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Cover Stories: Concealing Speciesist Violence in U.S. News Reporting on the COVID-19 "Pork" Industry Crisis

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With a focus on journalistic discourse, this paper argues for a re-envisioning of food-system communication that takes non-human animals into account as stakeholders in systems that commodify them. This is especially urgent in light of the global pandemic, which has laid bare the vulnerability to crisis inherent in animal-based food production. As a case study to illustrate the need for a just and non-human inclusive orientation to food-systems communication, the paper performs a qualitative rhetorical examination, of a series of articles in major U.S. news sources in May of 2020, a few months into the economic shutdown in the U.S. in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, millions of pigs were brutally killed on U.S. farms due to the impossibility of killing them in slaughterhouses overrun with COVID-19 outbreaks. The analysis finds that media reporting legitimated violence against pigs by framing narratives from industry perspectives, deflecting agency for violence away from farmers, presenting pigs as willing victims, masking violence through euphemism, objectifying pigs and ignoring their sentience, and uncritically propagating industry rhetoric about "humane" farming. Through these representations, it is argued, the media failed in their responsibility to present the viewpoints of all sentient beings affected by the crisis; in other words, all stakeholders. The methodology merges a textually-oriented approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA) with social critique informed by critical animal studies (CAS), and the essay concludes with recommendations for journalists and other food-system communicators, which should be possible to implement even given the current capitalist, industry-influenced media environment and the demonstrated ruthlessness of animal industries in silencing voices inimical to their profitmaking.

Keywords: speciesism, media, animal agriculture, critical animal studies, animal-industrial complex, pigs, journalism, humane myth

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INTRODUCTION

At the university where I teach, I offer a course on animal ethics each year. As part of the course, students visit local animal sanctuaries where they meet and interact with cows, chickens, turkeys, ducks, sheep, pigs, and other non-human animals who have been rescued from the usual fate of members of their species, which is to be killed by humans for food. One of the sanctuaries is devoted entirely to pigs, and students frequently discover that, despite pigs' abysmal status in society and the stereotypes humans deploy to justify our oppression of them, they are highly social, clean, playful, and intelligent animals with all the cognitive and emotional capacities of the dogs and cats idealized

in Western society. Students reach these realizations through interacting with pigs in a safe place where they are not being commodified or made to serve human interests and are able to express some natural behaviors.

This student's reflection upon visiting Better Piggies Rescue is representative of the majority of 48 students from my classes who have toured the sanctuary:

> I had never gone to an animal sanctuary before because I never really knew they existed. Being around hundreds of pigs, all of whom have names and distinct personalities made me realize that these animals are commodified and pushed out of consumers' visibility. Beyond the sanctuaries, it is so easy to eat bacon without feeling much guilt; however, after spending an hour looking into all of their eyes and petting them it's very hard to rationalize it.

Another student recounts:

> The most fun part of going to this sanctuary was getting to see the baby piglets, since I had never really seen any in person before, and I had definitely never gotten to pet them or play with them. Many of them were really curious and explorative…It reminded me a lot of the behavior that is associated with puppies…Getting a first-hand experience with pigs seems to make people realize that pigs do have feelings and emotions, and do not want to feel pain.

Students were able to develop these perceptions about pigs due to factors they mention such as the pigs' having names and thus individual identities, and being allowed to freely play and socialize with humans and with each other, all of which is denied them in animal farming operations. Part of the reason for students' previous lack of awareness of pigs' cognitive and social capacities is that dominant cultural forces, including media communications about food systems, keep exploited non-human animals invisible. When they are presented in media stories, it is almost always as incidental figures in narratives centered on anthropocentric concerns, so that they are objectified as "mass terms" (Adams, 2000) rather than portrayed as individuals with subjectivity. In other words, they are presented solely in the context of their commodification.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT PIGS?

In order to be comprehensive, a re-imagining of food system discourse should take into account not only human participants, but all sentient food-system stakeholders. The most vulnerable of these are the non-human animals whose lives and deaths are entirely inscribed within capitalist logics of domination, objectification, and violence. As Constance Gordon and Kathleen Hunt explain: "Although food justice is an orientation to the food system, it is also an orientation to the people, places, non-human animals, and the economic and ecological relations by which the food system is organized" (Gordon and Hunt, 2018, p. 6). Taking this insight as a point of departure, I argue that that non-human animals should be included as sentient subjects, rather than mere commodified objects, in a food-justice approach to environmental communication.

