). This study is informed by a social constructionist approach to meaning-making, particularly Foucault's discursive formation approach, exploring discourse's power to shape society.

According to Foucault, discourse is a certain construction of knowledge on a topic that functions in a society at a particular time, one based on groupings of "ideas, images, and practices" (Hall, 1997, p. 6) which work to organize the culture's way of discussing that knowledge. Foucault felt discourse serves to define the limited ways which were suitable to talk about, treat, or engage the topic so its meaning is comprehensible to a society. This is not just a linguistic organizing device; it has powerful political effects. Through practice, discourse operates under a system of relations and rules found in society. Foucault (1990a) explains that what we believe to be true about something emerges not from language or the objects themselves but from *relations* "between institutions, economic and social processes, behavioral patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of characterizations; and these relations are not present in the object" (p. 1133).

Foucault's definition of discourse's reliance on relations indicates one must consider the following *relations* and social norms for purposes of this study: our historical relations with farmed animals, our values toward them, the words we use to describe them, our familiarity with them as beings, our laws governing them, our ownership and financial control over them, and our nation's economic dependence on their use. The results of these social, historical and economic relations situate farmed animals as a resource in our culture's status quo and profoundly influence the current discourse within which American journalism is bound to operate. Therefore, when applied to the news media, Foucault's discourse theory explains that news organizations are not the only source of power that defines a discourse on farmed animals and that they operate within a network of other powerful institutions in society – such as corporations, governmental agencies, and religions.

Despite the pressure on news media to reflect the status quo, that does not discount the substantial power and authority the news has to construct meanings and play a role in supporting or challenging a regime of truth through their choice of topics and frames. The theory of agenda-setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) underscores this key role that the news media play in determining social relations by stating that the public's attention will turn towards those issues and frames that the news media cover with the most salience. Journalists put these frames into action through their choice of words, visuals, and sources and the amount of emphasis given to each (Entman, 1993). Similar to how discourse operates, Entman claims these frames serve to define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies. However, when it comes to news frames regarding social justice movements, scholars have proven that the news media tend to support dominant groups and the status quo while marginalizing less powerful or minority groups, such as social movement organizations (Gitlin, 1980; Fishman,

1980; Ryan, 1991; Tuchman, 1978). It is more challenging for less powerful groups to gain access to media than it is for mainstream, official sources with more resources (Danielian, 1992; Gamson, 1988). Political economists blame the media's commercial profit orientation for driving its moderate content favoring the status quo over social progress (Chomsky & Herman, 1988; McChesney, 1999).

This puts the animal rights movement and farmed animals at a disadvantage to agribusiness and governmental agencies when it comes to gaining media attention for their viewpoints. The social responsibility theory of the press (Peterson, 1956) contends that society's power imbalance in favor of animal-use does not justify news coverage which dismisses the animal protection perspective that millions of Americans support. The Society of Professional Journalism's code of ethics incorporates social responsibility principles favoring a balancing of differing viewpoints, even those in the minority. It promotes giving "voice to the voiceless" and supporting "the open exchange of views" and "diversity" in the human experience (SPJ, 2007). While the social responsibility theory is anthropocentric, a non-speciesist perspective on journalism ethics would argue that stories which discuss issues relating to nonhuman animals should include their "voices," whether it be through a description of the animals' response to their situation or through allowing humans to speak on behalf of the nonhumans' interests. Media ethics scholar Tom Bivins (2004) adds that a balance or variety of viewpoints is necessary, along with accuracy and context, for news to fully represent the truth, another key principle in journalism ethics.

Yet a blind allegiance to idealistic goals of "balance" and "objectivity" in newsroom culture can be problematic (Ward, 2004), resulting in polarized stories and excessive reliance on official sources (Tuchman, 1978). Instead, Ward (2004) advocates for a "pragmatic objectivity"

where journalists strive to be factual and fair in representing multiple viewpoints without pretending to be capable of being fully detached, objective observers. This allows for the news to openly represent some values and interpretation in a reasoned fashion (Ward, 2004), as Gans (1979) contends journalists implicitly do in their construction of stories.

