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Resonance of Moral Shocks in Abolitionist Animal Rights Advocacy

Overcoming Contextual
Constraints



Abstract

Jasper and Poulsen (1995) have long argued that moral shocks are critical for recruitment in the nonhuman animal rights movement. Building on this, Decoux (2009) argues that abolitionist nonhuman animal rights fails to recruit members because it does not effectively utilize descriptions of suffering. However, the effectiveness of moral shocks and subsequent emotional reactions has been questioned. This article reviews the literature surrounding the use of moral shocks in social movements. Based on this review, it is suggested that the exploitation of emotional reactions to depictions of suffering can sometimes prove beneficial to recruitment, but successful use is contextual based on pre-existing frameworks, ideology, and identity. A reliance on images and narratives might therefore be misconstrued in a society dominated by nonhuman animal welfare ideology.

Abolitionism



- Developed by Gary L. Francione
- Rights based; veganism
- Criticizes mainstream animal rights movement in moderating goals
 - Welfare reform
 - Single issue campaigning
 - Ignores veganism
- These moderate tactics are thought to
 - Increase efficiency and profits for industries
 - Increase public comfort with consumption

Moral Shocks

- Intended to elicit strong emotional reactions (Goodwin & Jasper 2003)
- Important when networks are absent
- Can motivate spontaneous recruitment and donations from isolated individuals
- DeCoux (2009) criticizes abolitionism for not depicting suffering and focusing on rational discourse



SKIP TO VIDEOS ▶



FOUL PLAY

On fur factory farms, animals are crammed into filthy cages, where they are surrounded by their own waste and are prevented from taking more than a few steps back and forth.

CAMPAIGN NEWS

- [Mayte Garcia Gets That 'Caged Animal' Fe...](#)
- [Supermodel on Catwalk Nude to Protest Fu...](#)
- [Bill Maher to Liberals: I 'Hoped for Mor...](#)

[More From PETA's Blog »](#)

STOP THE CRUELTY



BUNNY BUTCHER YOGA



CAN ANY OF THESE STANDARD FARMING PRACTICES BE CONSIDERED "HUMANE"?



Whether killed in their own backyard by the very people they trusted, or hacked to pieces in a distant slaughterhouse where they are dragged onto the killing floor after enduring the prolonged agony of auction and transport, all of the young victims of our appetite are killed violently, unnecessarily, and in cold blood. None of these youngsters *wants* to die, none of them *deserves* to die, none of them *has* to die for us to live and thrive. **And not a single one of them experiences his or her own brutal, untimely death as "humane".** They all know they are going to be harmed, they all know they are going to die, and they are all terrified—some shake uncontrollably, some freeze in terror, some lose control of their bowels and vomit in fear. They all struggle desperately to escape, they all plead for a mercy that never comes, they all cling to their young lives to their last breath. Regardless what type of facility they are raised on, from "hobby" farms or industrial operations, animals farmed for their flesh are all killed at a very young age.

"Broiler" chickens are decapitated at 40-50 days old, so young that they still peep in their baby voices. Turkeys are slaughtered between 2 and 4 months, when they are barely adolescent. Pigs and lambs are brutally killed at 6 months of age, when they still act, think, and play like "puppies". The oldest goats killed for meat are "yearlings", the youngest are unweaned, 4-12 week old "suckling kids". "Beef" cattle are murdered between 12-15 months, at the age when, in nature, they are still deeply connected with their mothers.

Worldwide, 56 billion land animals are massacred for human appetites every year. 56 billion young lives, mocked as "meat", dismembered for an evening's amusement, burned, bitten and flushed as sewage. Each, a daughter, a son, a sister, a brother, a mother, a friend. Each, an individual with a mind, a heart, a language, a memory, and a meaning to their life that they well understand. Each, a being who values his or her life as much as you and I do.



THE MASS MURDER OF YOUNGSTERS



Abolition & Moral Shocks

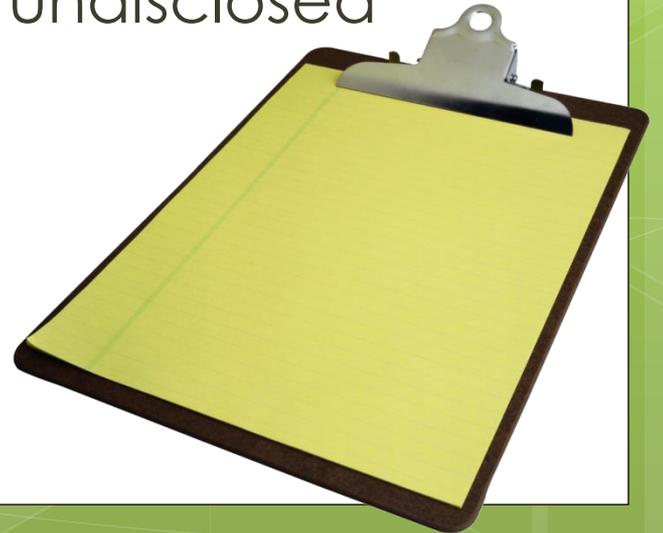
- Abolitionists do utilize moral shocks, though largely reliant on moral suasion
- Moral shocks are a traditional tactic of professionalized animal rights organizations and the two are highly associated
- The concern is that moral shocks will encourage viewers to support problematic welfare reforms and single-issue campaigns in a knee-jerk reaction of wanting to help nonhumans now





FARM Pay-Per-View

- 80% of viewers pledge to decrease animal product consumption and over 50% of viewers have made these changes 1 month later
- Pledge wording and options undisclosed



Literature Review

- Elicit strong emotions and disgust motivating participation (Herzog and Golden 2009)
- Moral shocks increase time and money donated (Burt and Strongman 2004; Maheswaran and Meyers-Levy 1990)
- More effective than narrative descriptions (Eayrs and Ellis 1990)
- More effective than networks in recruitment (Jasper and Poulsen 1995)
- Immediate or over time (Jasper 1998)
 - Study by McDonald (2000) supports this
- Participants exposed to a graphic vivisection film were disgusted and receptive to attitude change (Nabi 2009)

Literature Review (Continued)

- Effectiveness unclear (Cooney 2011; Rothman et al. 1992)
- Can cause viewers to shut down (Joy 2008)
- PETA advertisements were unpersuasive and viewed negatively or garnered little interest (Mika 2006)
- Social distance of those being blamed is important (Kilstein and Kilkenny 2011; Nepstad and Smith 2001; Maurer 2002)
- Personal networks may be more important than moral shocks (Cherry 2006)
- Those close to transitioning may be more receptive to rational discussion (Mika 2006)
- Prevalence of moral shocks in media desensitizes (Blaxter 2009)

Contextual Constraints

- Media
 - Positive vegan messages censored (Cole and Morgan 2011)
 - Pro-industry bias (Blaxter 2009; Kew 2003)
- Framing
 - Important in defining the problem, how to solve the problem, and how to motivate participation (Benford and Snow 2000)
 - Professionalized animal rights organizations maintain the dominant frame
 - Welfarist counterframing
- Identity
 - Audience and activists



Findings

- Support for moral shocks is mixed
- Context is key
 - Need a more supportive media atmosphere
 - Abolitionists, excluded from the dominant animal rights frame, will have difficulty using welfarist tactics for abolitionist goals
 - Must overcome negative identity associations
- Potential compromise in positive portrayals of nonhumans