A large and growing body of scientific literature on the sentience and sensitivity of pigs provides evidence that communicating about them as subjects is warranted. A recent article by cognitive ethologists Lori Marino and Christina M. Colvin Marino and Colvin (2015) synthesizes and builds on over one hundred ethological studies on pigs. Their findings include the following:

> All of these studies point to the presence of stable individual behavioral traits that reveal a complex personality in pigs that overlaps with that of other animals, including humans. As with any comparative scientific issue, the study of personality in pigs and how it interacts with their other characteristics is critical for a full understanding of who they are (p. 18).
> Pigs exhibit behaviors and patterns of interaction with one another that may be comparable to what has been observed in primates and some birds (p. 11).
> Common object play behaviors in pigs include shaking or carrying an object such as a ball or stick or tossing straw…Locomotor play includes waving/tossing of the head, scampering, jumping, hopping, pawing, pivoting, and gamboling (energetic running), flopping on the ground, and hopping around…Social play in pigs includes play fighting, pushing and running after each other…Many of these categories of play are combined and the behaviors are similar to play behavior in dogs and other mammals. Play in pigs not only satisfies a need for exploration and discovery, it also is critical for healthy development (p. 9).
> Emotions tend to influence more than one individual in a group. For instance, they can be shared through a process known as emotional contagion, the arousal of emotion in one individual upon witnessing the same emotion in another... Emotional contagion is considered, by some investigators, to be a simple form of empathy, the ability to feel the emotional state of another from the other's perspective… Emotional contagion has been demonstrated in many socially complex groups such as dogs …wolves…great apes…and only a few other non-human species, including pigs (p. 15).

When commodified in food systems, pigs are deprived of all opportunities for play, family relationships, and other essential healthy behaviors, and their empathetic emotional capacities, still intact, lead them to feel overwhelming fear, boredom, and depression. Psychologist Melanie Joy (2011) notes:

> Most pigs…spend their entire lives in intensive confinement and never see the outdoors until they are packed into trucks to be sent to slaughter. Shortly after piglets are born, they are typically castrated, and their tails are cut off, with-out anesthesia. Ranchers are told to remove ("dock") their tails with blunt, side-cutting pliers because the crushing action helps to reduce bleeding. Tail docking is necessary because under extreme stress and when all their natural urges have been thwarted, pigs develop neurotic behaviors and can actually bite each other's' tails off. This psychological reaction is one of the symptoms of what is referred to in the industry as porcine stress syndrome (PSS), a condition that is remarkably similar to what we call in humans post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (p. 42–3).

This morally problematic treatment of sentient individuals is inevitable in a system in which humans consume and commodify

other animals. Joy (2011) uses the term *carnism* to refer to the "violent ideology" that undergirds this system, and argues: "Contemporary carnism is organized around extensive violence. This level of violence is necessary in order to slaughter enough animals for the meat industry to maintain its current profit margin" (p. 32). A food-justice approach can fruitfully embrace a critical animal studies perspective by elucidating the reinforcement of carnism in dominant modes of food-system communication such as mass journalism.

Coronavirus Crisis

In May of 2020, a few months into the economic shutdown in the U.S. in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, millions of animals exploited for food, particularly pigs and chickens, were "depopulated" (an industry euphemism)—in other words, violently killed by the millions—on U.S. farms due to the impossibility of sending them to slaughterhouses, as would usually be done in order for the farmer to turn a profit. These conditions did not result in a higher number of pigs being killed than usual; the difference between this ostensible crisis and standard farming operation is that in May 2020, millions of pigs were killed in the places where they had been confined and exploited rather than being transported to the slaughterhouse in crowded trucks (trips that often take many hours or days, during which the pigs are deprived of food and water and linger in their own excrement). At the slaughterhouse, they are either hoisted upside down by a back leg and conveyed down the line until their throats are slit and they bleed to death, or they are forced into CO_2 gas chambers where their bodies essentially burn from the inside out as their lungs fill with carbon dioxide—both agonizing deaths.

While many North Americans were pointing an accusing finger at the Asian "live markets" to which the genesis of this particular pandemic is traced, they failed to condemn equally abominable practices in the U.S., or to note the many zoonotic pandemics that have originated from Western animal-exploitation food systems, such as influenza and swine flu (Gregor, 2020). Also largely escaping moral scrutiny was the fact that U.S. slaughterhouses are a hotbed of communicability of the COVID-19 virus, which is what led to the shutdown of slaughterhouses and thus the need for farmers to kill pigs themselves.

The U.S. media attention given to the mass killing of pigs in May of 2020 was therefore not due to the number of pigs killed or the violence visited upon them (since such atrocities are routine), but rather to the news peg (Benedict, 1992) offered by the human drama of farmers having to pay to kill pigs themselves rather than having them trucked off at a profit. The opportunity to interview animal farmers, who are generally idealized in the U.S. public imagination, is a sellable media moment. It is well-documented that pigs were killed in the most vicious and agonizing ways during the May 2020 "depopulation": the most common mode was "ventilation shutdown," in which oxygen supply to the pigs' confinement building is blocked at the same time that the temperature is raised. Most pigs slowly die over as long as twenty four hours as they suffocate while roasting alive. Those who survive this are shot or beaten to death (Greenwald, 2020).

