

The Beef Between Men and Animals: Meat-Eating and Masculinity in the U.S.: A Case Study of Objectifying Fast-Food Advertising in the Anglosphere

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Introduction

For thousands of years, eating animals has been an integral part of the human diet. However, our food is much more than nourishment to us: it is also culture (Willard 105). Meat especially conveys an array of symbolic values that with time arguably have become much more important reasons for eating meat in the U.S. than sustenance. Moreover, many people enjoy the taste of meat and therefore continue to consume it even if they can live without it. Ideas about a connection between meat eating and masculinity are widespread in North American society and are heavily used in fast-food advertising in the Anglosphere (e.g. Rogers 281). Since “[a]dvertising... both reflects and creates social norms” (Schroeder 27), it becomes problematic when advertisements showcase harmful ones. Some commercials are overtly telling their audience that meat eating is masculine, like the repeatedly analyzed Burger King commercial “Manthem” from 2006, while others are using the notion that meat eating is masculine more subtly to sell their food. When “[t]he media perpetuates this notion of the meat and masculinity connection with its ‘real men eat meat’ advertisements” (Allcorn and Ogletree 461), it upholds society’s expectations of men’s meat consumption which in turn is harming animals. One of the ways in which fast-food companies are also advertising their products through this perpetuation is by objectifying animals and women. Based on an investigation of the underpinning symbolic values of meat and the gendering of meat eating as masculine and an analysis of advertisements by Arby’s, Carl’s Jr., and Burger King, I argue that the three fast-food advertisements contribute to the ongoing normalization of the objectification of animals and women through their perpetuation of the problematic notion that eating animals is both natural and masculine. Due to the intricate ways in

which socially constructed ideas about meat and gender are intertwined to justify the consumption of animals, these advertisements additionally become examples of how symbolic values can affect the lives of non-human animals and humans. Although race and ethnicity are intertwined with ideas of animals (Merskin, “Introduction” 13-17) and masculinity (Kimmel 15) and are an important aspect of advertising in general, further discussion of this is outside the scope of this article.

I begin with a short review of why the exploitation of animals and especially meat eating is viewed as natural and is justified to understand the premise of the human-animal relationship and the symbolic value of meat. Then follows an account of masculinity and hegemony in the U.S, why meat and the consumption of it is gendered masculine, and how men perform masculinity by eating meat. This information is used to illuminate the way in which meat and masculinity have become intertwined as well as how the connection is problematic. Subsequently, an examination of the historical development of meat advertising and how it differs from the way meat is advertised to men in contemporary U.S. society. Next, an analysis of the three specific fast-food commercials and how they contribute to the normalization of the objectification of women and animals. Finally, I provide an assessment of how the advertisements support the linked-oppression thesis and consequently how the normalization of the objectification of women and animals can become a problem for real, living women and animals.

Naturalness and justification

Our “interactions with animals for much of our evolutionary history would have involved one very specific goal: to kill or be killed” (Kasperbauer 22), and humans have done exactly that; eradicating many species on their way to the top of the food chain. Many scholars agree that the human-animal relationship is exploitative (e.g. Adams; Allcorn and Ogletree; Fiddes; Luke; Willard). Nevertheless, there is a recurring argument of the naturalness of this exploitation, perhaps most salient of all that eating meat is natural, which is especially prevalent in advertisements (Nibert 85). The romanticized idea about our hunter-gatherer ancestors is something that is widely spread and used as a justification for meat eating in Western culture. Perhaps because our culture views the lifestyle of our ancestors as primitive and more connected to nature, their way of life is associated with naturalness, which is often deemed good. Moreover, hunter-gatherers hunted for sustenance, and while meat consumption might have been necessary for them to survive it is rarely the case in present-day U.S.A. Even if “the oldest human-animal relationship is that of predator and prey” (Kasperbauer 22), the “natural” argument is flawed since the way in which animals are raised and the quantities in which they are eaten today is

nothing like it was in hunter-gatherer societies. Indeed, “[n]inety-nine percent of all land animals eaten or used to produce milk and eggs in the United States are factory farmed”, which entails that they “are genetically engineered, restricted in mobility, and fed unnatural diets” (Foer 34). In sum, almost all animals consumed in the U.S. can be considered unnatural. However, as the idea of meat eating as natural is socially constructed, the argument does not need to be logical. In relation to this, it is also relevant to question if everything that is “natural” is good, beneficial or even ethical.

