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# Winning Hearts and Minds: Using "Ag-Gag" Outrage and Corporate Rebranding to Achieve a Public Image Makeover for the Animal Rights Movement

Alison J. Spasser

*University of San Francisco*, [aspasser@gmail.com](mailto:aspasser@gmail.com)

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WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS: USING 'AG-GAG' OUTRAGE AND  
CORPORATE REBRANDING TO ACHIEVE A PUBLIC IMAGE MAKEOVER FOR  
THE ANIMAL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

An Analytical Paper Presented to the Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences  
University of San Francisco

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of  
MASTER OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

by

Alison Spasser

November 2013

WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS

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UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

November 2013

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this  
analytical paper has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree.

Approved:

FIRST ADVISER \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

SECOND ADVISER \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

THIRD ADVISER \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS

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## WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS

### **Executive Summary**

Despite limited legal victories—particularly in the realm of companion animal protections—the animal rights movement has failed to make substantial progress in other focal areas, including the acquisition of increased rights for food animals on factory farms. The public image of the movement has taken a hit in recent years, due in part to effective campaigning by opposing lobbies and corporate entities and in part to self-inflicted damage from failed messaging and tactics. The alignment of animal rights advocacy organizations with extremism and the public distrust of activists leaves the movement in need of a critical public image makeover. However, the emergence of factory farming anti-whistleblower legislation (“ag-gag” laws) in many states provides animal rights activists with a critical window of opportunity to reach new, diverse audiences that are freshly attuned to an animal welfare issue. Taking advantage of this window and making concerted efforts to improve the movement’s standing with the public is imperative, and can be facilitated by the use of certain techniques more commonly utilized in the corporate sphere: the unification of animal rights organizations under a set of common principles to engender public trust and attain greater political capital as well as the fostering of helpful corporate and political partnerships to reach wider audiences and pool resources.

In addition, there are several communications strategies that would facilitate a positive public image shift that the animal rights movement—particularly the subgroup concerned with farm animal welfare—has failed to use to its advantage, including tactics that have helped companion animal advocates achieve considerable success in fundraising and volunteerism. First, the use of anthropomorphic language—or attributing

human characteristics to non-humans—to describe animals, as well as the use of intense emotional appeals in advertising, are strategies that have been effectively employed by companion animal advocates for many years and should be adopted by organizations concerned with farm animal welfare. Doing so is the only effective way to combat the near-instantaneous cognitive dissonance that occurs among meat consumers to rationalize their behavior. In addition, the animal rights movement must strongly communicate the importance of human stewardship of animals created for purely human use, a difficult task considering the long-held Judeo-Christian belief of human dominion. Instilling a sense of personal responsibility is critical for the movement's continued possession of "moral capital" over its opponents.

The animal rights movement must also be willing to take steps to define the opposition and reframe animal rights issues in their favor by effectively countering the claims of the corporate and political entities that stand against it—and by shifting the negative focus away from animal rights activists and onto these big business interests. By successfully communicating the dangers of factory farming operations to animals and humans (as well as the related threat posed by ag-gag) and conducting targeted media campaigns to ensure efficiency of resources and a greater public response, animal rights activists can begin to deconstruct the staged offensives by formidable opposing forces. Finally, it is important for the movement to strongly emphasize public education about factory farming issues and alternatives—instead of campaigns meant to cause scenes or evoke unease, those that offer a balance of thoughtful, strategic messaging using the tactics above and substantive solutions and facts will help the movement improve its image and gain more traction in the political arena.

Winning Hearts and Minds: Using ‘Ag-Gag’ Outrage and Corporate Rebranding to  
Achieve a Public Image Makeover for the Animal Rights Movement

In recent decades, the animal rights movement has seen substantial progress: what was once the effort of a concerned few has grown in membership, spending power, and political capital into a multi-billion dollar force in the non-profit industry. But the considerable successes of the animal rights movement—a coalition of diverse and often conflicting causes and ideologies—have been limited in scope, and have brought with them equally significant challenges to the movement’s ultimate objective: the reduction (or elimination) of humans’ perceived dominion over their animal counterparts.

Historically, the primary obstacle that social movements must overcome is gaining ground in the court of public opinion, a process that can take time, strategic planning, and the consolidation of allies in high places. Using these tactics, the animal rights movement has been particularly effective in the field of companion animal rights; the substantial majority of the contributions received by prominent organizations like the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) have come from advocacy campaigns centered around dogs and cats, specifically.

However, public opinion has yet to be swayed on a number of other issues central to the movement’s mission, including hunting for sport, animal testing in the laboratory sciences, and perhaps most importantly, the treatment and use of animals in the food industry.

Recent polling data has shown that the public has remained ambivalent about the animal rights movement (Gallup, 2003, no pag.); despite the movement’s notable gains in



the legal sphere—for instance, every state now has laws in place criminalizing animal cruelty (Einwohner, 2002, 510)—most Americans are hesitant to embrace activists’ other core tenets. The overall public image of the animal rights movement and its activists has seen a negative shift in recent years, which can be attributed to two equally critical factors: damage that has been self-inflicted through the movement’s tactical decision-making and failed public outreach strategies (King, 2006, no pag.), and damage inflicted by opposing entities, such as the meat and medical research industries, through effective media campaigns meant to discredit animal rights activists and align them with dangerous extremism (Girgen, 2008, 163). Because the animal rights movement will likely not see any significant gains in the areas in which they have struggled to curry favor without increased public support, it is long overdue for a change not only in tactical style, but in strategic communications with its key stakeholders—in essence, a public image and public affairs makeover.

As this paper will discuss in depth, the animal rights movement, despite its fragmented membership, must look to the strategies of brand consolidation that have achieved so much success in the corporate sphere in order to unify under a few core messages and boost public trust—as well as disassociate the movement from the connotations of terrorist activity that the opposition has worked so hard to insinuate into public consciousness. In addition, the movement must look to the successful strategies implemented by its companion animal subgroup and apply them to areas of the movement that have failed to make strides, particularly the area that deals with food animals. Finally, recent factory farming anti-whistleblower legislation introduced in many American states—“ag-gag” laws—provide a critical window of opportunity for the

animal rights movement to gain the attention of wider, more diverse audiences so that their new strategies may be implemented to greater success. By utilizing the public outrage stemming from these laws, building on the effective tactics already used within the movement, and looking to the corporate sector to foster helpful partnerships and improve its public brand, the animal rights movement can not only enhance its standing with the American people, but find greater success in achieving its principal objectives.

## **Background**

### **The Animal Rights Movement**

**Contemporary History.** Though the first anti-cruelty statutes were established in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the broader animal rights movement, with its diverse objectives and demands (some more radical than others), did not gain influence until the mid-1970s (Girgen, 2008, 51). The movement, even in its earliest stages, sought to tear down the socially constructed barriers between humans and animals; more specifically, the notion that animals exist primarily to be manipulated and used to benefit humans (Girgen, 2008, 1). Since the inception of the modern animal rights movement and its earliest lobbying efforts, states have implemented notable anti-cruelty laws—particularly for companion animals—and the public has grown more accustomed to the ideas presented by prominent activists and advocacy organizations (Einwohner, 2002, 509). These gains continued throughout the 1980s and well into the 1990s—in 1995, public opinion polling showed that approximately two-thirds of Americans agreed that “An animal’s right to live free of suffering should be just as important as a person’s right to live free of suffering” (Foster, 1995, no pag.). However, the modern animal rights movement “occupies a somewhat contradictory position in American society”—though many people agree with certain

crucial principles of the movement, the public has consistently remained unwilling to shift its stances on other issues. For instance, a 2003 Gallup poll found that only 25 percent of Americans believed that animals should have the “same rights” as their human counterparts, though a total of 96 percent believed that animals should receive at least some protections (no pag.). Despite the public’s moderate concern for animal welfare, little has been done to stop the documented abuses on factory farms and the unchecked testing on animals for medical research and cosmetic products—and studies by Dunayer (2001) have shown that most people remain unaware of the true nature of the activities on factory farm operations (as cited by Frank, 2004, 5).