Seen in light of the information about pigs' sentience and sensitivity conveyed above, this can be seen as a mass atrocity. And yet the media coverage of this event, as my analysis will show, generally adopted a glib tone and ignored the violence endured by the pigs, focusing solely on anthropocentric concerns such as the farmers' financial losses or, in a case of reverse victimology (a concept explained forthwith), the emotional suffering of the farmers who perpetrated the violence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Other analyses of the representations of sentient beings exploited for food in U.S. media include communications scholar Carrie P. Freeman (2009/2016) seminal study of how farmed animals were represented in US national print and broadcast news from 2000 to 2003. Freeman highlights a predominance of "anthropocentric news frames" that marginalize animal rights as a topic of public debate (2016, p. 169). She finds that "American news media largely support the speciesist status quo," and that "news media often objectify non-human animals discursively through: (1) commodification, (2) failure to acknowledge their emotional perspectives, and (3) failure to describe them as inherently valuable individuals" (2009, p. 78). As will be seen below, this is consistent with the findings of my analysis of the mass extermination of pigs during COVID.

Along similar lines, independent scholar and activist Karen Davis (2018), in her analysis of journalistic discourse on sentient beings exploited for food, found with few exceptions a disturbing "moral disengagement" on the part of journalists (p. 73). The news articles she examined reinforce the nonhuman-animal-consuming status quo while superficially purporting to attend to the interests of these beings. She provides evidence that "journalists do not always feel obligated to adhere to standards of precise language where farmed animals are concerned" (Davis, 2018, p. 75). Congruent with Freeman's (2009/2016) findings, Davis discovered that anthropocentric concerns, such as financial loss or gain, predominated in stories on farmed animal exploitation and suffering (Congruent with Freeman, 2009/2016).

Sociologist David Nibert (2002, 2013, 2016) documents the history of speciesism in mass media, which dates from this media's very inception in the early twentieth century. "Speciesist ideology and oppression, like other exploitative social arrangements, are so pervasive, and so pervasively promoted and normalized in both advertising and the content of the media, that it takes considerable effort just to become aware of it, much less to understand the institutional arrangements that compel it" (2016, p. 85). These institutional arrangements involve the political economy of corporate media (which is all U.S. media) as the major communicative arm of capitalist profit-taking entities, many of which are part of the animal-industrial complex, or the network of diverse and interdependent industries (food, pharmaceutical, chemical, and vivisection, among others) that profit from the exploitation of non-human animals[1].

[1]On the network of industries forming the *animal-industrial complex*, see Noske (1997), who coined the term. On the commercial corruption of media

Communications scholar Garrett M. Broad (2016), in evaluating the rhetorical effects of ag-gag laws devised by animal industries to suppress eyewitness accounts of their daily operations and to intimidate activists, notes that the harmful practices of animal agriculture "have generally occurred out of sight of the eating public." Moreover:

> Mainstream public discourse tends to further reinforce the structural power of the animal production industry. State-level agricultural disparagement laws, for instance, lower the barriers to entry for food producers who aim to initiate lawsuits against critics of their products…[T]hese frivolous "food libel" lawsuits subvert traditional legal standards and can have a chilling effect on media discussions related to animal production processes (Broad, 2016, p. 47).

What these industries have to hide, with the help of an intimidated and compliant media, is the systemic violence at the core of their activities. Critical animal studies scholar John Sanbonmatsu (2017) explains: "Today, non-human animals born into the industrialized agriculture system spend their whole lives in entirely artificial environments where their bodies, behaviors, and minds are forced to conform utterly to the needs of the administered world of capital" (p. 2). Thus it is not just the killing, but the entire lifespan of these oppressed beings that is characterized by violence, since they are treated as disposable units of production. Sanbonmatsu continues:

> The fact that pigs are curious, affectionate beings with needs and interests is…not of concern to the farmer who raises and sells them…When commodified non-humans are deemed no longer to possess commercial value within the system of exchange, they are thus liquidated, in the same way a shoe manufacturer might dispose of last season's shoes by sending them to a landfill (Sanbonmatsu, 2017, p. 9).

This is exemplified by the mass annihilation of pigs during the COVID slaughterhouse shutdowns, during which, as discussed below, pigs were murdered and literally dumped in landfills.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Examining a purposeful selection of news texts, this essay employs "textually oriented discourse analysis" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 2), a form of critical discourse analysis (CDA) that focuses on detailed examination of small selections of carefully chosen texts rather than examining large corpora of material on a more general, quantitative level. The objective of textually-oriented discourse analysis is to "transcend the division between work inspired by social theory [such as Foucauldian analysis], which tends not to analyze texts, and work which focuses upon the language of texts but tends not to engage with social theoretical issues" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 2–3). From a similar methodological orientation and specifically in the context of news media analysis, John E. Richardson (2007) proposes that since discourse contributes to producing and reproducing social inequalities, CDA should aim to impact upon social relationships, "particularly on relationships of disempowerment, dominance, prejudice, and/or discrimination" (p. 26). To effectuate this, he advocates for an "interpretive, contextual, and constructivist approach" to textual analysis, elaborating: "What this means is that critical discourse analysts offer interpretations of the meanings of texts rather than just quantifying textual features and deriving meaning from this" (Richardson, 2007, p. 15).