The exploitation of animals is only seen as natural due to the idea that humans are superior beings. This idea of superiority has changed throughout history, and there are many ways in which humans have justified and still justify their exploitation of animals (Luke 4). After the domestication of animals, “[r]eligion was often used to justify this newfound domination over nature” (Freeman and Merskin 279). During the beginning of the early modern period, the idea of the Great Chain of Being was used to hierarchically divide humans and animals (Schiebinger 144; See also Merskin, “Introduction” 8). Today humans justify the exploitation of animals primarily through dehumanization which “include[s] denial of secondary emotions (uniquely human), such as shame or pride, and minimizing cognitive capacity of the mind” (Allcorn and Ogletree 460). When the grounds for dehumanizing animals due to the lack of something considered exclusively human have been proven wrong by the discovery of such an “exclusive trait” in an animal, humans change the criteria to uphold the status quo. However, this is problematic since “[w]e do not exploit animals because we are superior to them, we claim superiority in order to excuse the exploitation” (Luke 8; see also Fiddes 87). Thus, by dehumanizing animals, claiming superiority over them, and thereby excusing the exploitation of them, humans justify eating animals (Allcorn and Ogletree 460).

The reasons for exploiting animals used to be rooted in necessity and additionally “[m]eat, and the possession of live animals, have historically signified wealth and strength” (Fiddes 175). It is arguably symbolic value that has escalated the consumption and use of animal products. Since the upper class had access to meat, people would want meat not only due to dietary reasons but also due to the symbolic value meat conveyed through its connection to the elite (Ruby and Heine 448). Today in the U.S., as well as many other places, meat is at the center of the meal (Rothgerber 364). The naturalness of meat consumption is also partially based on historical information about the importance and prevalence of meat in the human diet. However, “what information exists relates mainly to ruling élites” in Great Britain (Fiddes 20). Most of the population did not have the same access to meat, and “meat was in generally short supply” (Fiddes 22), but this is not necessarily the perception most people have today. “Technical innovations facilitated the increase in average meat consumption which is

evident from the eighteenth century onwards” (Fiddes 22); hence, this can be considered the reason why more people are now able to eat large amounts of meat. Still, this cannot necessarily be considered natural, because “until as recently as the last few centuries animal products were for most people probably less pre-eminent than they are today” (Fiddes 21). This might explain why some people “*are* overconsuming meat and fat to the detriment of their health” (Hamilton 121). In sum, meat is much more than just food: consuming meat has symbolic value, eating animals is seen as natural, and humans justify the exploitation and consumption of animals by claiming superiority. These aspects of meat all underpin the objectification of animals in fast-food advertising.

Masculinity and the gendering of meat

Meat is also intertwined with the idea of gender. Gender is everywhere, and it is an aspect that people are evaluated upon constantly. Many people today are aware of the idea that someone’s sex is biologically determined and refers to reproductive organs, while their gender is socially constructed. However, “men” and “women” are still met with different expectations regarding their behavior based on their sex (Nguyen-Phuong-Mai 88). In Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, the ideas that gender is a social construct and a performative act are discussed (11, 34). This way of perceiving gender has become widespread, and because “[t]he gender positions that society constructs for men may not correspond exactly with what men actually are, or desire to be, or what they actually do” (Connell 44), Butler’s theory is beneficial when examining masculinity and the way in which it is “performed”. To understand the masculinity portrayed in advertising, I will now examine the development of masculinity in the U.S. as well as the term hegemonic masculinity.

Manhood and what defines a man in the U.S. are not static. These ideas have changed throughout history and will likely change again. Although, as mentioned, this is a socially constructed idea, it has real consequences for people identifying as men due to societal expectations. The expectations of men also have consequences for everyone else, including non-human animals, because what is expected of men usually involves women or non-human animals. During the first half of the nineteenth century “[b]eing a man meant being in charge of one’s own life, liberty, and property. Being a man also meant not being a boy. A man was independent, self-controlled, responsible; a boy was dependent, irresponsible, and lacked control” (Kimmel 14). The identity as a real man was very exclusive in regard to race and ethnicity (Kimmel 15) which has meant that white, wealthy males subordinated the rest through othering. Sociologist Michael Kimmel notes that The Depression had important consequences for the idea of manhood in the United States. Instead of deriving manhood

from one's property or the marketplace, "[m]asculinity could be observed in specific traits and attitudes, specific behaviors and perspectives. If men expressed these attitudes, traits, and behaviors, they could be certain that they were 'real' men, regardless of their performance in the workplace" (Kimmel 176). This shift consequently meant that behaviors such as consuming meat could be perceived as masculine.

When talking broadly about masculinity in the U.S. from a historical perspective, the conclusions become very generalized because what is usually considered is hegemonic masculinity. According to media studies scholar Debra Merskin, "[h]egemony is a method of social control that relies on the influence of thought, rather than the threat of physical force, to gain compliance from citizenry" (Merskin, "Animal Media Studies" 36), which means other ideas exist but people risk being rejected if they stray from the hegemonic ones (36-37). "The result is the sense of voluntary consent and participation in the system that is gained through ideas taught... by private domain social institutions such as education, religion, and mass media" (Merskin, "Animal Media Studies" 36); hence, advertising is one place where people are taught dominant ideas about masculinity and animals, perhaps even without questioning them because they are hegemonic.