The animal rights movement is often divided along lines of relative extremism; subgroups are separated by the level of rights they wish animals to attain or the means by which this end can be achieved (Szybel, 2007, 1). However, the movement is also tactically divided—different portions of the movement utilize different methods to reach the public and stop cruel practices (Einwohner, 2002, 511). Strategies employed to attract attention and publicity have ranged from peaceful protests to illegal acts, including trespassing, stealing, and destruction of property—a reliance on the “spectacular,” or “sociological warfare” to get their point across (Mika, 2006, 916; Lowe, 2008, 4). PETA, in particular, has gained international attention for its creative use of symbolism in its staged protests (such as dousing fur-wearers in red paint meant to represent blood) and the shock value of its rhetoric; for example, in a recent lawsuit, PETA compared SeaWorld’s use of whales as performers to American slavery and sued them for violations of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment (CNN, 2012, no pag.). Some theorists contend that such statements, as well as some of the more outlandish protest tactics, have contributed

not only to the failure of the animal rights movement to achieve significant progress in animal testing and factory farming reforms, but to the lukewarm public opinion of the overall movement, as well (King, 2006, no pag.).

**Issues with Public Image.** As previously stated, the animal rights movement is currently struggling to gain favor with a seemingly unreceptive public regarding the issue of factory farming, and the highly visible protest tactics by small subgroups have potentially damaged the image of the movement as a whole. Furthermore, animal rights activists have been unjustly aligned not only with extremism in general, but with eco-terrorism and threats to public safety (Girgen, 2008, 64-65). The lack of public support is rooted in both flawed messaging by activists within the animal rights movement and in claims-making by opposing forces, including the meat and poultry industries, the mainstream media, and influential politicians.

***Self-inflicted problems.*** As animal rights scholar David Sztybel notes, the animal rights movement is divided between two primary subgroups: animal rights “pragmatists” who insist that people “*ultimately* act for sentient beings, rather than *ultimately* for abstract principles such as rights” and that such rights can only be achieved practically and incrementally; versus animal rights fundamentalists, who believe that “animal rights is absolute and indeed a basic moral principle...anything inconsistent with such a principle is morally wrong” (2007, 1). Where pragmatists see all legal victories for animals, no matter how small, as progress, fundamentalists often view them as failures that fall short of what is necessary. While most animal rights organizations—even PETA, which frequently makes headlines for acting in the extreme—fall closer to the pragmatist end of the spectrum in their approaches to both public affairs and internal practices, it is

the fundamentalists who usually dominate public consciousness, whether they are acting alone or within the structure of an organization (Szybel, 2011, 2). Fundamentalist groups such as the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) or Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) (an organization mobilized against Huntingdon Life Sciences, Europe's largest contract animal testing laboratory) that make up the extreme wing of the animal rights movement are often responsible for its more controversial—even illegal—activities, and "...from the public's perspective, activities linked with vandalism, sabotage, and intimidation will be viewed unfavorably" (Frank, 2004, 11). The possibility that their activities could cast a negative light on the entire animal rights movement is one that ALF has acknowledged: on their website, they answer the question "Doesn't extreme activism give the [animal rights] movement a bad name?" by asserting that such activity "broadens the spectrum of activism so that lobbying by mainstream groups is not considered extremist" (para. 65). While this point is certainly intriguing in theory, it has proven inaccurate in practice; the attention attracted by their extreme tactics has brought the public image of "mainstream groups" to the level of groups like ALF, rather than creating the effective juxtaposition that they describe (Mika, 2006, 921).

Furthermore, even on the pragmatist end, rhetoric and imagery involving factory farming and other topics the public remains ambivalent about has assumed a provocative, antagonistic edge. PETA's frequent use of incendiary images of farm abuses has the potential to be memorable, but carries significant risks; namely, that "such an approach may deeply offend, resulting in backlash against the organization, undermining its credibility and tainting the movement as a whole" (Mika, 2006, 921). This process is exacerbated by a sensationalist news media, which tends to emphasize the more extreme

events of a protest or demonstration and neglect the peaceful aspects. Though PETA often purposely utilizes the media to gain attention, by doing so, the organization allows the acts or language of a few to represent the acts of the whole group—or even the whole animal rights community (Mika, 2006, 921). A study examining the content of *New York Times* articles regarding animal rights issues from the past few decades found that the number of pieces that cast a negative light on protestors—“atrocious tales”—far outweighed those that used more sympathetic language (Girgen, 2008, 115-116). While this does not necessarily indicate a premeditated agenda on the part of the New York Times or the broader news media, it does suggest that the media is taking cues from a public that views the animal rights movement through a negative lens—or even as a threat.

***Problems inflicted by opposition.*** Though a large part of the movement’s public image problem stems from activist tactics, it must also be noted that the animal rights movement, particularly the sector concerned with factory farm abuses, has been subjected to numerous campaigns by the meat and poultry industries and their political champions in Congress to discredit the efforts of animal rights activists and to align the movement with extremism in the eyes of the public. More specifically, anti-animal rights advocates have made concerted efforts to label their opponents as irrational and hyper-emotional (partially due to the fact that the majority of animal rights activists are women), misanthropists who value the comfort of animals over the comfort of humans, and even dangerous eco-terrorists (Girgen, 2008, 85-86). An examination of congressional testimonies related to animal rights issues turned up numerous instances of such claims-making—of 114 total testimonies, 63 contained claims that “animal rights

activists have turned to violence, criminality, and/or terrorism,” and 27 percent of these testimonies contained such statements even though the main topic of the hearing had nothing to do with animal rights activists’ criminal activity (Girgen, 2008, 142). Whether this congressional claims-making trend, in particular, is rooted in genuine apprehension of the behavior of activists or is part of the greater coordinated campaigns by special interests is unclear; however, either possibility presents a problem for the movement. If there is a true belief in the criminality of animal rights activists (despite the lack of evidence), then the movement is failing to adequately convey their message and educate the public. In contrast, if this claims-making is a part of a larger, purposeful attack, then it is apparent that the opposition has successfully communicated their anti-animal rights sentiments on government’s biggest stage—something that the animal rights movement has failed to accomplish in a significant way.

Anti-animal rights countermovements, which are usually comprised of special interest groups, political action committees, conservative think tanks (such as the Heritage Foundation and the Koch brothers’ Cato Institute), and corporate entities (often meat and poultry producers, like the Tyson and Hormel companies), have frequently employed “survivalist anthropocentrism” in their rhetoric, or the assertion that humans take precedence over their animal counterparts and that the continuation and comfort of the human species must be prioritized (Girgen, 2008, 89-90). In contrast to the emotional appeals of the anti-animal rights countermovement, animal rights activists tend to “rely on rationale expansion in their effort to gain support for their policies,” which often fails to capture the attention and support of onlookers (Girgen, 2008, 96). The presentation of meat-eating and hunting as American traditions and animal testing as crucial to saving

human lives has proven effective—not only at convincing the public, but at bringing legislators into the anti-animal rights fold, as well.