My goal is to merge this textually-oriented approach to CDA with social analysis informed by critical animal studies (CAS) in order build upon existing research about the textual representation of non-human animals in journalistic food-systems discourse (outlined above in the literature review). In focusing on hegemonic media discourses, the analysis gives "more attention to "top-down" relations of dominance than to "bottom-up" relations of resistance" (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 250), concentrating on elite media like *The New York Times*, National Public radio, and other high-circulation U.S. news sources with the rationale that because of their high social and economic capital, these outlets have a substantial influence on public sense- and decision-making, including among elite social actors. The analysis adopts the principles of, and contributes to, the fields of CDA and CAS, both of which enact a commitment to politically engaged scholarship that addresses power relations and how they are perpetuated in discourse, and eschew any pretenses to "objective," disengaged inquiry (Van Dijk, 1993; Best et al., 2007).

In order to analyze media coverage of the violence inflicted on pigs on farms during the COVID-19 pandemic, I will examine in detail three representative examples from a set of 32 articles and broadcasts by major US news outlets in May of 2020, and provide a synopsis of the other texts. Because media coverage of the mass pig extermination lasted for about two weeks, this sample is comprehensive and can be considered representative of how major, high-circulation news sources reported on the event. I will look at these texts in terms of the following analytical categories: (1) framing, or the perspective from which the narratives are told; (2) agency, especially as concerns the question of who inflicts and is victimized by crisis; (3) euphemism to conceal violence; (4) objectification of animals that denies them subjectivity; and (5) the humane myth, or rhetoric that presents exploiters of non-human animals as benign caretakers. In compiling relevant texts for analysis, I searched for the terms "pigs," "farmers," "COVID-19," and "pandemic" in the online editions of the *New York Times*, National Public Radio, the *Washington Post*, the *Chicago Tribune, CNN*, and NBC News. The date range of the search was 1 May 2020 through 31 May 2020. These news outlets were selected for their public image as credible, professional, and mainstream U.S. news sources, and included a mix of traditional newspapers, one radio outlet, and one major TV news network. Of 32 total news texts examined, three were selected as representative for analysis because they were devoted entirely to the mass extermination of pigs (rather than mentioning it tangentially), and because they were long and detailed enough to provide rich opportunities for analysis. These texts are as follows: a May 14 article in the *New York Times* with the headline "Meat Plant Closures Mean Pigs Are Gassed or Shot Instead" (Corkery and Bellany, 2020); an NPR story, also from May 14, titled "Millions of Pigs Will Be Euthanized as Pandemic Cripples Meatpacking Plants" (Mak,

under capitalism, see Chomsky (2002), Stauber and Rampton (2002); and McChesney (2015).

2020); and a piece by NBC news, dated May 28, headlined "Coronavirus Crisis Puts Hog Farmers in Uncharted Territory: Killing Their Healthy Livestock." The three texts are from different news genres (print, radio, and television, respectively). An analysis of them now follows, with an examination of other texts in the overall sample included in the section "Additional Texts" immediately preceding this essay's conclusion.

Analysis

Framing

There is extensive literature on news framing, i.e., how news stories selectively present particular elements of a reported event as most salient while neglecting other perspectives (Gamson, 1989; Fowler, 1991; Iyengar, 1991; Entman, 1993; Mills, 1995; Price et al., 1997; Fairclough, 2003; Kuypers, 2010; Patterson, 2013). To examine framing in terms of imbalanced power relations, feminist linguist Sara Mills (1995) has employed the concept of "focalization," adopted from narratology and concerned with how highlighting the voices of particular characters "slants the emotive and ideological content of a text" (Mills, 1995, p. 185). Focalization shapes what Mills calls the "dominant reading," that is, the kind of audience-subject a text conjures and constructs.

The discourse of the news articles examined for this study assumed an audience that is socially conditioned to accept violence against pigs in food systems as morally unproblematic. It was focalized from the perspective of farmers, that is, those who profit from the exploitation of sentient beings. Because events were presented as an economic and human-interest story, this framing might initially seem justifiable. However, considering that the pigs who were the direct victims of the crisis are sentient individuals, excluding their interests and subjectivity from the narrative is an oversight and violates the press's social responsibility to reflect relevant viewpoints of all those affected by the issues on which it reports. Freeman (2009/2016) calls for the press to adhere to its obligation to represent the perspectives of all groups affected by the issues on which it reports; this mandates including the perspectives of non-human animals in new stories on agricultural practices in which they are exploited (2016, p. 169).