There are several masculinities varying amongst cultures as well as social situations. However, the one most interesting with regard to the stereotypical depictions of masculinity in advertising is hegemonic masculinity. According to sociologist R. W. Connell, hegemonic masculinity is

[t]he form of masculinity which is culturally dominant in a given setting... 'Hegemonic' signifies a position of cultural authority and leadership, not total dominance; other forms of masculinity persist alongside. The hegemonic form need not be the most common form of masculinity... Hegemonic masculinity is, however, highly visible. It is likely to be what casual commentators have noticed when they speak of 'the male role.' (Connell 48)

Moreover, it is important to note that "[h]egemonic masculinity in western culture tends to be defined by what it is not, constructed in opposition to a range of 'others', both human... [and] non-human" (Parry 386). With this in mind, the most prevalent masculinity in U.S. advertising is a hegemonic one that simultaneously serves as an ideal (Donaldson 645). The male/female dichotomy has been a key factor in the definition of masculinity historically; most likely because of its importance to the structured oppression and subordination of women, i.e. patriarchy. Moreover, hegemonic masculinity is not only defined in opposition to women: other men and masculinities are likewise othered. By

othering women, men have been able to justify the oppression of them, much like the way in which humans have dehumanized animals in order to justify eating them.

“[V]alues such as courage, inner direction, certain forms of aggression, autonomy, mastery, technological skill, group solidarity, adventure and considerable amounts of toughness in mind and body” are connected to hegemonic masculinity in the U.S. (Donaldson 644) and are generally seen in U.S. advertising as well. Although many fast-food advertisements and commercials only depict women, traces of hegemonic masculinity are still embedded within them. The ideal that hegemonic masculinity sustains is the same one that perpetuates the notion that consuming meat is masculine. When conforming to hegemonic masculinity, “[d]oing masculinity’ means eating like a man—consuming manly foods at manly meals in a manly way” (Sobal 139). As most scholars on the subject note, meat is gendered masculine and arguably “[t]he more meat an individual eats, the more masculine the individual will be perceived by others” (Sumpter 104). Since “[m]asculinities do not exist prior to social behavior, either as bodily states or fixed personalities” but “come into existence as people act” (Connell 49), the socially constructed connection between masculinity and meat eating is perpetuated by men through the continuous consumption of meat.

Gendering meat consumption as masculine is not a new phenomenon. Especially “[i]n the U.S. and many other Western post-industrial societies” meat is considered masculine (Sobal 137). “Hunting was the first technique individuals used when gathering meat for consumption” and is typically associated with men because they historically “have dominated the hunting arena” (Sumpter 106). This might be because “men created rituals around hunting, most of which excluded women, to gain status for themselves, as previously women had been the more revered sex for their roles as food-gatherers and procreators” (Freeman and Merskin 278). Although this is just a theory, men’s domination of women and animals is tightly connected to hunting as “meat is a symbol of male dominance” (Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat* 33) no matter how and why men ended up with the privileges of being the hunters. The exclusion of women from hunting “has allowed the product of the hunt – the meat – to be associated with masculinity” (Sumpter 106). Moreover, in order to procure meat through hunting men had to be strong. Therefore, “[m]eat symbolizes the strength and virility of the conquering of beasts by men” (Sobal 138).

Furthermore, meat consumption is also perceived as a way of gaining strength. The impression is that through the act of “eating the muscle of strong animals, we will become strong” (Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat* 33). Animal rights advocate Carol Adams notes that the idea that “men need to be strong, thus men need meat” (Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat* 33) is a myth of meat eating. This

idea is part of the problem because it upholds expectations of men and combines them with meat consumption, and as a consequence, men are expected to eat meat in order to be masculine. If men do not eat meat, like vegetarian men do not, they are perceived as less masculine (Ruby and Heine 450; Nath 266), which might cause some men to eat meat, in spite of a wish not to, in order to preserve a certain perception of their masculinity.

The ideas we have about meat and the naturalness of meat eating are, just like those about gender and masculinity, social and cultural constructs. Rather than rooted entirely in a dietary want for meat, “[m]eat eating is linked to a motivation to conform to gender expectations, that is, a male desire to appear masculine and to feel like a real man” (Rothgerber 372). Hence, consuming meat is a way in which men can perform masculinity since “an individual’s consumption directly affects how they are perceived” (Calvert 18). The fact that gender is a social construct also means that the idea that “real men eat meat” is kept alive through socialization. Sociologist Jeffrey Sobal notes that “Western men are socialized into adopting beliefs and behaviors about masculinity by the active and passive efforts of other men and women... with fathers acting as examples of meat-eating men and mothers reinforcing those gendered values” (Sobal 138). Thus, when meat eating is as deeply rooted in the idea of masculinity as it is, it might become a way of compensating for behaviors perceived as less masculine: “[n]utritionist Jean Mayer suggested that ‘the more men sit at their desks all day, the more they want to be reassured about their maleness in eating those large slabs of bleeding meat which are the last symbol of machismo’” (qtd. in Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat* 34).