**Impetus for Change.** Despite the evidence in the literature that demonstrates that current tactics are falling flat with the public, there are those within the animal rights community who maintain that no change is needed, or even that any sacrifices to ideology are tantamount to compromising the values of the movement; for example, animal rights advocate (and fundamentalist) Gary Francione contends that “animal rights advocates will not gain ‘insider status’ with governments and will not be taken seriously as reformers because they are too radical. He calls insider-status-seeking ‘counterproductive’ because it would mean having to give up animal rights advocacy, which he calls essentially an *outsider* position” (Szybel, 2007, 11). However, if the ultimate goal of the animal rights movement is to achieve legislative victories for animals and to ensure the expansion of their rights, then activists must agree that most contemporary efforts—perhaps with the exception of those relating to companion animals—are coming up short of their objectives.

In order for desired policy changes to be implemented, these ideas must first ascend to the legislative agendas of prominent politicians; however, this is likely to occur only if the public demonstrates considerable interest in making these changes happen, as policymakers often take cues from their constituents. Currently, the public remains ambivalent about many issues central to the animal rights movement, including treatment of food animals on factory farms, and this uncertainty makes it increasingly unlikely that influential politicians will take notice of animal rights concerns, especially when voters—and thus, their representatives—hold such a dim view of the animal rights movement and



its activists. For the movement to expand its ranks and see future legislative success, it must make significant changes in the way it presents information to the public through targeted, strategic communications.

### **‘Ag-Gag’ Legislation**

Factory farming anti-whistleblower legislation, colloquially known as “ag-gag” laws, have been the subject of considerable media attention in the past two years, and many state legislatures have debated their merits to varying results. Though less extreme laws were already enacted in some of the plains states in the 1990s (Pitts, 2012, 97) and the majority of the state legislatures have ultimately decided not to pass the more recent incarnations of the legislation, in March of 2012, two states—Iowa and Utah—passed and implemented ag-gag efforts in reaction to heavily-publicized undercover operations staged by animal rights organizations meant to shed light on inhumane treatment of food animals (Bollard, 2012, 10961). Missouri, South Carolina, and Arkansas have also passed modified versions of this legislation since 2012 (Genoways, 2013, no pag.). These anti-whistleblower laws are variations of the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act (AETA), a piece of model legislation drafted with the input of large corporate meat producers and their political champions as a more severe, state-oriented version of the Animal Enterprise Protection Act of 1992 (AEPA), a federal statute that criminalized any “physical disruption” of animal-related business operations which causes damages in excess of \$10,000 (Eddy, 2005, 263; Hill, 2011, 655; King, 2011, 64). In contrast to federal laws regarding acts more traditionally associated with domestic terrorism, such as arson, AEPA punishes all “economic damage,” a somewhat ambiguous concept that has been difficult for judges and juries to interpret when the law has been challenged in court

(King, 2011, 64-65). Though the language can be applied broadly to many “criminal” activities, the recent, expanded state versions ultimately seek to prosecute individuals who gain access to factory farming operations (perhaps under false pretenses, such as job interviews) and obtain video or photographic evidence of misconduct—primarily, the mistreatment of animals (Gibson, 2013, no pag.).

**Public backlash.** Ag-gag laws have become the subject of public scrutiny over the course of the past two years, with a number of high-profile journalistic exposés introducing a topic that had previously only gained recognition in specialized circles to a much wider audience (Genoways, 2013, no pag.). Though the primary target of ag-gag measures have been animal rights activists and the loudest protests to the laws has been from anti-cruelty advocacy organizations, many other concerns have been raised from a variety of individuals and organizations, many of them unassociated with the animal rights movement. These concerns involve the treatment of farm workers, the First Amendment free speech implications of the legislation, and the threat to consumer safety borne of unsanitary or unsafe meat preparation—as well as the traditional concerns for comfort and welfare of food animals (Kingery, 2012, 680).

**Labor concerns.** Since the resurgence of ag-gag fervor within state legislatures, prominent labor unions—such as the AFL-CIO, a powerful federation of unions, including those of farm workers—have scrambled to voice opposition. Just as animal rights activists wish to protect their ability to expose the mistreatment of farm animals, labor unions wish to uncover and fix unsafe working conditions for farm employees (Lacy, 2013, 139). Recent months have seen the presidents of large unions issue statements meant to alert their members of pending ag-gag legislation and to urge

them to contact their representatives to take action against the state measures (AFL-CIO, 2013, no pag.).

***First Amendment concerns.*** Perhaps the most significant issue raised that does not directly concern animal welfare is that ag-gag measures are in direct violation of free speech rights under the First Amendment. Legal scholars have challenged AETA-based legislation on a number of counts, including its expansive, vague language (that could be applied too broadly—for instance, it could be used to ban all pictures taken by farm workers or tourists); its interference with the freedom of the press to engage in undercover journalism as protected by the Constitution; and finally, its possible contradiction to constitutional protections against prior restraint, or the ability of the government to control news content disseminated to the public (Landfried, 2013, 380-388). Ag-gag efforts have attracted the ire of prominent free speech advocacy organizations, such as the American Civil Liberties Union, which has not only voiced strong opposition to ag-gag laws, but has lobbied extensively for a whistleblower protection amendment to be added to AETA and the bills that have already passed in several states (King, 2011, 67-68).

***Consumer safety concerns.*** Since the 1906 publication of Upton Sinclair's pivotal exposé *The Jungle*, which revealed the dangerous, unsanitary practices of the Chicago meatpacking industry, food and consumer safety has been at the forefront of government regulatory efforts. Many of those opposed to the implementation of ag-gag measures are concerned that the laws silence those who wish to shed light on improper meat and poultry production on factory farm operations—putting public health at risk and essentially dismantling the tradition of Sinclair and his successors (Wells, 2013, no pag.).

The unsanitary preparation of meat has led to highly publicized outbreaks of food-borne illness brought on by contamination, and many say that ag-gag laws violate the rights of consumers to see how the food they eat is produced (Kingery, 2012, 677).

*Animal welfare concerns.* Finally—and perhaps most notably—activists’ concerns about ag-gag laws arise from their implications for animal welfare. Previous video footage obtained by animal rights organizations have revealed graphic and often disturbing treatment of food animals, including tiny, cramped living spaces, violent beatings by farm employees, and improper, needlessly painful methods of slaughter (Kingery, 2012, 678; Carlson, 2012, 2). Often, factory farm employees are found not only to violate federal and state animal cruelty statutes, but the farms’ own production protocols and humane slaughter policies, in order to boost efficiency. These unlawful practices include unnecessarily painful or even incomplete slaughter, in which an animal has not entirely killed before meat collection activity begins (Lacy, 2013, 136). Animal rights organizations such as the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), which are often responsible for the controversial undercover video footage of factory farms, have pointed out that these covert methods are sometimes necessary to reveal inhumane practices to the public and to law enforcement, and thus, they are necessary to get farms to change their ways (Hill, 2011, 985; Genoways, 2013, no pag.).

**Moment of opportunity.** As noted above, the public backlash to factory farming anti-whistleblower laws has been significant and diverse in origin, bringing the issue of ag-gag into a public consciousness that, historically, does not often seriously consider issues of animal welfare. The current prominence of ag-gag laws in the media and on the agendas of advocacy organizations and state governments—as well as the widespread

negative attention they have garnered—presents a rare chance for the animal rights movement to disseminate information to a much broader audience than it would typically be able to access. Furthermore, this window of opportunity would allow activist groups to communicate with sectors the public that, until now, have not had contact with the animal rights movement or significantly considered its principles. Though ag-gag legislation would only play a small, topical role in the communications and branding strategies needed to achieve a public image makeover for the animal rights movement, the laws present something nearly as important: optimal timing for change to be implemented.