Even when a purely anthropocentric frame is adopted (which is standard in media and other dominant cultural spaces), citing only the viewpoints of farmers is still an oversight in that it excludes other relevant voices, such as those of animal advocates or experts in cognitive ethology. The narrow, industry-focalized framing of these news stories is seen in the fact that every quotation in all three representative articles contains the words of a pig-farming industry representative. These voices include the those of the "head of a pork producers association" (Solon, 2020, para. 1); "Mike Patterson, a hog farmer from Kenyon, Minnesota" (Solon, 2020, paras. 4, 7, and passim); "David Preisler, CEO of the Minnesota Pork Producers Association" (Solon, 2020, paras. 8 and 9); "Brad Kluver, a third generation pig farmer in Lake Crystal, Minnesota" (Solon, 2020, paras. 17 and 19); "Terry O'Neel, a pork producer from Friend, Nebraska" (Solon, 2020, para. 24); "Third generation hog farmer Chad Leman" (Mak, 2020, para. 1), also identified as "a farmer from Eureka, Ill., and a board member of the Illinois Pork Producers Association" (Mak, 2020, para. 11); "Heather Hill, a multi-generational hog farmer living in Greenfield, Ind." (Mak, 2020, para. 13); "Greg Boerboom, a second-generation pig farmer in Marshall, Minn." (Corkery and Bellany, paras. 5, 20, 24, 32, 34, 35–37, and a photo caption); "Steve Meyer, a pork industry analyst" (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, para. 12) "Shane Odegaard" who has a "farm in South Dakota" (NYT, paras. 16-17); and "Dean Meyer, a farmer in northwest Iowa" (NYT, paras. 23, 26, and 27). These personalized, geographically situated, and family-oriented (e.g., "third generation" and so forth) attributions focalize events from these industry profiteers' perspectives, inviting readers to identify with them as individuals. (Pigs, on the other hand, are presented as a depersonalized mass)

Framing involves more than simply whose voices are included; it is also a matter of how the problem is presented, and from whose perspective readers are positioned to see the issues at hand (Patterson, 2013). This excerpt from NBC news is representative of the texts examined in its exclusive emphasis on the economic struggle and ostensible good character of farmers:

> Facing rising costs and increasingly cramped conditions for their herds, some hog farmers across the Midwest have taken drastic action: killing their perfectly healthy pigs. "This goes against everything we do," Mike Patterson, a hog farmer from Kenyon, Minnesota, told NBC News. "We realize these animals are going to be killed, but we take great pride in knowing we are putting food on Americans" tables and trying to give the animals the best care we can to ensure they are healthy and thriving every day. To see that go to waste is difficult (Solon, 2020, paras. 3–4).

In contrast to the personalized representation of farmers shown above, pigs are identity-less "herds." Framing the mass killing of "perfectly healthy pigs" as "drastic action" obfuscates that this is what farmers do on a routine basis; the only difference is that they were economically compelled to perform themselves what slaughterhouse workers customarily do to the pigs from whose deaths the farmers profit. To say that this "goes against everything" they do is therefore a misrepresentation, making it sound as if their work is usually violence-free and that they are purely benign caretakers. Equally misleading is the implication that the pigs' deaths, which the exploiters allegedly find regrettable, is for the higher purpose of "putting food on Americans' tables." The objective, of course, is to turn a profit, and the clichéd narrative that farmers are altruistic providers for both non-human animals and human consumers is what Brian Luke (2007) identifies as a common industry "cover story" utilized to maintain public support and stave off criticism prompted by the work of activists. Luke explains:

> Industry cover stories work to disincline us from sympathetic intervention. They all say in effect, "Well, there may be animals being harmed here, but what we're doing is so important, you better let us continue." The cover story for the animal farming industry, of course, is that they are providing food for people. Human consumption of animal flesh is portrayed as an unremarkable given, leading to a consumer "demand" for meat that simply must be met…This story obscures the crucial facts

> that the taste for meat is culturally variable, not innate, that animal flesh is not a nutritional necessity for humans (indeed, the standard North American flesh-based diet is unhealthy), and that the animal farming industries do not passively respond to some mass insistence for meat, but rather actively construct markets for their products in order to accumulate profits (p. 138).

Seen in this light, the press's uncritical conveyance of this industry narrative constructs a narrow, one-sided depiction of events that fails to offer readers a more probing, critical lens through which to analyze the crisis. Such a critical lens—which would question the healthfulness and necessity of eating pigs' flesh, and the precarity of a food system that requires such extreme violence and can so easily be disrupted—would provide a more balanced depiction of the crisis and would offer tools for creating sustainable solutions.

This excerpt from NPR demonstrates further the uncritical, industry-aligned framing insofar as it characterizes the pig-flesh industry as an efficient and practical food production system which has only become problematic due to COVID-19:

> Before the Coronavirus crisis, pork production was a finely-tuned, just-in-time supply chain. During normal times, this led to efficiency and the reduction of the cost to produce pork. Now, it is a significant burden to hog farmers who will have nowhere to sell their ready-for-market pigs (Mak, 2020, par. 12).