Another example of performing masculinity is arguably that of barbequing because “cooking meat outdoors is one of the few forays men have made into the mundane, feminized realm of day-to-day food preparation” (Parry 388). By grilling meat at a barbeque, men are able to evoke ideas of nature and the masculinized activity of hunting. Moreover, roasted meat is associated more with men than meat cooked in other ways because “roasted meat remains close to a state of rawness, highlighting the connection between animal slaughter and meat consumption, and rendering more ‘natural’ the bond between meat-eating and masculine domination over nature” (Parry 388). Hence, the naturalness of meat and masculinity are connected. Therefore, grilling meat and then consuming it can be a way of performing masculinity. Even though not all men perform masculinity in the same way, for some Western men, meat eating is a way of performing hegemonic masculinity.

In recent history, companies have utilized ideas about meat consumption and masculinity as well as the fact that men perform masculinity by consuming meat in order to sell their products. “When national food advertising exploded in the early 1900s, advertisers believed that women were the major

consumers of household goods” (Parkin 12), so advertisements were targeted at women and specifically aimed at their insecurities regarding their cooking. “Advertisers encouraged women to make men’s satisfaction their top priority” (Parkin 144), they also tried to convince women that “[o]ne of the surest ways to disappoint a man...was by cooking foods that were not manly enough” (Parkin 144), thus constructing a need for meat and making it a necessity when cooking meals for their husbands. This way of advertising was only successful because of the patriarchal society of the United States in the early 1900s, which positioned women as subordinate to men.

Later on, fast-food companies started selling meat and the idea of masculinity directly to men in their advertisements and commercials, which is still the case today. Even though women in general also eat meat as well as fast-food, some fast-food companies seem to use objectification of women and animals in their advertisements in order to sell their products. This could be due to the fact that “the frequency of fast-food intake [is] found to be higher in men than in women” (Dave et al. 1169). Hence, the fast-food companies in question might be trying to catch the attention of the consumers that are most likely to buy their products: men. Additionally, these companies might take advantage of how women are socialized to and expect to be the objects of male desire (Adams, *The Pornography of Meat* 28) to rationalize their choice of portrayal.

Analysis of three fast-food advertisements

One of the companies that have released advertisements relying on the objectification of women and animals is the American fast-food company Arby’s. In 2009 Arby’s gained attention by publishing an advertisement for their new Roastburger in the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue of the year (Rovell). The advertisement shows two burgers being held by crossed hands. The background is beige with a fading effect emulating the skin color of the hands and suggesting that there is a body although it is not explicitly shown. Underneath the burgers and hands is a red panel with text. In white font it reads: “We’re about to reveal something you’ll really drool over.” Underneath in smaller font is written: “What a tease, Arby’s introduces exciting new menu items, including the Roastburger. It’s the burger done better. Unfortunately, you’ll have to wait until March for the full mouthwatering experience”. Next to the panel with text is the Arby’s logo with their catchphrase at the time: “I’m thinking Arby’s”. Since the advertisement was published in the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue, which is filled with pictures of scantily clad women, the sexualization of the burgers does seem to mimic this specific backdrop. The burgers symbolize a woman’s breasts, and the text in the panel extends this image further. Drooling is not only associated with delicious food but also implies the lust of men scrutinizing

a woman. Using the word “mouthwatering” is only reinforcing this ambiguous meaning. Additionally, “what a tease” refers to the image of the burgers being held by a pair of hands, obscuring the view of a lustful spectator. Thus, being a tease or a “teaser” is sexually charged. It can refer to “[a] woman who arouses but evades amorous advances” as well as suggest “[a] strip-tease act” (“teaser, n.1.”), which is not straying far from the advertisement’s suggestive image.

Interestingly, there is not a woman present in the image. The only depiction of a human is a pair of hands with some of the lower arms visible, and this in itself does not suggest that it is a woman. What makes the spectator think of a woman is the burgers, but no actual breasts are shown. So, the two things that suggest there is a woman in the picture are actually objects because the burgers, or rather the meat inside the burgers, used to be subjects, but as Carol Adams has noted, “[w]hen a burger is eaten no one looks harmed” (Adams, *The Pornography of Meat* 22). According to Adams, “animals become absent referents” when butchered (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 63) since they are transformed from subject to object. They become “a mass term” (Adams, *The Pornography of Meat* 22) because meat is meat no matter whom it is made of or how much there is. If there is meat there is no live animal, and “[w]ithout animals there would be no meat eating, yet they are absent from the act of eating meat because they have been transformed into food” (Adams, “The Rape of Animals” 51). Adams uses the term “absent referent” to illuminate that “[b]ehind every meat meal is an absence, the death of the animal whose place the meat takes. With the word ‘meat’ the truth about this death is absent” (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 63). Thus, cows are the absent referents in this advertisement. Animals are typically absent referents in fast-food advertisements and commercials in order to sustain the objectification of animals which enables the consumption of them.