### **Relevance of Corporate Branding**

Though it has been an encouraged business practice for many years, corporate branding theory has only very recently become the focus of academic study. In 1960, the American Marketing Association defined ‘brand’ in the corporate sense as “a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (as cited in Stride & Lee, 2007, 108). Corporate theorists consider the primary role of brand in business is to set a company apart from competitors; historically, superficial elements like logos and slogans have been the tools used to achieve this differentiation (Stride & Lee, 2007, 108). However, in recent years, the focus has shifted from these surface-level attributes to branding that “provide[s] emotional and self-expressive benefits to the consumer...it is the knowledge that consumers’ have about a brand that provides them with brand value” (Stride & Lee, 2007, 108-109). Due in part to the expansion of the marketplace in the past few decades, branding in the corporate sector has shifted away from the emphasis of products and services being offered by companies

and towards their organizational values and reliability through corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts (Wæraas, 2008, 207). The strength of corporate brands is often measured in levels of consistency among values, identities, and communications with stakeholders. In that vein, “branding entails uniting the organization’s different elements and types of communication into one single identity expression, as if it were one ‘body’” (Wæraas, 2008, 208). The most impressive corporate brands are those that offer a wide variety of products or services and manage to maintain a core brand identity among consumers through effective communication—brands like Coca-Cola, Kraft, and Johnson & Johnson manufacture diverse sets of consumer products, but are able to achieve successful branding for both individual products and their overarching parent companies.

Limited research has been done on the application of corporate branding principles to the public and non-profit sectors, but most scholars in the field agree that many of its tenets have the potential to benefit such organizations (Wæraas, 2008, 208). Certain non-profits have accepted these principles on a small scale and have used them to boost fundraising efforts, but others are beginning to use a broader approach, using corporate branding techniques to improve organizational cohesion and understanding the ways they can be used to achieve the non-profit’s long-term goals (Kylander & Stone, 2012, 35). Though many theorists believe that advocacy organizations can effectively set themselves apart from others by strengthening brand identity (Barakso, 2010, 161), others contend that non-profit and public sector entities inevitably face major challenges when attempting to become “coherent corporate brands,” as they are often comprised of diverse and sometimes conflicting identities that reflect their public stakeholders—consistency

pigeonholes not only the non-profits themselves, but the people they serve (Wæraas, 2008, 209). In terms of the animal rights movement, which consists of a wide variety of non-profit organizations and individuals with diverse viewpoints, it is unlikely that the entirety of the movement could be simplified into a single brand identity with its attendant logos, slogans, and marketing campaigns—the movement already contains several prominent organizations with name recognition and the various wings of the animal rights movement often differ too greatly in ways mentioned above to be unified in this way. However, there are elements of corporate branding—and rebranding—that can be applied to the animal rights movement in order to strengthen its reputation and boost public trust.

Because of the inherent complexity of its current structure, the animal rights movement is unlikely to successfully unify under a single brand; however, it could be beneficial to consolidate the many subgroups of the movement under a set of shared principles and a common system of values that encompasses all the areas in which the subgroups overlap. Doing so would require the use of “social capital,” or “any instance in which people cooperate for common ends on the basis of shared informal norms and values” (Fukuyama, 2002, 23). As mentioned earlier, a major role of brand in the corporate world is to distinguish a company from its competitors—for the animal rights movement, the goal is to distinguish itself from other causes that might dominate public attention and the national political agenda, rather than intra-competition among animal rights organizations. By determining a list of tenets shared in all corners of the movement—for example, the reduction of animal suffering, the expansion of their rights and status in the legal sphere, and the education of the public about central animal rights

issues—the animal rights movement can achieve internal cohesion and a more monolithic status in the political arena, making it easier to gain influence and lobby for animal causes. Though the details of the varying beliefs within the movement may differ, by acknowledging areas of agreement and presenting a more united front to the public, the movement can achieve a “value system that both underpins and indeed drives [its] operations” (Stride & Lee, 2012, 110) among “diverse internal constituencies” (Kylander & Stone, 2012, 39).

In the corporate world, successful brand management hinges on public trust, and rebranding often becomes necessary when the previous incarnation of the brand fails to successfully convince consumers of its reliability (Kylander & Stone, 2012, 38). Specifically, a corporate entity can gain public trust if it yields favorable responses to the questions, “can the company get the job done?” or “can it be trusted to deliver the product or service it promised?” As discussed earlier, the animal rights movement has suffered a negative shift in public image due to both self-inflicted problems with messaging and tactics as well as damage inflicted by opposing forces—thus, public trust is at low levels, particularly towards activists involved with factory farm reform or other contentious issues that have historically attracted provocative tactics and rhetoric. Improving interactions with the public through strategic communications and a shift in tactics will go a long way towards enhancing public trust. If the movement can demonstrate its commitment to delivering on its promises in the legislative arena, rather than focusing on gaining publicity through incendiary imagery and antagonistic protests, it will be well on its way to establishing a long-lasting trust with its stakeholders.

Brand consolidation (to the limited extent that it can occur within the fragmented



animal rights movement) can be made easier by thinking of the different subgroups of the movement as different products and services offered by a private company, each catering to a specific subset of the targeted population of consumers. As Wæraas (2012) notes, “the public sector must deal with a wide range of goals, values, and paradoxes... In order to carry out their basic functions as providers of common goods and services, public organizations have developed a capacity for the simultaneous balancing and handling of many competing value orientations and identities” (212). In order for the differing viewpoints within the animal rights movement to come together under shared principles, these inherent differences must be embraced, not fixed or ignored. The different subgroups—working for different animal-related causes and varying in degree of intensity—appeal to different slices of the marketplace, but aligning these segments of the population with the broader animal rights movement would strengthen a common brand identity. A strong brand will lead to greater political and legislative success, and increased progress will result in a strong, positive reputation because the promises made by the brand are being kept (Argenti & Druckemiller, 2004, 372).

In addition, many opponents of the animal rights movement have often publicly stated that fervent animal rights activists are more concerned with the welfare of animals than the welfare of the human species (Girgen, 2008, 85). Despite the factual inaccuracy of this claim and its irrelevance to matters of policy, it is an especially important one to debunk concurrently with the implementation of the animal rights movement’s public image makeover. The notion can be dismissed if activists demonstrate that the animal rights movement, though primarily concerned with the improvement of the status of animals, is also looking out for humans, as well. Many of the policies that the movement

advocates have positive connotations for public health—the topic of ag-gag has particularly strong ties to this issue due to food safety implications—and the public is more likely to buy into the unified brand and establish trust if people believe that animal rights movement cares about their health as well as the health of their animal counterparts. HSUS, in its limited materials relating to farm animal welfare, does mention the public health argument and the human implications of current factory farming practices—they offer a series of articles and studies related to this perspective on their website—but have not made it a central issue of their campaigns.

Improving the brand of the animal rights movement is a process that will undoubtedly take time to hone and considerable planning to implement. In addition, the successful integration of corporate branding techniques might be facilitated by the achievement of one or two major partnerships between corporations and the animal rights movement (most likely one of its higher-profile organizations). These partnerships would create symbiotic relationships: the private companies that join forces with the animal rights movement to improve conditions for food animals will benefit from increased public trust—a partnership is equivalent to an endorsement by animal rights advocates—and animal rights organizations will be able to more readily assimilate their images to mainstream advocacy culture and can reach wider audiences. According to Reading Is Fundamental, a nonprofit organization that frequently partners with private companies:

For the nonprofit, reputation is close to being everything. And reputation is closely tied to visibility. Your reputation is enhanced not just by the good work you do, but by the recognition you get for doing it. So the relationship that helps us get the word out about the organization is important. It's hard to put a dollar

value on it. It's important not just for the branding effort of a national nonprofit organization, but it's also important for the local volunteers in the field who absolutely love to feel a part of something big and important. (as cited in Austin, 2000, 77).