So how fairly does the news cover animal protection issues? A study of general attitudes toward animals in newspapers in the 20th century reveals news tended to overwhelmingly reflect the status quo attitude that animals are valued more instrumentally than inherently, in opposition to animal protection attitudes showing moral concern (Kellert, 1982). However, the news has been shown to exert some agenda-setting influence on public policy in *support* of pro-animal legislation in some historic instances (Jones, 1997). Jones (1996) highlights examples where the passage of pro-animal ballot initiatives or humane legislation (statewide) was positively correlated with the amount of supportive coverage the issue received in the media[2] (1996). In another agenda-setting example, opinion survey evidence shows that it was the predominance of anti-vivisection editorials by media magnate William Hearst in his nationwide chain of dailies in the first half of the 20th century that "most likely succeeded in turning a significant number of uninformed readers against the use of animals in research" (Jones, 1996, p. 74), more so than was evidenced by readers of other papers. However, a more recent look at news coverage of animal experimentation from 1984-1993 does not indicate such favorable coverage of the anti-vivisection stance as was given by Hearst years ago (Kruse, 2001). Additionally, Jones (1997b) noted a decline in media coverage of animal rights protests since 1990 and attributes this in part to the success of industry and government's countermovement media message strategies suggesting animal rights presents an "unacceptable threat to the nation's economic and cultural status quo" (p. 72).

Regarding animal agriculture reform specifically, the media helped set the agenda in favor of passing legislation in the 1870s (for transportation) and the 1950s (for slaughter methods). Jones (1997a) explains "only two pieces of federal legislation address the treatment of farm animals and both of these were enacted following intense media campaigns" (p. 8). However, despite the growth of the animal rights movement, these minimal federal protections for farmed animals have not been significantly strengthened since their inception over a half century ago (Finsen & Finsen, 1994; Singer & Mason, 2006), indicating the current news agendas may not be as favorable to farmed animal protection in this age of corporate agribusiness. Fraser (2001b) contends that current news coverage of both sides of the debate (vegetarians vs. agribusiness) ends up polarizing the issue and confusing the public through contradictions, generalizations and oversimplification. He proposes that ethicists and scientists find a moderate middle ground from which to build consensus and accurately describe animal agriculture and its issues to the public.

Getting in the way of such accurate descriptions in present day discourse is the predominant use of animal agribusiness rhetoric, which effectively uses euphemisms to soften the harsh realities, violence, and exploitation of intensive farming (Dunayer, 2001; Glenn, 2004; Stibbe, 2001). According to Stibbe (2001), "the external discourses of animal product industries contain hidden ideological assumptions that make animal oppression seem inevitable, natural, and benign" (p. 158). Glenn (2004) provides examples of industry and government officials referring to animals using commodified marketing terms like "livestock," or sanitized terms like "individual accommodations" or "modern maternity units" to describe the cramped cages in which they confine calves and pregnant pigs. Dunayer (2001) promotes more direct non-speciesist language such as *him/her* instead of *it*, *enslaved nonhuman* instead of *farm animal*,

enslavement or *confinement facilities* instead of *farms*, *slaughterhouse* instead of *processing plant*, and *flesh* instead of *meat*. Stibbe and Dunayer assert that language plays a critical role in the oppression of both human and non-human animals through "othering" discourses that create "us" and "them" divisions meant to separate and disconnect mankind from the rest of the animal world.

This study will add to the literature on media representations of the "other," specifically forming the foundation of scholarship on national news representations of farmed animals. The research questions are:

RQ1: How and to what extent do news media representations of farmed animals reinforce speciesism and neglect ethical perspectives?

RQ2: How and to what extent do these media representations challenge the status quo and reveal openings for change?

To clarify, while this study is informed by a non-speciesist ethic, it does not claim that the news media are obligated to be *solely* non-speciesist. This study aims to assess how the news media represent the interests of farmed animals under the premise that an animal protection viewpoint deserves fair coverage based on both its legitimacy as a social issue as well as the media's social responsibility obligations to provide all relevant viewpoints.

Methodology

Textual Analysis

A textual analysis method was used to address these questions because it allowed for the kind of open-ended analysis necessary for delving into this unexplored topic to elucidate the multiple meanings present. This followed Hall's (1975) description of textual analysis which includes a three-step process (pg. 15):

1. A long preliminary soak in the text – initial readings and light note-taking of all text (including visuals) that allow one to focus on issues while still seeing the big picture.
2. A close reading of the text – getting more focused and taking detailed notes to start identifying strategies and themes that can be used to structure the paper. This included creating a spreadsheet to categorize all news stories by topic, species, visual content, size, medium, and location to aid identification of themes across categories.
3. Interpretation of the text – explaining what and how meanings were constructed through those themes across categories and what realities were represented.

This analysis process was informed by Hall's idea of meaning as a social construction and Foucault's notion of discourse being a powerful constraining device defining our knowledge of what farmed animals are supposed to *mean* to us and what seems to make *sense* when we talk about them in the news. Whose construction of the "truth" about farmed animals does news discourse privilege? Although this study is not a frame analysis, methodological guidance was also gained by Gitlin's (2003) textual analysis techniques in identifying news frames. In this study, the text and visuals were examined to identify: what topics were considered newsworthy; how problems, remedies, and involved parties were defined; who was allowed to speak with authority about farmed animal issues and if they included the animals' perspective; what social values were emphasized or assumed regarding whether farmed animals are valued inherently or just instrumentally; what terminology and visuals were selected and what relevant options were

omitted (and whose perspective did these reflect); how accurate and direct were the text and visuals in representing the realities of modern agribusiness; with whom was the audience encouraged to make personal connections; and what emphasis was placed on the animal's sentience instead of on his/her body as a commodity.