Additionally, in this advertisement the burgers, i.e. the absent animals, have taken the place of the woman consequently making her an absent referent as well. In this Arby’s advertisement, both woman and animal are objectified and reduced to consumable products. Adams’ linkage between the objectification of women in pornography and butchered animals is interesting in regard to the Arby’s advertisement because the image alludes to pornography:

With pornography, fragmented body parts become sexualized so that someone can get pleasure from something. Yet that *something* - the woman used in pornography - was at one point someone, a very specific someone. Two mass terms are merged as one - individual animals into hamburger, an individual woman into an object 'woman'. (Adams, *The Pornography of Meat* 25)

While the only human body parts visible in the image is a pair of hands, the burgers as a stand-in for a woman's breasts arguably qualify as fragmented body parts. They are also sexualized in order to indicate potential pleasure for the spectator. Likewise, the woman is not an individual but an object, in this case, used to sell a product. Whether the notion that sex sells is true or not, sex is widely used as a metaphor in fast-food advertising (Messaris 246). Although the Arby's advertisement is selling burgers and not sex in the literal sense, it does "suggest that the experience of eating the product is somehow equivalent to sex" (Messaris 248). It is clear that the advertisement is targeted at heterosexual men, especially the ones who are the buyers of the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue.

So, there are several traces of hegemonic masculinity in the advertisement as well. "A fundamental element of hegemonic masculinity... is that women exist as potential sexual objects for men" (Donaldson 645), another element is the idea of the sexually aggressive man. Hence, not only are men expected to be initiators, but women are seen as sexual objects to be pursued or simply consumed visually for the pleasure of the observer, and men are expected to engage in this objectification. Arguably, the idea of a male gaze in advertising is not too far off in this case, and the "woman" is also the object of a "pornographic gaze" (Merskin, "Where Are the Clothes?" 199) "because it dehumanizes and objectifies" (215). The same gaze can be said to be applied to the animal object, the burger, because it is likewise dehumanized, objectified, and sexualized through its placement as breasts, creating a link between animals and women in the advertisement. The male gaze is evidently tied to hegemonic masculinity through its objectification and subordination of women. The way in which masculinity is present in the advertisement boils down to two main ideas of hegemonic masculinity, namely that eating meat is masculine and that looking at naked women is masculine. Since "gender stereotypes in advertising can influence gender-role stereotypes in society, further perpetuating gender roles and gender inequality" (Matthes et al. 325), the Arby's advertisement is contributing to the normalization of the objectification of women and animals by portraying these ideas of hegemonic masculinity.

Another company that has released several advertisements that objectify animals and women is Carl's Jr. The American company is known for its sexual advertising and has released several celebrity-endorsed commercials in which a provocatively dressed female celebrity is eating a burger. One of these commercials is featuring model and actress Charlotte McKinney and aired during the 2015 Super Bowl. In the commercial, McKinney is seen walking through a farmers' market where she encounters several male gazes on her way. The setting of the farmers' market is underlining the natural

connotations that Carl's Jr. wishes to evoke with the All-Natural Burger which the commercial is advertising. McKinney passes four men that are all looking at either her or the burger, which is hard to tell because the commercial plays on the duality of objectification of women and animals by insinuating that McKinney is naked while also hiding the burger from sight until the end of the commercial.

The first man is hosing vegetables when she catches his attention ("Charlotte McKinney – Carls Jr," 00:00:04 - 00:00:09). He turns around while his eyes follow her down the street, still with the hose in his hand, which makes him spray water in her direction. This implies ejaculation and supports her role as a sexual object. Then McKinney is walking away, with the camera facing her back ("Charlotte McKinney – Carls Jr," 00:00:09 - 00:00:13). In front of her bottom is a tomato that looks like a pair of buttocks. A hand squeezes the tomato and McKinney turns around and looks at the camera. However, she does not look dissatisfied. Rather, this action might indicate that she condones the attention and the objectification that the male gaze of the camera is causing. Additionally, she is conforming to the expectation there is for her to enjoy being looked at. She then walks past another man shaving ice, another activity that involves a white substance shooting away from the man. When he sees McKinney, he starts shaving the ice in a more aggressive manner causing the ice to fly around him ("Charlotte McKinney – Carls Jr," 00:00:14 - 00:00:20). Then there is a frontal shot of McKinney walking towards the camera. When the camera zooms out, a kitchen scale and a pair of melons have been placed in front of the camera obscuring the view of McKinney's breasts. The fruits and vegetables that are hiding McKinney's buttocks and breasts are underlining the "natural" connotations of the commercial and so is the suggested nakedness. There is a quick shot of a man that is just looking at her with a twitching hand ("Charlotte McKinney – Carls Jr," 00:00:27) reiterating the fact that she is being watched. Then comes the big reveal where McKinney is seen wearing sparse clothes with the All-Natural Burger in hand ("Charlotte McKinney – Carls Jr," 00:00:28). Another man is walking past her with his arms filled with baguettes, and he turns around to look at her or possibly the burger. The baguettes are arguably phallic symbols and the multitude of them is emphasizing the fact that so many men have objectified her on the short walk through the farmers' market.