In the 1990s, Georgia-Pacific (G-P), a large paper products company, partnered with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), a prominent environmental conservation organization, to jointly manage forest lands—even though their agendas have previously clashed (Austin, 2000, 81). Both entities realized the need for change: “TNC recognized that its strategy... would never be sufficient to protect large ecosystems... G-P recognized that resisting environmental protection pressures was increasingly difficult, both politically and legally. ... TNC became more of an economic pragmatist, and G-P became more of an environmental steward” (Austin, 2000, 81-82). Through a successful partnership, TNC gained the visibility needed to pursue its goals and G-P was able to gain credibility—and both were able to boost public trust. In addition, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), a nonprofit organization that advocates for the international conservation of natural habitats, has robust corporate partnerships with several private companies, including Coca-Cola and Avon. These partnerships extend to cause marketing and corporate sponsorship of WWF events, which the organization advertises as opportunities for companies to “gain visibility and show your corporate support of conservation” (WWF, “Marketing Partnerships,” no pag.). Through these collaborations, WWF is able to bring in much-needed revenue and their corporate partners are able to strengthen their brand through publicized philanthropy.

Determining the private companies that would produce optimal partnerships is a

complicated process—though it would perhaps be most powerful for an animal rights organization advocating for improved conditions for food animals to partner with a major meat producer, most of these companies engage in the very practices the movement decries or are aligned with anti-animal rights special interests. Therefore, it would be more effective for animal rights organizations to partner with companies that patronize these meat producers, such as grocery stores and restaurants. For instance, a partnership with a grocery chain like Whole Foods could prove particularly beneficial; not only is the company already known for its commitment to organic products and humane slaughter policies, but its clientele are more concerned with the origins of their food than traditional grocery stores and are willing to pay slightly more to ensure that it comes from acceptable sources. Fostering a robust partnership between a company like Whole Foods and animal rights organizations will align the movement with more mainstream influences. However, such a partnership would be slightly more complicated than most corporate-nonprofit collaborations, as the issue Whole Foods would be associating with—increased protections for food animals—is more controversial. Many private companies partner with disease research organizations or anti-poverty advocacy groups, causes that have reached near-universal support in the public. As previously noted, animal rights issues are not as widely accepted—but could make headway if activists begin building partnerships with trusted corporate allies.

Furthermore, unifying the subgroups of the animal rights movement under a common set of principles presents significant challenges that will require concessions on the side of animal rights pragmatists as well as their fundamentalist counterparts to overcome. “Pragmatic” organizations like the HSUS and ASPCA are known primarily

for their work with companion animals, though they do work with other animals, as well, including those used in the meat industry. However, the majority of their fundraising and membership comes from their dog and cat advocacy, and thus, most of their advertising and communications revolves around these efforts. If these organizations were to devote more of their energy and considerable resources to the protection of food animals, it would go a long way towards fostering greater collaboration and cooperation among the subgroups of the animal rights movement. Previously, HSUS and ASPCA have shied away from shining a spotlight on the plights of food animals, likely due to the lack of fundraising success that doing so generates, but now that their companion animal efforts have yielded such strong positive results and monetary returns, these organizations may have accumulated enough political and social capital to expand their strategic communications efforts to include non-companion animals and the issues surrounding their protection and care. In addition, subgroups with more fundamentalist agendas must also put aside differences with organizations like HSUS and be willing to collaborate, which will become much more likely if these prominent organizations were to tackle the issues central to animal rights fundamentalists' concerns.

### **Communications Strategies to Achieve Public Image Shift**

By utilizing certain critical elements of corporate branding theory to consolidate the common messages of various subgroups, securing at least one major corporate partnership, and by taking advantage of the optimal timing that widespread ag-gag legislation provides, the animal rights movement has the tools necessary to achieve a positive public image shift at its disposal. What is then left to discuss are the communications strategies needed to garner the attention of the people who, because of

ag-gag, are now treading in the animal rights sphere, and to more firmly align them with the movement—particularly the issues that have yet to see high levels of support. Effective communication strategies for the animal rights movement do not necessarily have to originate from external sources; certain devices used by companion animal activists and advocacy organizations have achieved considerable success in soliciting donations, boosting membership, and encouraging further activism among their supporters. While organizations representing the interests of dogs and cats have been able to communicate with a wide audience, establish a moderate degree of political capital in the lobbying realm, and achieve modest legislative success in recent years, other subgroups of the animal rights movement have remained stagnant, due in part to a more potent countermovement by powerful corporate lobbies, like those representing the interests of agriculture and pharmaceutical companies. However, companion animal advocacy organizations have also been able to employ effective messaging tactics to disseminate factual information, enhance their credibility, and appeal to the emotions of their audiences. The less mainstream subgroups of the animal rights movement—particularly factory farm reform advocates, as they are in the best position to take advantage of ag-gag outrage—must look to the companion animal sector and apply their more successful communications strategies in order to cash in on the wider audience that ag-gag affords them. There are a number of tactics that, based on their effective use by companion animal advocacy organizations and an examination of the animal rights literature, would prove helpful in revamping the public image of the movement and increasing the progress made for animals on factory farms.

### **Utilize Anthropomorphism**

A tactic long employed by companion animal activists is the use of anthropomorphic language when describing dogs and cats—essentially, applying characteristics traditionally associated with humans to animals in an effort to shrink the socially constructed gap between the two (Butterfield, Hill, & Lord, 2012, 957). Using human descriptors for animals can have a powerful effect, even in the face of mental impediments: studies have shown that humans intentionally rationalize their behavior towards animals by diminishing the perceived mind capacity of the animals in question (Bastian, Loughnan, Haslam, & Radke, 2011, 7). People often attribute dehumanizing language when discussing abuses against other humans—frequently comparing the mistreatment of humans to the accepted treatment of animals, in fact—and it has been shown that the use of humanizing language when describing animals can boost concern for animal welfare (Butterfield et al., 2012, 957). In a study conducted by Butterfield et al. (2012), people who were given descriptions of dogs that contained anthropomorphic language (e.g., “good listener”) were more likely to express interest in adopting those dogs than those who were given descriptions with non-anthropomorphic language (e.g., “good at listening to commands”) (958). True to this research, the use of anthropomorphic language dominates the messaging of companion animal advocacy organizations, which frequently refer to dogs and cats as “friends,” “companions,” and “buddies,” and use human-centric descriptors of their adoptable pets—a quick review of the ASPCA’s “Adoptable Dogs” page turns up phrases like “laid-back,” “couch potato,” “fun-loving,” “goofball,” and “glass-is-half-full kind of dog” (ASPCA, 2013, no pag.). Additionally, this device is widely used across other prominent organizations best known for their work with dogs and cats, including HSUS.

The success of anthropomorphic communications in the companion animal sphere has led to a series of studies examining human perception of other animals, especially those used for food: Bastian et al. (2011) found that people who eat meat—even those who also consider themselves animal-lovers—tend to rationalize their choice by diminishing the mental capacities of the animals they consume, and that this dissonance spikes right before meat-eating occurs (1). Thus, finding a way to combat this powerful cognitive dissonance is crucial to the animal rights movement, particularly because people are resistant to learning about where and how their meat is produced (Bastian et al., 2011, 1), and the use of anthropomorphic language in their communications presents a partial solution. In the past, PETA has attempted to close the gap between humans and food animals by displaying provocative images of naked women with body parts demarcated with the corresponding parts of a cow used for meat (e.g., “chuck,” “loin,” etc.) (Appendix). However, the success of such ads was limited, as they tended to generate unease among viewers as well as distraction and anger regarding the nudity of the models (Mika, 2006, 936). Though evidence supports the effectiveness of anthropomorphization tactics, the softer, more emotional approach of the companion animal sector—emphasizing the human characteristics of the animals, rather than the reverse—would be more appropriate.