Unmentioned here are potentially resurfacing, previous pandemics that have been directly caused by the pig-flesh industry, such as swine flu, and that non-human animal agriculture in general is a disease-generating industry due to the fetid conditions in which sentient beings are forced to live, the prevalence of excrement, blood, and other bodily fluids at every stage of the "supply chain," and the transmission of these biohazardous substances to and among slaughterhouse workers and into the resulting products. In fact, the reason for the slaughterhouse closures that triggered the very crisis being discussed is that slaughterhouses are hotbeds for disease transmission, including COVID-19 (Gregor, 2020; Molteni, 2020; Reuben, 2020; Taylor et al., 2020). Also evident in the above excerpt is a portrayal of "hog farmers" as the victims of the crisis, with no moral concern for the violence they inflict on the crisis's true innocent victims, the pigs. I turn next to this deflection of agency.

Agency

Although pigs are direct victims in this system, media coverage of the crisis presented farmers as the only legitimate victims, focusing not only on their economic hardships but also on their emotional distress at having to do, at a cost to themselves, work from which they usually receive remuneration when done by others (i.e., slaughterhouse workers). This kind of semantic reversal can be interpreted within the framework of *reverse victimology*, a concept that has been used in studies of gendered, human-to-human violence to describe a reactionary rhetoric in which perpetrators of violence become the ostensible victims, and the actual victims' interests and experiences are neglected or dismissed (Stringer, 2014; Barca, 2018). Although the human-to-non-human violence discussed in the present essay is different in important ways from human-based gendered violence, the structures of domination and the valorization of perpetrators are similar enough that the concept of reverse victimology may be applied.

There are many examples of this reversal in the news sample; for instance, the *New York Times* recounted:

> "There are farmers who cannot finish their sentences when they talk about what they have to do," said Greg Boerboom, a second-generation pig farmer in Marshall, Minn.… The obligation to kill the animals themselves, and then get rid of the carcasses, is wrenching… "The economic part of it is damaging," said Steve Meyer, a pork industry analyst. "But the emotional and psychological and spiritual impact of this will have much longer consequences" (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, paras. 5, 9, 11).

While the inherently predatory non-human-animal-based food system can be seen as indirectly victimizing some human participants to a degree, including some farmers, there is still no doubt that they profit from exploiting sentient individuals while staying in that line of work at least somewhat voluntarily, and routinely carrying out atrocities such as confining mother pigs in cages so small they cannot turn around, killing unprofitable baby pigs by blunt force trauma, and removing pigs' tails, testicles, and teeth without anesthesia. Therefore, when the quoted industry representatives speak of "not being able to finish their sentences" and "the emotional and psychological and spiritual impact" on themselves, the discourse omits reference to the routine violence they perform. The journalistic discourse omits any inquiry into why this particular crisis is so much more "wrenching" than business as usual, and whether it has more to do with financial loss than empathy for pigs[2].

These statements from the *New York Times* are particularly vivid in terms of reverse victimology and ignoring the impact on those violated:

> Mr. Boerboom attended one of the presentations [by "pork industry groups"] and listened to a farmer talk about the emotional strain of killing about 3,000 pigs in a single day. After the call, Mr. Boerboom learned that the farmer had used a gun. "It was an all-day process," he said (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, paras. 35–36).

The journalist does not draw attention to the emotional and psychological impact upon each individual pig who watched as her kin were shot one-by-one until it was her turn (imagine the terror at the sound of the gunshots, the cries of pain and fear of the others, and the smell of their blood). Or, under the "ventilation shutdown" technique, of simultaneously being deprived of oxygen while her flesh roasts in temperatures above 140 degrees. These facts are omitted, while farmers are portrayed

[2]It is important to note that a number of farmers voluntarily exit the business and many former farmers now speak out regularly about the cruelties of the industry. See Free From Harm (n/d).

as worthy victims burdened with the "emotional strain" of carrying out these actions.

Many other instances of reverse victimology were present, with farmers quoted as saying: "It keeps me up every night" (Solon, 2020, par. 19); "The emotional and financial impact of the pandemic on farmers is devastating" (Solon, 2020, par. 24); and, in a particularly glib exclamation that belies the claims of emotional devastation: "My wife and I have a longstanding joke between us. She always says, 'well Chad, it could be worse,'" Leman told NPR. "And I say, 'I know, but it could be better!'" (Mak par. 23). The journalists emphasized that farmers were "forced" (or other language signaling that they were compelled) to carry out violence (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, lead and paras. 2, 4, 9, 26; Mak, 2020, paras. 1, 4-5, 7, 12; Solon, 2020, paras. 19, 20). This emphasis presented "farmers" as passive victims and ignored the grisly *force* they literally and constantly enact upon the sentient beings under their control.