The commercial is easy to understand for the viewer because the idea of the female sexual object is reiterated several times. Charlotte McKinney is portrayed as sexy and natural, and so is the burger. McKinney's sensual voiceover is supporting what the visual suggests during most of the commercial, namely that she is naked: "I love going all-natural. It just makes me feel better. Nothing between me and my 100 percent all-natural juicy grass-fed beef" ("Charlotte McKinney – Carls Jr," 00:00:06 -

00:00:30). Only when she gets to the word “grass-fed,” do the visuals reveal that she is *not* naked and is talking about the burger. Once McKinney is done, a male voiceover starts talking about the burger: “Introducing the all-natural burger. The first-ever in fast food. With no antibiotics. No added hormones. And no steroids. Only at Carl's Jr.” (“Charlotte McKinney – Carls Jr,” 00:00:30 - 00:00:41). The immense focus on naturalness in the commercial echoes the idea that meat eating is natural though, as previously explained, American beef production is hardly natural anymore. Even if antibiotics, hormones, or steroids are not used, cows are not reproducing naturally within factory farming (Foer 156-57), and there is no mention of animal welfare, where the cows come from, or anything else relating to the actual animal. McKinney notes in her voiceover that the burger is made from “100 percent all-natural juicy grass-fed beef,” which is making the dead animals into absent referents because they are described as beef rather than cows (Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat* 66).

Through the male gaze of the many men McKinney passes, she and the burger are both made into sexualized objects. As mentioned in regard to the Arby's advertisement, the male gaze is a way of conforming to hegemonic masculinity due to its objectification of women and animals. But masculinity is also heavily emphasized through the many men that are symbolically ejaculating at the sight of McKinney and the burger. Sex is used as a metaphor to associate the burger with having an orgasm, but in this commercial only the male orgasm is focused on, thereby, turning the men into subjects. Even though it is McKinney who actually takes a bite out of the burger, she has been objectified by the men, and most likely the viewer as well, thereby, removing her subjectivity. Instead, she is the symbol of potential male pleasure just like the burger which is promoted with a promise of pleasure through consumption. Like the Arby's advertisement, the Carl's Jr. commercial is telling the same story about how gazing at sexy, possibly naked women and eating meat are masculine behaviors. But in addition, this commercial is going out of its way to label their beef, i.e. the objectified animals, as well as McKinney, i.e. the “object ‘woman’” (Adams, *The Pornography of Meat* 25), as natural. If “[t]he naturalisation of a meat-eating diet enacts human supremacy, while links constructed between meat and masculinity extend these connotations, establishing male dominance” (Calvert 22), then the Carl's Jr. commercial is an example of how Western patriarchal values are used to promote fast-food, thereby, perpetuating existing gender roles and speciesism.

Consequently, the Carl's Jr. commercial is contributing to the normalization of the objectification of women and animals through the perpetuation of the notion that meat eating is not only a masculine behavior but also that the meat in their burger is natural, echoing that meat eating in itself is considered a natural behavior. Since the commercial aired at the Super Bowl, a lot of Americans

will have seen it. As suggested by Freeman and Merskin, “[a]dvertising doesn't just sell things, it articulates values and builds meaning, sometimes through constructing stereotypes that simplify a complex trait such as gender. If largely unchallenged, these carefully cultivated constructions of gender become normalized as a 'regime of truth' in the American popular imagination” (Freeman and Merskin 278). Thus, by equating masculinity with the act of objectifying and subordinating women and animals, the Carl's Jr. commercial is normalizing this constructed idea (278).

The last advertisement I will analyze is from yet another American fast-food company Burger King. In 2009 a franchisee in Singapore (Miller) ran a print ad featuring a Caucasian woman with her mouth open next to the BK Super Seven Incher burger heavily implying the act of oral sex. The burger is not fully visible suggesting that there is more outside the frame, possibly the rest of the man the burger symbolically is a part of. The woman is staring straight ahead with her mouth open wearing red lipstick and heavy mascara giving her a doll-like look. She is not only objectified through the suggestive image but also by the way she is posing, which results in a blank expression. Underneath the woman and the burger, the biggest font is used to write “It'll blow your mind away”. This is not only accentuating the image of a sexual act insinuated above by using the word “blow” but also using sex as a metaphor to sell the burger (Messaris 248), a technique used both in the Arby's advertisement and the Carl's Jr. commercial as well.