### **Emphasize Stewardship**

In its revised messaging, the animal rights movement must emphasize the importance of stewardship of the animals whose creation rests solely on the shoulders of the human species. Human stewardship “imposes upon man a responsibility *for* the care and welfare of animals” (Seamer, 1998, 204), and is especially important in the



discussion of the treatment of animals on factory farms. Just as the companion animal sector often stresses the realities of pet overpopulation and the human role in creating that problem, advocates for the improved treatment of food animals must point out the human responsibility for animals bred for consumption. Western society's view of animals is strongly influenced by the Judeo-Christian concept of human dominion over their animal counterparts—animals exist to be used by men and women for food, clothing, and other functions meant to perpetuate the human species (Seamer, 1998, 202). The continued presence of these values in American culture is a long-standing barrier that has made it exceedingly difficult to attract people to the animal rights movement and to convince people of the intrinsic value of animals slaughtered for meat, and if the movement is to gain ground in this field, it must promote human respect of the animals bred for their use.

In this sense, the animal rights movement possesses a certain amount of “moral capital” that has been consistently counteracted by their high-powered opponents by utilizing anthropocentric imagery—a child suffering from disease that could have been cured with the help of animal testing, for example—strong attempts to preserve the Western tradition of human dominion (Munro, 1999, 51). Fighting the anthropocentrism inherent in American culture is, perhaps, the most difficult obstacle facing the animal rights movement today, and in response, it must instill a sense of personal responsibility in its audience—an audience that has recently been primed by ag-gag legislation to oppose the efforts of agribusiness, one of the movement's primary opponents.

### **Define the Opposition**

Much of the analysis thus far has revolved around revamping the image of the animal rights movement from within, fixing the problems that have prevented the

movement from progressing toward its goals and more effectively countering the claims of the opposing side. However, just as a candidate on the campaign trail must highlight the flaws of his opponent or a company must draw attention to the characteristics that make the products of its competitors inferior, so must the animal rights movement define and re-frame the forces that stand against them. The forces working against factory farm reforms include powerful agribusiness and animal use industries, the political action committees and organizations that act as the lobbying arm of the anti-animal rights countermovement, and the influential politicians who act in their interests. However, this represents only a limited sample of the countermovement; when other issues central to the animal rights movement are factored in, the slate of opponents becomes much broader and includes prominent organizations such as the National Rifle Association (NRA), the American Medical Association (AMA), and reputable universities nationwide (Munro, 1999, 39). These organizations have considerable monetary resources, widespread name recognition, and political influence in Washington, D.C., and it has allowed them to afford the best personnel to stage their counteroffensives against the animal rights movement through corporate advertising and lobbying efforts on Capitol Hill (Girgen, 2008, 67).

Despite the fact that their opposition's primary rhetorical tactics involve defining animal rights activists as irrational, misanthropic—or in the case of former Secretary of Health and Human Services Louis Sullivan, terroristic (Girgen, 2008, 65)—the animal rights movement has, for the most part, kept their responses limited to the issues at hand, rather than take the fight to the lobbies and corporate interests behind the personal attacks (Girgen, 2008, 96). Animal rights organizations have occasionally tried to bring attention

to the organizations behind certain pieces of anti-animal rights, pro-agribusiness legislation, but they have failed to *define* these opponents on a more personal level, and thus, have allowed these powerful lobbies to frame many critical issues. The rise of ag-gag laws not only provides optimal timing for their public rebrand, as mentioned previously, but casts the agribusiness lobby and its associated corporate entities (e.g., meat producers such as Tyson and Hormel) in a negative light, perhaps making the movement's intended audience more receptive to the desired framing—in political terms, allowing them to “go negative.”

To successfully go negative, the animal rights movement must first explicitly name the opposition; specifically, they must name the individual companies at fault. They are not groups of concerned citizens, but rather big business enterprises that are more concerned with turning profits than with the ethics of their own practices, even if that means turning a blind eye to rampant, unnecessary animal suffering. Since the beginning of the economic downturn, public faith in big business has seen a significant dip; this negative shift has plateaued somewhat since then, but trust in these institutions remains low: a June 2013 Gallup poll showed that 33 percent of Americans had very little or no trust at all in big business, while only 22 percent said they had a great deal or quite a lot of trust (3). The animal rights movement can acknowledge the importance of protecting the main principles of the free market, but must also assert that these principles cannot be preserved at the expense of animal welfare—the ethics of humane animal treatment supersede the desire to marginally increase production efficiency and revenue intake. Furthermore, the animal rights movement can point out that its stance on ag-gag and the treatment of farm animals actually carries benefits to the consumer—by allowing the

public to access information about the production of the meat they consume and by increasing accountability for factory farming operations that continue to violate humane slaughter and sanitary workplace standards, the animal rights movement is also protecting the interests of *humans* with its opposition to ag-gag. The old adage that “the customer is king” still rings true—and ag-gag and its corporate supporters put the customer’s health at risk. By framing the issue as a big business ethics problem, calling out these corporate interests for profiteering at the expense of animal welfare and public health, and shifting the negative attention onto the corporate countermovement, the animal rights movement can effectively combat the staged offensives against them and regain their footing in the political conversation.

Defining the opposition, which is comprised of a diverse set of powerful political and corporate influences, is a challenging task, especially because the inhumane practices that the animal rights movement opposes are so widespread (while hidden from the public eye). The challenge is considerable not only for animal rights advocates, but for their audience; for instance, asking consumers to boycott an entire industry is much more difficult than asking them to boycott a single company’s products (Baron & Diermeier, 2007, 600). Thus, the process of “going negative” would be facilitated by the use of *targeted* media campaigns—those that go after individual entities at a time—in this case, meat producers and other companies that utilize their products. Targeted campaigns make it easier for people to contribute to the movement and support the cause, as the “participation costs” are much lower (Baron & Diermeier, 2007, 600). Furthermore, targeted campaigns have the potential to have larger impacts: “a successful campaign against one firm may lead to a domino effect as competing firms attempt to avoid being

targeted next by proactively meeting the activist's demands. Activists may also ratchet up their demands, demanding greater concessions from the second target than their first" (Baron & Diermeier, 2007, 600). Using this type of campaign makes defining the opposition and framing animal rights issues surrounding factory farming a much easier undertaking, particularly from a monetary standpoint—tackling a single company at a time frees up resources that would otherwise be used to maintain a broader (possibly unsustainable) communications effort.

Targeted campaigns can work fluidly in tandem with the aforementioned corporate partnerships, particularly if the targets present competition for the partner company. For instance, in the previously mentioned example of a partnership with Whole Foods, if a targeted campaign is orchestrated against a competing grocery chain, the corporate partnership is strengthened, as Whole Foods would have more incentive to maintain—and even expand—the existing bond with the nonprofit organization(s). It also allows them to use an external entity to “attack” their competitors rather than doing so themselves, a practice that is risky and has the potential to reflect poorly on companies that do not allow their products and services to speak for themselves.