Willing Victims

Not only were farmers presented as the true victims of the crisis, but non-human animals were subtly portrayed as consenting to their own exploitation, a common trope in industry rhetoric[3]. For instance, news texts implied that pigs were eager to go to the slaughterhouse (italics have been added for emphasis in each excerpt below):

> Coronavirus outbreaks at meatpacking plants have created a backlog of *animals ready for slaughter but with nowhere to go*. Farmers are having to cull them (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, lead).
> Meat processing plants have shut down across the United States as the coronavirus has spread among workers, creating enormous bottlenecks in an inelastic supply chain. The result has been empty shelves in grocery stores and millions of *pigs that are all fattened up with nowhere to go* (Solon, 2020, para. 2).
> *Hogs ready for slaughter* cannot be easily held on farms because of their fast rate of growth (Mak, 2020, para. 10).
> Before the Coronavirus crisis, pork production was a finely-tuned, just-in-time supply chain. During normal times, this led to efficiency and the reduction of the cost to produce pork. Now, it is a significant burden to hog farmers who will have nowhere to sell their *ready-for-market pigs* (Mak, 2020 para. 12).

The rhetoric of pigs "ready" for slaughter reinforces the speciesist myth that animals consent to their oppression and willingly submit themselves to the objectives of humans. High-profile media outlets such as the ones cited might do well to update their framing to be more consistent with contemporary ethological knowledge about non-human sentience; they might even cite abundantly available scientific evidence that pigs and other exploited animals resist and suffer greatly under these conditions and are not willing victims. More accurate phrasing would convey that the farmers are the ones "ready" to benefit from their deaths.

[3]On the myth of nonhuman-animal consent to exploitation, see Foer, 2009, p. 113; Cole, 2016, pp. 99-101; Grillo, 2016, pp. 24-27; Stănescu, 2017, pp. 121-123; and Stănescu and Stănescu, 2020, pp. 164-167.

Euphemism

In her analysis of newspaper opinion pieces, Dunayer (2016) found that euphemisms masking speciesist violence were rampant (see also Stibbe, 2001, 2012). Among these euphemisms was use of the term "euthanasia" in situations other than those that coincide with its definition: "killing someone who is experiencing incurable suffering" (p. 98). Following Dunayer's analysis, "euthanasia" is an inaccurate characterization of the murder of pigs for reasons of human economic interest and food-system malfunction. All of the news articles in the May 2020 sample nonetheless used the term, often prolifically. It was used as either a noun or a verb six times in the *New York Times*, seven times by NBC news, and nine times in the NPR story. This terminology obfuscated the severity of violence and failed to convey social reality to audiences.

While "euthanize" was the most prevalent euphemism in the news texts examined, others were present; for example, several are seen in combination in these passages, to which emphasis has been added:

> Some [farmers] have found smaller butcher shops to handle the slaughter and *processing* of a small proportion of pigs, but many of those are now booked up for months, Preisler [a pig farming industry executive] said, and are no substitute for the industrial-scale *harvesting* of pigs provided by large *meat processing plants* of companies such as JBS USA, Tyson Foods and Smithfield Foods (Solon, 2020, para. 12).
> *Depopulation* means losing the approximately $130 it takes to raise a pig to market size on top of having to pay to *euthanize* and dispose of the animal (Solon, 2020, para. 14).
> With meatpacking plants reducing *processing* capacity nationwide, U.S. hog farmers are bracing or [sic] an unprecedented crisis: the need to *euthanize* millions of pigs (Mak, 2020, para. 1).
> He [third generation hog farmer Chad Leman] means [the pigs should be] gone to the *meatpacking plant to be processed*. But with *pork processing plants* shut down due to worker safety concerns, he's faced with a grisly task: He needs to kill the pigs to make room for more. / And Leman isn't the only one. With *meatpacking plant* closures and reduced *processing* capacity nationwide, America's hog farmers expect an unprecedented crisis: the need to *euthanize* millions of pigs (Mak, 2020, paras. 4-5).
> This [high incidences of COVID spread in slaughterhouses] has led to a significantly reduced capacity for *processing hogs into pork,* which is forcing farmers like Leman to make the difficult (Mak, 2020, para. 6).
> Coronavirus outbreaks at *meatpacking plants* have created a backlog of animals ready for slaughter but with nowhere to go. Farmers are having to *cull* them (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, lead).
> In Minnesota, an estimated 90,000 pigs have been killed on farms since the *meat plants* began closing last month (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, para. 5).

Using the innocuous-sounding term "plant" to refer to slaughterhouses deemphasizes that these are sites of continuous killing and dismemberment. The terms "cull" and "harvest" also deflect this reality. This kind of morally-obfuscating terminology is often recommended in "meat"-industry literature (Luke, 2007; Stibbe, 2012) and was uncritically adopted by journalists.