The burger in itself is a phallus due to its elongated shape. Moreover, the words used to describe it emphasize this to a point of redundancy. Adams has noted that “the entire product ‘hamburger’ becomes masculinized” partly due to the names of burgers that “[seem] to be recalling the way men discuss their erections” (Adams, *Burger* 62). The burger in the Burger King advertisement called the BK Super Seven Incher mimics other masculinizing burger names in fast-food, and with the burger extending outside of the frame, the size is supposed to be considered big, not only for a burger but for a penis as well. The Burger King advertisement is an example of how the burger is heavily masculinized (Adams, *Burger* 62) due to the great effort put into making the burger a phallus. The burger, containing meat, is equated with what is arguably the most important bodily display of hegemonic masculinity: the penis. Thus, the burger becomes masculine not only due to the historical and cultural gendering of meat but also as a result of the way it is advertised. The use of viewer insecurities to sell products is a well-known tactic within advertising (Schudson 6) as is evident from the way in which food was advertised to women in the early 1900s. Advertisements also target the insecurities of men to sell products. The rather explicit reference to penis size might contribute to the feeling of inadequacy some men experience, consequently prompting them to eat the burger as a way of performing masculinity

in order to compensate because the burger is both advertised as huge, i.e. a “man-sized portion” (Parkin 144), and it contains meat.

In the bottom right-hand corner of the advertisement, a description of the burger is printed, and the sex metaphor continues: “Fill your desire for something long, juicy and flame-grilled with the NEW BK SUPER SEVEN INCHER. Yearn for more after you taste the mind-blowing burger that comes with a single beef patty, topped with American cheese, crispy onions and the A.1. Thick & Hearty Steak Sauce”. The words “desire” and “mind-blowing” are charged with sexual undertones and so is the phrase “yearn for more”. Describing the burger as “long” and “juicy” alludes to the phallic image and sexual undertones of the advertisement. Interestingly, in spite of all the allusions to fellatio, the advertisement does not target women. Rather, men seem to be the intended audience. By using the word “flame-grilled,” the appeal to male customers is defended, since, as mentioned earlier in the article, grilled meat is associated more with males, and eating a flame-grilled burger is, therefore, a way of performing masculinity.

Like in the Arby’s advertisement and the Carl’s Jr. commercial, the dead animals are also absent referents in the Burger King advertisement. The advertisement is objectifying animals by referring to them as a mass term, namely beef (Adams, *The Pornography of Meat* 22). The woman is likewise objectified, and her body is reduced to a head, nothing more than a symbol of male pleasure. The advertisement once again showcases the way in which hegemonic masculinity is used to sell fast-food by relying on the notion that meat is masculine and that men are superior to women, thereby, normalizing the objectification of women and animals.

It’s important to note that according to the Fox News article, the reception in Singapore was supposedly good, but in the U.S. the reception was bad. It is interesting how there are several similar advertisements that have run in the U.S. in which women and animals are also objectified, but Americans were appalled by this one causing a spokeswoman for Burger King to distance the U.S. branch of the company from the advertisement. Arguably, the presence of this type of objectifying advertisement is due to the ongoing normalization of the objectification of women and animals that takes place in the U.S. Although advertisements portraying objectification of animals and women are sometimes received negatively in the U.S. and sometimes recalled as well, the normalization seems to be perpetuating the presence of objectification in fast-food advertisements. There will always be people who dislike these advertisements, but they rarely cause outrage since so much advertising is sexualized in the U.S. today. Where the line is drawn between the perceived normality and extremity in terms of

sexual and objectifying advertising is hard to know. Although it appears as if the Burger King advertisement was too explicit for a North American audience.

It is possible that the medium in which the specific advertisement is published is of great importance regarding the reception. In the case of the Arby's advertisement, the medium was the *Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue*, which is a magazine containing images of sexualized women. Therefore, it was unlikely that the advertisement was going to offend the viewer. The Burger King advertisement caught international attention and was seen outside of the intended context which was the Singaporean market. Perhaps the reception of the advertisement was more positive in Singapore due to the fact that Caucasians are a minority in Singapore ("Singapore Citizens"), thereby, lessening the physical resemblance and perhaps causing less viewer identification and as a result fewer negative reactions. This could also be an explanation for the negative feedback from the U.S. Nonetheless, the ideas of masculinity and the way fast-food is advertised in this particular Burger King advertisement are coherent with the tendency suggested by the other examples from the U.S. Since Singapore is a part of the Anglosphere, has English as its official language and is highly westernized, it is not surprising that this is the case. Moreover, this advertisement indicates that the normalization of the objectification of animals and women is not only present in the U.S. but also in other parts of the Anglosphere, which share many ideas about masculinity, women, and animals with the U.S. It is not unlikely that this phenomenon of normalization is also prevalent beyond the Anglosphere due to globalization as well as Americanization happening around the world.