Text Selection and Overview

Stories selected for analysis focused on animal farming or the farmed animal in his/her live state (including fish farming and commercial fishing). Excluded were stories that merely mentioned animal farming as a peripheral element or stories just about animal-based food products, diet-based health issues, or meat-recalls. Searches in Lexis-Nexis database included keywords (granted some are speciesist, as that is common terminology), such as: cow, beef, dairy cow, veal calf, hog, pork, chicken, duck, sheep, foie gras, egg, fish, ocean fishing, farm animal, farm animal welfare, vegetarian, foot-and-mouth disease, and mad cow disease. For breadth and variety, this study examined U.S. news coverage of farmed animals over a four-year time frame from the beginning of 2000 through the end of 2003, using the premier single sources of national news in both print (newspapers and news magazines) and broadcast (network and cable): *New York Times*, *Time*, *CBS Evening News*, and CNN.

For a major national newspaper, the *New York Times* (NYT) was selected because it is often used as the sole national paper examined in many media studies due to its popularity and award-winning journalism, as well as its agenda-setting power with political elites and other newspapers (Gitlin, 2003). Due to the multitude of disease stories, this study eliminated a small portion of those stories that were deemed either repetitious, brief, or too far removed from any discussion of the animals themselves. This was done judiciously in an attempt to keep the text

sample to a manageable size for in-depth analysis without cutting back on the years included in the study[3]. In the category of major print news magazine, *Time* was selected since it had the largest readership, reaching 23 million people a week, which comprised almost half (44%) of all news magazine sales weekly in the U.S. (*Time*, 2003).

Broadcast news selection was limited to that available through the Vanderbilt Archives, for purposes of accessibility and budget. For network news coverage, CBS was selected because early Lexis-Nexis searches revealed it had more animal-related stories than ABC or NBC. Additionally, CBS has been used by many scholars as a reputable and leading network news source for academic research (Gitlin, 2003). For cable TV news, CNN was the obvious choice. Not only is CNN a popular and established cable news network, it is also the only one that dates back through 2000 that is available through the Vanderbilt Archive.

Once collected, the text sample ended up including 106 total news stories: 72% from the *New York Times*, 10% from *Time*, and 18% from broadcast (15 stories from CBS and four from CNN). Half of the *New York Times* text occurred in the year 2003, which was a popular year to feature stories on mad cow disease hitting the U.S., commercial fishing's effects on the environment, and the fast food industry's interest in farmed animal welfare. 2001 was the most popular year for stories in *Time*, CBS, and CNN, on an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in Europe. Farmed animal disease was by far the most popular topic in each medium but others included (in order of popularity): environmental issues, animal welfare, family farming, science/genetics, corporate farming, human health/food safety, business, and religion. Some of the coverage was quite prominent. For example, one third of all the *New York Times* articles were cover stories, in sections such as main, science, dining, business, and metro. Almost half of all *New York Times* stories were located in the main section, including 10 cover stories (primarily

due to mad cow disease hitting North America). Note that while I do use some quantifying figures to help readers gain perspective on relative sizes within the sample, this is not a quantitative analysis.

Findings

RQ1: Reinforcing the Status Quo

The first research question asked how and to what extent news media representations of farmed animals reinforce speciesism and neglect ethical perspectives. Findings reveal that the majority of the news stories in the sample (approximately 90%) tend to reinforce speciesism by objectifying farmed animals. Objectification was found to be a result of three discursive methods by the news media: (1) talking about farmed animals as commodities; (2) failing to critique the ethics of the situation from the animal's perspective and ignoring emotional issues they face; and (3) denying farmed animals individual identities. The following three sections will discuss each of these discursive methods in more detail.

1. Talking About Farmed Animals as Commodities.

Considering that farmed animals are primarily raised to be sold for profit, it is not surprising that their instrumental use would be part of the discourse, but it does not have to be the only way in which they are defined as valuable. This limited economic definition strips farmed animals of their rightful status as living beings and reduces them to objects for sale – essentially portraying them as commodities. This commodification in the news occurs via the following methods: using labels and words that focus on farmed animals as bodies not beings;

framing animal crises in purely economic terms; and raising animals according to a recipe for profit from cradle to grave. This section will address these three methods.