### **Make Emotional Appeals**

The role of emotion in animal rights campaigns is a topic that is frequently overlooked not only by academics who examine the trends of social movements, but by animal rights activists, themselves. As previously discussed, the subgroup of the movement that is focused on the treatment of companion animals has utilized anthropomorphic language to make successful emotional appeals. Prominent animal welfare organizations have also taken these emotional appeals and translated them to ad

campaigns—famous examples are the ASPCA’s ads that solicit donations by showing a series of photographs of abused cats and dogs set to poignant background music. These television commercials proved more than effective: by 2009, the ASPCA had raked in a record \$30 million in donations from just the first ad in the series, which they began running in 2007 (Strom, 2009, no pag.). However, other sectors of the animal rights movement, including those concerned with factory farm abuses and laboratory testing on animals, have shied away from this approach. According to Groves (2001), “Once famous for criticizing the male-dominated medical profession for lack of compassion, today’s animal rights activists embrace emotional neutrality, science, and ways of looking at the world that they consider masculine (228). This is perhaps in response to the fact that as much as 80 percent of animal rights activists are women, and the majority of the people the movement convinces to donate money or volunteer for a cause are women, as well (Groves, 2001, 224). The activists, like the public, have historically considered emotions as feminine—sympathy is equivalent to weakness, and anger is equivalent to hysterics—and in today’s movement, most of the high-ranking positions within organizations are held by men with scientific backgrounds (such as HSUS president Wayne Pacelle and ASPCA president Matthew Bershadker), despite the fact that women comprise the overwhelming majority of the animal rights community (Groves, 2001, 224-225).

However, by eschewing emotional appeals to dispute the accusations of the opposition, these sectors of the animal rights movement are choosing to ignore tactics that have proven effective in companion animal advocacy. Indeed, agribusiness and pharmaceutical industry operatives have historically attempted to label animal rights

activists as hyper-emotional, and as this method has worked, they are unlikely to shift their rhetorical strategy in the near future. However, as unfair as the label may be, if a hyper-emotional approach to communications is what will garner the most positive public attention and bring new people into the animal rights fold, it would be foolish to continue to reject its validity. In addition, these animal rights activists appear to compensate for their considerable female membership by appointing men to lead them and purposely discard emotion within their ranks, rather than embracing their roots. If women are the members of households making the donations and volunteering for animal rights-related causes, then appealing to them in advertisements and other communications with the public is the shrewd option. The movement has already attempted to use a more masculine approach to broaden the movement's appeal, but this effort has failed; by doing so, activists have only succeeded in stripping its messaging of emotional punch and alienating potential members, both male and female. As for the role of emotion in the rhetoric of factory farm reformers, though the extreme and antagonistic rhetoric of the past should be avoided, the "politics of pity" have proven successful—"where the fortunate may encounter mediated images and narratives of suffering and are moved to action so that questions of legality and or propriety become secondary to alleviating the 'spectacle of real suffering'" (Lowe 2008, 22).

### **Promote Education**

Thus far, the majority of the discussion has pertained to the messaging tactics that could be used by the animal rights movement to regain favor with the public and improve its standing in the political arena, including the use of emotional appeals similar to those already employed by companion animal advocates. Though animal rights activists must

move away from their tendency to “rely on rationale expansion” in their primary strategic communications (Girgen, 2008, 96), it is still important for them to support public education efforts and promote an environment conducive to constructive learning and the creation of social capital. According to Fukuyama (2002), “the creation of social capital is not all that different from the creation of human capital: it is done through education, and therefore requires investments in training and an institutional infrastructure within which the training can take place” (34). The more outlandish advertising campaigns of organizations like PETA attempt to evoke an emotional response from viewers but are short on substance, and their content tends to generate unease to the extent that audiences are more wary of inquiring further. In an interview, one PETA volunteer recounted an instance in which one of their activists threw a pie in the face of a woman who had just been crowned by event promoters from the meat industry as “Pork Queen”: “...[she] said she would have never supported this. It distracted the public from learning about vegetarianism and the plight of factory-farmed pigs. Another member had written an anonymous note to the group... ‘We need more thoughtful, careful education,’ it warned. ‘Stay away from publicly presenting the loony left with alienating antics and anger’” (Groves, 2001, 218). Even within the organization, people have realized that the extreme rhetoric and the provocative street theater are more detrimental than helpful. Education can take place through the communications efforts of the animal rights movement, but it can also be supplemented and facilitated by previously mentioned corporate partnerships; the movement can reach the clientele of their partners and use private companies to disseminate information to those who might not be seeking it initially.

What’s more, the movement’s more “alienating” tactics have the added problem



of antagonizing the public, using accusatory language that makes animal rights activists appear as if they blame the people they are trying to educate for the animal abuse problems plaguing the meat industry. Even if public habits are partially responsible for agribusiness's continued abuses, education presents a more effective solution than calling people out for their ignorance—studies have shown that most of the public remains unaware of many of the inhumane practices that occur on factory farms (Frank, 2004, 5). Blame for continued violations of humane slaughter regulations and other needless meat industry animal abuses must be allocated appropriately; namely, to the problematic corporate and political interests that perpetuate institutional cruelty.

### **Looking Ahead**

This analysis broadly examines tactics and rhetorical strategies that the contemporary animal rights movement—particularly the subgroups that seek to improve conditions for food animals—could use to revamp its public image, disassociate itself from extremism, combat the offensives by corporate opponents, and move closer to achieving its legal objectives. It is meant to act as a framework upon which to build more specific communications plans, and as such, there is room for future analysis to be conducted. In addition, there are potential complications that could interfere with the successful implementation of the strategies outlined above.

### **Limitations and Challenges**

The animal rights movement is a fragmented and diverse community whose beliefs and methods often come into conflict; for instance, certain pragmatic groups like HSUS, ASPCA, and PETA are devoted to the reduction of animal suffering on factory farm operations, while other organizations, such as ALF, take a more fundamentalist

approach and advocate for the complete abolition of the industry—and believe that the efforts of the former groups are near meaningless. These inherent tensions within the movement present a significant barrier, particularly if the movement is to attempt to unify under shared principles as corporate branding theory dictates they should—though there are indeed principles shared by even the most divergent sectors of the movement, getting them to ally themselves with one another presents a challenge, especially as infighting has not been uncommon in the past. It is possible that certain groups that have historically been unwilling to make concessions will never wish to align with more pragmatic organizations—or that pragmatic organizations might not be willing to ally with groups associated with extreme messaging and protest activity. However, any unification, even if it does not span the entire movement, would be beneficial and make the acquisition of political capital, corporate partnerships, and wider audiences much easier. Organizations with values that overlap to a greater degree are more likely to partner, and as more groups willingly unify, other organizations (even those that exist closer to the fringe) might be incentivized to join. A structure similar to that of the AFL-CIO, a large coalition of labor unions, could serve as a model to eventually emulate: a federation of animal rights organizations is much more politically formidable than each organization on its own.

Much of the discussion above focused on helping the public to view food animals differently than they currently do, breaking the cycle of cognitive dissonance that allows them to simultaneously believe that animals should not suffer and actively participate in their continued abuse, as well as calling into question the belief that humans hold dominion over other species. However, the public has thus far been unwilling to change its habits, and getting them to do so could take time—it is unlikely that people would so

drastically alter their definition of what is normal without a significant period of adjustment to the ideas presented by the animal rights movement (especially because the concept of human dominion originates in religious beliefs that are deeply entrenched throughout much of the country). This challenge becomes particularly glaring when the continued lobbying efforts of the meat industry and its allies are accounted for; their monetary and political resources are unlikely to be diminished in the near future, and they will still have access to a skilled team of consultants and advisors to stage their offensives against the animal rights movement, which will make the alteration of the public's conception of food animals all the harder.