The idea that animals and women are connected has been called "the linked oppression thesis" and it "has claimed that the oppression of women and animals is connected structurally and has a shared foundation, with each reinforcing and exacerbating the other" (Allcorn and Ogletree 457). This shared foundation is, among other things, based on the connection between women and nature, the fact that nature is feminized, as well as the male/female dichotomy. According to Merskin, "[s]ex, gender, and species are particularly interwoven experiences and designations equating the *seeming* naturalness of women's connections with nature/animals is a deliberate construction in patriarchy" (Merskin, "Introduction" 23). Hence, Western patriarchal values are arguably the foundation for the linked oppression thesis, since they are the ones causing both the links and the oppression. In 2018 Allcorn and Ogletree conducted a study showing that

benevolent and hostile sexism as well as traditional gender role attitudes were positively correlated with pro-meat-eating attitudes, denial of animal suffering, hierarchical

dichotomization, religious, health, and destiny/fate justifications for eating meat...[and] Sexist and traditional gender role attitudes were significantly negatively correlated with pro-animal attitudes. (Allcorn and Ogletree 464)

Thus, their study supports the linked oppression thesis by showing that negative and exploitative views of animals are correlated to sexism. Although their study was not done nationwide, the study indicates that “[i]ndividuals from westernized countries could be expected to have attitudes that link sexism and meat-eating” (Allcorn and Ogletree 465). Additionally, their study supports the correlation between “traditional gender role attitudes”, i.e. women as subordinate to men, and “pro-meat-eating attitudes” (464) which have been illustrated in the advertisements from Arby’s, Carl’s Jr., and Burger King as well.

When advertising has the ability to “influence gender-role stereotypes in society” (Matthes et al. 325), construct ideas about gender as well as normalize them (Freeman and Merskin 278), and attitudes towards women and animals are correlated and “reinforce and exacerbate each other,” then advertisements objectifying women and animals are not only perpetuating this type of advertising but also normalizing the objectification of women and animals. This is potentially excusing the exploitation and subordination of animals, stagnating the development towards gender equality, as well as excusing the subordination of women. Thereby, fast-food advertising that uses objectified women to sell their products containing meat, i.e. objectified animals, can have real consequences for real, living women and animals. Similar to how “[s]exual humor about women's and nonhumans' bodies teaches men how to look at women and teaches women how to be looked at and used” (Adams, *The Pornography of Meat* 28), the objectified women in advertising serve as an example of how men can treat women and animals and how women can expect to be treated. Likewise, “[r]hetoric saturated with connotations of the ‘natural’ and ‘normal’, deems meat eating socially acceptable, thus evading critique, and avoiding moral and ethical arguments contesting it” (Calvert 19). Hence, the objectification of animals in advertising is hardly noticed by many, and the exploitation and suffering of animals is excused as natural and normal. The reason why humans still eat meat in spite of the harm done to animals, the heightened health risks, and the potential for harm against women is likely due to the intricate symbolic values of meat as well as the status of meat eating as “normal”. However, it is difficult to empathize with an object, so, by normalizing the objectification of women and animals in advertisements, the media is perpetuating the current situation of animal exploitation and gender inequality in a country where the

law views farm animals as objects (Foer 50-51) and the gender gap is still prominent (Armstrong et al.).

Conclusion

In conclusion, humans justify meat eating by claiming superiority over animals and deeming it natural, similar to how men have claimed superiority over women in order to justify their subordination. Meat consumption has symbolic value and is gendered masculine through hunting, barbequing, and superstitious beliefs about the strength of meat, hence, enabling meat eating to become a way in which men can perform hegemonic masculinity. Although cooking has been gendered female historically, advertising has changed to sell ideas of hegemonic masculinity and meat directly to men in part by using images of objectified women and animals reiterating the patriarchal subordination of the two. I have argued that the three advertisements all normalize the objectification of women and animals by perpetuating the notion that meat eating is natural and masculine. As Allcorn and Ogletree's study shows, there is a connection between sexism and meat eating, which supports the linked oppression thesis. Since advertising has the ability to influence people's perception of gender and non-human animals, the advertisements are not only normalizing the objectification of animals and women in society, but they have the potential to increase objectification by normalizing it to the viewers exposed to them. Thus, these advertisements become examples of how socially constructed symbolic values, like those attributed to the consumption of animals, can have consequences for real, living non-human animals and women.

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