Commodification begins through the words used to refer to farmed animals– words that objectify them and separate them from us, as described by Glenn (2004), Stibbe (2001), and Dunayer (2001). For example, the news often refers to animals raised for food using industry labels that represent their end purpose, such as *livestock, beef cattle, pork, dairy cows, veal calves, poultry,* or *seafood,* instead of more essential references to them as living beings, such as *cow, pig, bird, or fish*, and never using Dunayer's animal rights terms of *enslaved beings* or *nonhuman animals*.

The economic value of animals is also evident in the many disease stories that emphasize how much money could be lost in the epidemics. Consider the economic focus of the following headlines: "A Killer Economy" (Cowell, 4/1/01, Sect 4, p. 2), "U.S. Scours Files to Trace Source of Mad Cow Case: The Beef Market is Down" (Wald, 12/25/03, p. A1), and "Avian Flu Raises Concerns on the Economy" (Braccidiferro, 3/23/03, Sect 14CN, p. 3). In a *Time* article, the reporter explains that while foot-and-mouth disease is not a fatal disease, the industry will destroy the animals because they are now "useless commercially," (Kluger, 3/26/01, p. 50). And since foot-and-mouth disease does not endanger human lives, a *New York Times* reporter calls it "a completely economic plague" (Cowell, 4/1/01, p. 2). The implication is that the animals' deaths can be considered as wholly an economic loss.

Further emphasizing their status as commodities, many news stories glamorize how farmers groom farmed animals from birth by using specific rearing methods to make them tastier and more profitable. For example, in the *New York Times* article, "How to Grow a Giant Tuna" (Apple, 4/3/02, Dining Cover F), it explains that after catching the tuna in large nets, the farmers

transport them carefully and slowly back to the farm in that same net so their meat's flavor will not suffer due to increased stress and chemical production in their systems. And just before "harvest," the farmer explains that he moves the tuna to special, less crowded pens so they do not get over-stimulated while being caught "lest they thrash about and damage one another" (p. F2) and bruise their valuable meat.

Other examples of recipes for raising more expensive meat include increased exercise and careful slaughter. A sheep farmer describes his lamb's meat as "better toned" (Apple, 4/19/00, p. D6) because his animals can roam around so their muscles get toned like an athlete's, coupled with the fact that they are killed young. The reporter explains how the farmer guarantees good flavor by doing his own slaughtering "to ensure the lambs were killed properly and the carcasses chilled slowly, to avoid toughening them" (p. D6). And a Nantucket sheep farmer says the hills work like a "stairmaster," to make the lamb's meat more "flavorful and succulent" (Hesser, 11/5/03, p. D1). These dining articles overlook the fact that these small farms tend to treat their animals more humanely than do factory farms. Because the news media frame these stories around product quality and not animal welfare, it implicitly encourages consumers to make product choices based on self-interest instead of ethical values.

2. Failing to Critique the Ethics of the Situation from the Animal's Perspective and Ignoring Their Emotions

Most stories in this sample focus on human-centered perspectives and problems. The underlying implication is that humans are not morally obligated to consider the farmed animals' interests because the animals are so dissimilar to us and do not have our complex ability to think and feel deeply. The main discursive methods used to disregard animal perspectives are:

critiquing problematic issues (like cloning, disease culls, and the predominance of intensive farming methods) only in terms of human concerns; using language that often neutralizes or trivializes farmed animal deaths; and overlooking farmed animal emotions, as if non-existent or benign, or mocking them as trivial when mentioned. This section discusses these three methods.

In the many disease epidemic articles, most empathetic frames relate to showing concern for those industry employees whose livelihoods will suffer, or the public who must be concerned for their health, but not for the animals suffering from disease and premature death. For example, the discovery of exotic Newcastle disease in a California egg farm is said to send "a shiver through the state's $3 billion poultry industry" (Janofsky, 12/28/02, NYT, p. A15). The reporter's choice of the word "shiver" tends to personify the poultry industry itself as if it were a person who is worried about his/her livelihood, but there is no personification of the chickens or indication that they (or the readers) might be shuddering about the fact that 100,000 birds are to be killed due to this disease.

Foot-and-mouth disease stories often show gruesome visuals of dead bodies burning in mass graves. Reporters often acknowledge the situation is grim and describe it using factual verbs like *burn, destroy, kill, slaughter*, and *bury*, but they do not quote anyone who uses more emotional descriptions such as *depressing*, *unjust*, or *shameful* to indicate this loss of life is a moral tragedy or that it could/should have been avoided based on different policies. *CBS Evening News* was the exception with a few stories that show British farmers crying or upset about the government-mandated culling and rough treatment of their animals. But in all other stories, word choices tend to neutralize any sense of injustice, compassion or mourning for the animal victims of mass slaughter. If it were human bodies heaped onto a pyre, or more inherently-valued nonhumans like horses or dolphins, the news story would likely seem callous

if it did not include some emotional commentary from sources to convey an appropriate sense of tragedy. The fact that these emotions could be left out of most stories of mass slaughter of farmed animals indicates a lack of concern for animal lives beyond economic realms.