Finally, the prominence of ag-gag laws in public consciousness has been discussed as the primary reason that the optimal time for the proposed public image makeover for the animal rights movement is now—the diverse and broad audiences that are paying attention to the issue present the movement with the opportunity to reach new segments of the population. However, it is difficult to know just how long ag-gag will remain on the public's radar—and thus, on the political agenda. If the animal rights movement hesitates for too long, they will lose the audience that ag-gag affords them and their window of opportunity to launch their new tactics will close. Because states like Iowa and Utah have only recently passed their ag-gag measures and other state legislatures have yet to pass or reject similar bills, there is little danger that ag-gag will fall off the agenda too soon for the movement to implement new communications strategies. In fact, Utah has already seen a legal challenge to its ag-gag law, in which the court dismissed the country's first attempted prosecution under the new measure (Epstein, 2013, no pag.). Because courts will now be forced to hand down the first

interpretations of these laws, the window of opportunity for the animal rights movement to implement the above recommendations is likely to remain open for a while; however, there is still pressure to act quickly, as public focus tends to shift rapidly, especially in today's 24-hour news climate.

### **Future Analysis**

The recommendations outlined in this analysis are broad frameworks and do not contain details necessary to formulate true communications plans for individual organizations (or coalitions of multiple groups); they are intended to provide the impetus for the animal rights movement to change its image and point motivated activists in the direction of helpful tools to achieve the necessary alterations. Specifically, the success of the outlined strategies will depend on the organizations and individuals communicating with the public; finding the optimal people for the task will be crucial and an appropriate topic of future study, as the public likely reacts differently to different types of spokespeople. It is possible that the successful execution of this makeover will require finding a prominent political ally to step into the spotlight and lead the charge—in addition to the assistance of potential corporate partners—though this might only be possible after other changes are made to establish credibility and make recruiting such allies easier. In addition, determining the best methods and optimal forms of media to reach intended audiences should also be the subject of future study; it is perhaps a topic best explored by scholars with political consulting experience and access to demographic data, a critical aspect of any media campaign.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, broad communications strategy recommendations were outlined for

the animal rights movement so that it can improve its public image and regain footing in the political conversation, particularly the subgroup of the movement that works to improve the treatment of food animals on factory farms. This section of the movement has failed to capture the attention of the public in a constructive way, often alienating people with extreme rhetoric and off-putting street antics. In addition, the animal rights movement has faced strong opposition from various corporate interests, advocacy organizations, and political forces with considerable resources at their disposal, and animal rights activists have frequently been victims of campaigns meant to discredit the movement as irrational or even borderline terroristic. Thus, the movement has found itself in need of significant change. The rise of ag-gag legislation to the national political radar provides the animal rights movement with a critical window of opportunity to reach new audiences and launch new communications tactics while still in the public eye while building on the already existing outrage against agribusiness and its allies that ag-gag has incited. By utilizing elements of corporate branding—including the (admittedly challenging) unification of subgroups under a set of shared values and using this increased unity to boost public trust—and seeking mutually beneficial corporate partnerships, the movement can positively affect how it is viewed. Additionally, several focal messages and communications strategies can be used to appeal to the public, including the utilization of anthropomorphic language, emphasis on human stewardship of animals, “going negative” on the corporate interests that comprise the opposition to the animal rights movement through targeted media campaigns, employing emotional appeals similar to those used by companion animal advocates, and promoting public education.

The principal objective of the animal rights movement, despite its fragmentation, is the elimination of unnecessary animal suffering at the hands of humans and to convince the public of the inherent rights of other species. Though the movement has tasted success, it still has a long way to go to achieve its core mission. With a unified message and a cogent communications plan in effect, animal rights activists can disassociate from the extremist label and move closer to realizing their goals—but before they can celebrate important legal victories, they must commence the essential work of winning hearts and minds.

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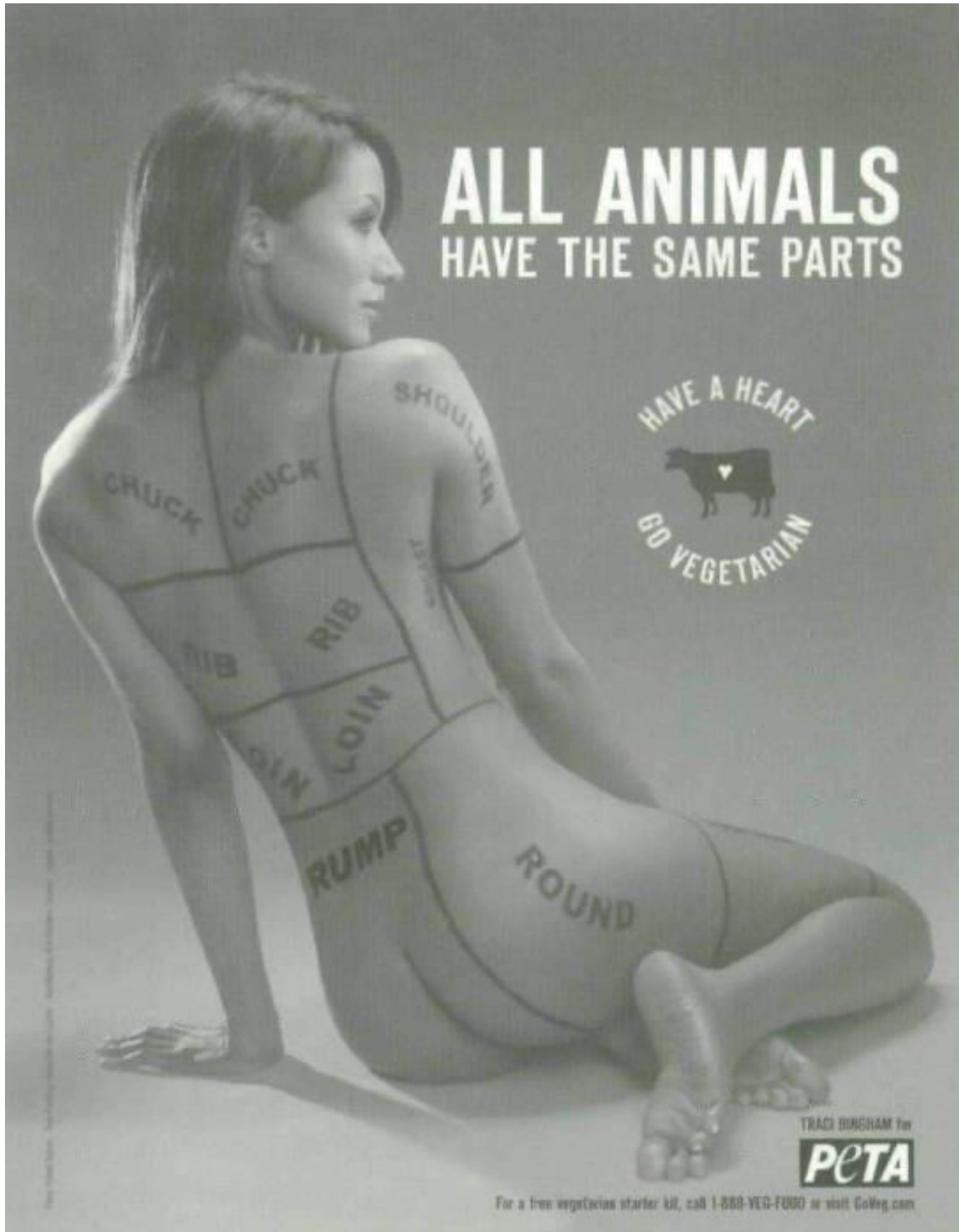
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Appendix



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