Time includes a few examples of whimsical language that trivializes animal deaths. For example, a mad cow disease article features a photo of a head-on stare from a lone sheep's face looking out of an opening in his confinement unit. The picture is poignant, as that particular sheep, slated for death, looks straight at the reader. Yet, that gravity is juxtaposed by a pun in the caption which reads "A baaad situation for 30 dozen sheep" (Thompson, 4/02/01, p. 14). Additionally the article jovially states the USDA is not taking any chances that mad cow disease will get a "hoofhold" (p. 14) here. These puns put a light-hearted frame on disease stories that deserve a more serious tone.

When it comes to the genetic modification or cloning of farmed animals, concerns about consumer-safety clearly take priority over animal welfare. While the subject of cloning humans is almost universally tabooed as morally grotesque, the only ethical concerns these science articles suggest about animal cloning is that the resulting food products might be detrimental to human health or the environment. In some frames, this skepticism of cloning is balanced by an explanation of the benefits genetically modified (GM) foods can provide consumers. Consider this rather promotional statement from the CBS reporter "Congress has put the brakes on human cloning, but out here on the farm, livestock cloning is off and running. Farmers are making perfect copies of their high-producing milk cows, their prize bulls, their meatiest and most flavorful pigs" (Andrews, 3/6/02).

Two *New York Times* articles explain how farmed animals are genetically modified for the medical research industry to produce pharmaceutical products, and while the research seems

to be strange and sometimes inhumane, sources do not question the research from an ethical standpoint. Consider one article's headline, "From the Head of a Rooster to a Smiling Face Near You" (Ault, 12/23/03, pp F1-2), which is about a wrinkle-reduction substance derived from roosters' combs. The light-hearted tone emphasizes cosmetic benefits to humans and disregards any issues the birds face from living as genetically modified drug receptacles. For example, the photo features a generic headshot of a healthy rooster and does not show any of the actual lab animals who are described in the article as having abnormally large and heavy combs.

The other *New York Times* article, entitled "If it Walks and Moos Like a Cow, it's a Pharmaceutical Factory" (Yoon, 5/1/00, p. A20), highlights the use of GM farmed animals as "bioreactors" who "earn their keep as living chemical factories" to produce pharmaceuticals. In it, a Canadian scientist optimistically declares "There is no limit to what can be done" (p. A20). While this scientific freedom does appear to benefit human medicine, it also implies that there are no moral limits to how animals might be fundamentally manipulated to serve human purposes, yet the article does not follow-up on this biased statement with any ethical critique. In fact, the article only contains one superficial sentence on ethics a few paragraphs later, which states that animal rights groups think that "the use of animals as living factories raises troubling ethical issues" (p. A20), but the article does not elaborate on what those issues are nor let any animal activists speak. So when the article then states that animal rights groups have been "relatively quiet on the issue" (p. A20), it gives the unsubstantiated impression the anti-vivisection movement has no major objections.

Additionally, the article's photographs all feature generic headshots of healthy and happy animals along with explanations of medical benefits under each photo, which is not an accurate depiction of these lab animals' lives, as no cages are shown[4]. For example, it would have been

more representative to use the photo space to show how the GM pigs raised with medicine in their semen are "trained to donate" it regularly (p. A20). Instead, the article seemed to glamorize animal research from a human perspective, overlooking its negative effects on nonhumans.

3. Denying Them Individual Identities

Another major way news stories disregard the sentience of farmed animals and allow us to view them impersonally is through their representation as having a generic mass identity instead of individual personalities and interests. This is a result of stories: failing to personalize any animal by profiling him/her as an individual; failing to introduce us to individual animals before butchering, or failing to make connections between an individual and his/her resulting food item; and describing animals using anthropocentric adjectives that highlight their usefulness to us after death instead of their personalities while alive.

Much of this impersonalization process begins with the words used to refer to them by name and gender. For example, the first cow to die of mad cow disease in England in 1984, a cow used for milk, has no name. She is called by her tag number, #133 (Grady, 12/30/03, p. F1). Two decades later, the first cow in the U.S. to officially have mad cow disease is often referred to in many stories as "it," even though, as a dairy cow, she is obviously female. However, in three major *New York Times* articles on mad cow disease in North America, a female pronoun is used only once to describe each country's first infected female dairy cow, but then she is called "it" several other times within the same articles, even when the stories are referring to her obvious female traits, such as calves to which "it" had given birth (Krauss, 4/23/03; Wald, 12/25/03; & Clemetson, 12/28/03). There is not a single story where the infected cow's female gender is reported in a consistently correct or personal way.

According to the AP Stylebook (Goldstein, 2000), the rule for journalists when writing about animals is to avoid using a personal pronoun except when the "sex has been established or the animal has a name" (p. 16). Most of the time, the news writers in this sample correctly use generic terms like "the Holstein," "the dairy cow," or "the diseased animal" instead of using any pronouns at all, but sometimes the gender is known but disregarded. For example, a feature story on the largest dairy farm in the world, found in Saudi Arabia, either uses the word "cows" or "it," but never a single female pronoun (Smith, 12/31/02). Consider the following industry-oriented quote, "no cow is kept once *its* output falls below eight liters a day, though most cows birth ten times before they are worn out," (p. A4). As Dunayer (2001) points out, calling these females "it" erroneously puts them in the category of an inanimate object.

In addition to pronouns, adjectives can also be used to objectify. In news, adjectives tend to describe animal bodies not animal personalities. Very few adjectives describe the animals when they are alive,[5] while many describe how they taste after death. In fact, some descriptions (especially in the dining section) are so romanticized that it sounds like they could be describing fine wine instead of flesh: *buttery, soft pink, smooth, succulent, delicate, sweet, tender,* etc. While reporters may not be able to definitely state personality traits of nonhumans, they can make educated guesses based on obvious behaviors (indicating shyness, joy, fear, aggression, curiosity, affection, etc.) as well as even consulting ethologists or other animal experts.

While the articles may feature the faces of some of these animals while alive and discuss their meat generically after death, that particular animal in the photo is never linked directly to any corresponding pictures of meat. There is a certain irony in the way the news stories skip right from the pleasant farm scene to the pleasant meal, while overlooking the unpleasant business of the individual slaughtering process. For example, news stories never tell the

audience whether the specific lamb pictured on the front cover was used to make the "loin of lamb with fennel and artichoke hearts" pictured in the back (Apple, 4/19/00, p. F1 & F6). This allows the audience to avoid making connections to who specifically is being served as food.

A brief commentary in *Time,* entitled "Babe Lives! World Sighs" (7/2/01) indicates people may have an aversion to identifying with individual animals prior to slaughter. It describes how fans were initially distraught by a false rumor that Babe, the pig actor from the movie, was slated for slaughter due to the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak. Many people seem to want to protect Babe from harm because they know and like him. But the public has not had much of a chance to identify with any of the millions of other animals killed to stem the disease because the news is not introducing any of them to the audience. The animal victims remain largely a nameless and faceless mass in the news.

RQ2: Challenging the Status Quo

The second research question sought to identify how and to what extent news media representations challenge the status quo and reveal openings for change. There are examples of news stories that, in whole or part, do represent farmed animals in ways that showcase their inherent value over their instrumental value (approximately 10% of the sample). This is done through construction of news angles recognizing that some people believe farmed animals: 1. deserve to be rescued from cruel treatment (seven stories); 2. have emotions and preferences which farming should respect (six stories); 3. should not be killed for human food (two stories); and 4. make good companions (one story).

By showcasing people who are willing to take risks and stand up and rescue animals from factory farms, news stories show audiences not only that some people think animals deserve

rescue but also that their conditions are indeed considered cruel and unacceptable. In addition to three brief stories about animal rights campaigns against the mistreatment of birds, there are also three in-depth stories showing people taking larger risks, both legal and illegal, to help rescue animals from cruel conditions. In all three of these latter articles, animal advocates are quoted drawing analogies between the mistreatment of nonhumans and the mistreatment of humans. The activists attempt to link their marginalized movement with the more established civil rights movement by using references like *anti-oppression, slaves, freedom fighters,* and *underground railroad.* In only one article did the reporter counter the activists' liberation rhetoric by quoting industry and government sources labeling animal activists as "animal rights extremists" (Brown, 9/2403, p. D4) and "domestic terrorists" (p. D1).

In one of these articles about an illegal hen rescue by Compassion Over Killing (COK), the frame is sympathetic to the animal cruelty angle and features a photo of a female activist in a compassionate light, cradling the rescued hens, and another photo of an unhealthy hen with the caption "a chicken that lost its feathers, activists say, after being starved" (Becker, 12/4/02, p. A20). The reporter gives the activists' perspective respectful coverage and directly quotes them explaining why the egg-laying hens need rescuing and how the birds' situation could be improved through humane legislation. Extraordinarily, an egg industry spokesperson describes animal welfare as a "serious issue" and admits improvements need to be made. Additionally, the reporter vividly describes COK footage by saying activists filmed, "rows of hens crammed 10 to a cage the size of a file-drawer cabinet. They get close-ups of swollen eyes, infected skin and shattered wings entangled in cage wire" (p. A20). He lets the activists have the last word with a touching description of them letting the chickens "walk on the earth for the first time" (p. A20).

Another of these *New York Times* articles details Lakota Sioux Indians in South Dakota who are risking their jobs by complaining to and suing the managers of a hog factory farm built on their reservation because they claim the farm mistreats animals, people, and the land (Peterson, 11/15/03). The article seems sympathetic to the tribe members' plight, features them in photos, and quotes them heavily. For example, here the article describes disturbing video footage taken by the Sioux tribe members documenting the poor conditions in which the pigs are kept:

> …showing animals so tightly packed in their pens that strong hogs begin to cannibalize the weak, eating off tails and ears. Other pigs are shown with soccer-ball size abscesses hanging from their bellies. During some weeks, hundreds of pigs die, some employees say, from mistreatment and disease (Peterson, 11/15/03, p. A8).

This is one of the few examples in the sample that includes a detailed description of mistreatment on factory farms.

There are also four stories in 2003 that detail a shift in consciousness for food suppliers towards a concern for improved animal welfare – three by David Barboza in the *New York Times* (6/25, 6/29, & 9/28) and one by Wyatt Andrews for CBS (11/05). Much of this coverage was prompted by McDonald's and other fast food chains starting to require some major humane reforms from their meat and egg suppliers, apparently a result of animal rights movement pressure over the years. There seems to be an underlying agreement in the stories that factory farming is inhumane because the reporters are not tempering it with words like "supposed" or "so called" cruelty, as they often do when animal rights activism is prompting the story. And

while the stories might occasionally make light of some of the specifics of the welfare research, the overall message is that animals do indeed have preferences in the way they are treated, and industry is earnestly trying to improve their treatment and meet the consumer demand for more humanely-raised farmed animals. However, in the *New York Times* articles on welfare research by agribusiness, they missed an educational opportunity by failing to ever show a photo of a farmed animal enduring standard, crowded farming conditions, instead showing only cartoon illustrations or photos within the laboratory. Some of the television coverage actually showed the inhumane living conditions on the farm, making broadcast news more accurate and representative than print from a visual standpoint.

The *New York Times* also published several stories that are good examples of how news can introduce the welfare component in unlikely places, such as business stories. For example, a technology article entitled "The Flexible Farmer Lets the Robot do the Milking" (Austen, 1/23/03, p. G8) includes many quotes from a dairy farmer who is pleased that a new milking machine makes life more pleasant for both him and his cows, admitting the cows have emotions and preferences to which he is sensitive. Another business story, entitled "A Marketing Cry: Do not Fence them in" (Markels, 9/1/02, p. C6), profiles a cage-free egg farm in Colorado and gives fair coverage to the idea of humane farming for ethical reasons in addition to business reasons. In it, the farmer and his daughter explain how the birds appreciate their freedom, and she is quite outspoken about her disdain for what she calls "concentration camp growing conditions on factory egg farms" (p. C6). Including quotes such as these helps sensitize readers to the emotional needs and preferences of farmed animals.

Regarding ethical vegetarianism, a large *Time* cover story on vegetarianism devotes very little attention to animal ethics as a motivation for vegetarianism, instead emphasizing health

benefits (Corliss, 7/15/02). The other vegetarian story, a *New York Times* article, includes the only admission that a portion of the public was emotionally disturbed by gory news coverage of the mass slaughter of animals due to foot-and-mouth disease (Hodge, 4/1/01). The article explains that increased vegetarianism in Britain is not only a response to grotesque news imagery but that perhaps people are making deeper connections between flesh sold in the supermarket and the "fluffy little lamb being held by a crying farmer on TV" (p. A4). This is another indication that the idea of identifying with animals and putting a face onto meat does make it less appetizing to the public.

Finally, there is only one mention of farmed animals as companions, and that is a touching feature story profiling a struggling farm sanctuary (Fischler, 2/9/03). The sanctuary owner is a compassionate person who describes her animals as "family members" (p. 4), yet the news frame is limited to profiling the human owner's dedication and overlooks an opportunity to let the audience get to know any of her nonhuman animal companions as individuals.

Discussion

> Discourse…is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized. - Foucault, *The Order of Discourse* (1990b, p. 1155)

By constructing farmed animals primarily as bodies not beings, the news in this sample largely disregards animal sentience and creates imbalanced coverage that advocates for the status quo of industry use over animal protection. Farmed animals typically appear to be most newsworthy when they become problematic to humans and threaten our economic or physical health, not for their own sake. If diseases, or anything else related to raising animals, cause

animals to suffer, the news does not often make this suffering an issue. While no story explicitly states "the interests of farmed animals do not matter," on the whole, the news implicitly states this is a rule of discourse by failing to address the animals' feelings, perspectives, or emotions in most stories. According to Singer's (1990) definition of speciesism, the news discourse in this sample ultimately reinforces the current speciesist worldview that human interests, however trivial, largely outweigh even the most critical interests of farmed animals. Like Kellert (1982) concluded of twentieth century journalism, my findings at the cusp of the twenty-first century suggest news frames still prioritize an animal's instrumental value over his/her inherent value.

Findings reveal the discursive practices of news commodify animals, favor human interests, and disregard animal emotions and individuality; in a Foucauldian sense, this likely functions in line with other social institutions to keep society feeling complacent with the current "regime of truth" by avoiding feelings of guilt, attachment, identity, or injustice regarding humans' common practice of farming other animals for food. Overall, news discourse keeps the public comfortably detached from the unpleasant reality of modern farming methods and its negative effects on the animals themselves. This lopsided coverage largely aligns news discourse with an agribusiness perspective without fairly including the perspective of the animal protection movement, bolstering the "othering" linguistic concerns of Stibbes (2001), Glenn (2004) and Dunayer (2001) regarding the prevalence of industry rhetoric over less speciesist terminology. While it is fair that a speciesist perspective of industry and mainstream America would be included in some stories on farmed animals, by largely avoiding the moral debate over farmed animal protection and use, the national news in this sample is not adequately serving its social responsibility function to be a diverse public forum representing the interests of all groups, such as advocates for farmed animal protection. Additionally, from an agenda-setting perspective, the

news rarely sets the agenda for legal humane farming reform or consumer reforms such as eating vegetarian.

From the standpoint of moral progress, the news poses no threat to the anthropocentric worldview that enables animal exploitation. In contrast to animal rights ethicist standards (Midgley, 1984; Regan, 2003; Singer, 1990) the news does not critically examine the legitimacy of the current worldview which places humans at the pinnacle of moral concern and constructs farmed animals as naturally existing only for humans' use as a necessary food resource. In Foucauldian terms, discourse constrains the debate within anthropocentrism. Even among welfare-promoting articles, few take the more fundamental step of addressing the deeper philosophical issue of whether it is ethical to raise and eat sentient beings in the first place. It seems the closer the animal activist sources stick to a mainstream welfare message (instead of animal rights or veganism), the more supportive the news coverage. For example, news stories rarely explore the animal *rights* viewpoint that agriculture unfairly enslaves or exploits animals, but they will occasionally explore the *welfare* viewpoint addressing needs for humane farming reform. However, despite the philosophical limitations, these welfare articles do represent some of the most important challenges to the status quo in this news sample. A few of them meet Fraser's (2001b) criteria for a less polarized and more moderate debate in the news over modern agricultural ethics issues. Most notably, these welfare stories expose the news audience to the unpleasant reality animals endure behind closed doors on factory farms – an education the public is less likely to learn if not for the news – and do threaten to kick animal farming off its "moral pedestal" (Fraser, 2001b) if covered more frequently and critically.

Despite the growing realization that modern farming is ethically and environmentally problematic, there remains a dearth of media research on farmed animals, ethical vegetarianism,

or related activism, so the field is ripe for more exploration. The main limitations of this research concern the sample. Selecting the specific stories was challenging due to the fact that "farmed animals" is such a broad topic and is problematic to define. The choice to eliminate some of the more repetitious disease articles in the *New York Times* kept this from being a true census, however, it remains quite an extensive overview of news coverage of farmed animal representation in major national news outlets over four years, and is the first of its kind. Future studies could analyze one news or entertainment medium's coverage of farmed animals more in-depth or compare and contrast media based on geographic/cultural locations and urban vs. rural populations.

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Footnotes

[1] Source: phone conversations with both groups in spring of 2005.

[2] Specifically, the passage of the Humane Slaughter Act in the '50s, the Animal Welfare Act in the '60s, and the Marine Mammal Protection Act in the '70s (Jones, 1996).

[3] With mad cow and foot-and-mouth disease articles in the NYT, there were a lot of stories that came out consecutively, and I excluded only those that basically repeated the same information as other stories I had included on the outbreak. Additionally, some excluded stories were short and did not provide any new language or information to analyze. While these exclusions regrettably did keep the sample from being a census, I made these cuts in order to keep the sample size manageable for an in-depth qualitative study. If I felt their exclusion would have significantly affected the findings, I would have included them despite sample size.

[4] It may often be the case that owners of animal laboratories or factory farms do not allow cameras inside to document the conditions. If so, reporters should mention it within the article so questions can be raised about why visual access is denied to the public.

[5] An exception to the rule was a NYT story explaining interesting facts about how the Patagonian Toothfish (served as "sea bass") can survive in extremely cold water and live for up to fifty years (Revkin, 5/21/02, p. F4).