"Depopulate," another industry locution (Greenwald, 2020), serves a similar obfuscating function. Another industry term widely adopted in the news sample, as seen above, is "pork," used to refer to the flesh of pigs, sentient creatures reduced to a food commodity. This kind of objectifying language is discussed next.

Objectification

In her seminal study of the representation of non-human animals in mainstream news, including during times of crisis due to zoonotic disease, Freeman (2009/2016) discovered: "Objectification was found to be a result of three discursive methods by the media: (1) talking about farmed animals as commodities; (2) failing to critique the ethics of the situation from the nonhuman animal's perspective and ignoring emotional issues they face, and (3) denying farmed animals individual identities" (2016, p. 172). All three of these forms of discursive objectification were prevalent in the news texts analyzed for the present study, as demonstrated by the following: "'Each load of pigs we can't sell, it definitely creates a domino effect, where we have a backlog of pigs,' she [Heather Hill, a "multi-generational hog farmer"] told NPR… But without meat processing, you can't turn pigs into pork" (Mak, 2020, paras. 15, 18). As seen earlier, "meat processing" stands in euphemistically for the murder via which the industry to "turn[s] pigs into pork." The presence of the commodity term "pork," its proximity to "pigs" in the phrase, and the nonchalant tone conveyed that this commodification is an unproblematic given. Pigs are referred to in terms of "loads" of which there is a "backlog," as if they were inanimate commodities rather than sentient individuals. *The New York Times* also referred to a "backlog" of pigs (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, lead and paras. 4 and 5).

Similarly objectifying references appeared in the sample. The *New York Times* informed readers: "Older, larger pigs have to be sold to the meatpacking plants to make room for younger *batches*," using a term more properly applied to inanimate objects like pastries (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, para. 19, emphasis added). NBC narrated: "The ordeal isn't over once the animals are euthanized. Farmers then have to find a way to transport and dispose of those 350 lb. carcasses" (Solon, 2020, para. 20). This highlights the "ordeal" of the "farmers" but not that of the pigs, who are reduced to a mass of carcasses to transport and destroy. The nation's paper of record declared: "The waste of viable pigs at a time of great need is causing both deep economic loss and emotional anguish across the nation's pork industry" (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, para. 4). The implication that humans' "great need" for food can best be satisfied with pigs' flesh is misinforming, while sociable beings with diverse personalities, who care for their families, love to play, have excellent problem-solving skills and a strong will to live are reduced to "waste." They were considered "viable" not as living beings with intrinsic worth, but as sellable bodies. The "anguish" is not theirs but that of the "pork industry." The *New York Times* reported: "'Every animal has a purpose,' [pig farmer Greg Boerboom] said. 'Every being has a purpose. We have raised these pigs to go into the food supply. And now so many are being wasted"' (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, para. 38). The claim that pigs' "purpose" is to become commodities in the human supply chain ignores their status as sentient beings whose species preexisted *homo sapiens*. Overall, pigs were presented in the news texts as de-individualized objects for whom no ethical concern need be mobilized.

The Humane Myth

The idea that sentient beings may be exploited and killed "humanely" has permeated the commercial landscape in recent years, assuaging consumers' consciences and making veganism appear unnecessary. This notion has been challenged by a range of researchers (including but not limited to Francione, 1996; Stănescu and Stănescu, 2020; Stănescu and Stănescu, Stănescu (2011, 2017); Adams, 2013; Bohanec, 2013; Borkfelt et al., 2015; Grillo, 2016; Canavan, 2017). As a communicative arm of industry and a capitalist enterprise in itself, the press frequently promotes the commercially-profitable myth of "humane" animal farming, exemplified by reporting on pig extermination during COVID-19, in which for industry representatives promoted the cover story of "caring" commodification.

Before looking at this rhetoric, it should be noted that the killing of pigs on farms during COVID-19 was particularly cruel, as is well-documented thanks in part to an undercover video procured by the activist group Direct Action Everywhere. Those willing to watch the video will see and hear undeniable signs of the pigs' suffering[4]. The day-to-day experiences of beings exploited for food, apart from this crisis, are also filled with constant violence, deprivation and suffering, even on farms that are certified "humane" (HumaneFacts.org)[5].

It is therefore a distortion for farmers to claim that they are "trying to give the animals the best care we can to ensure they are healthy and thriving every day" (Solon, 2020, para. 4). This "care" includes harsh confinement, mutilations, removal of babies from mothers, and premature death (as the new articles themselves explain, pigs are killed at six months of age, when they are children; the natural lifespan of a pig is 10–15 years). Another farmer claimed that the industry was trying to "figure out how can we most efficiently and humanely do this" (Mak, 2020, para. 19). The CEO of the Minnesota Pork Producers Association claims, "It's not nearly as gory as a person might think" (Solon, 2020, para. 23). One farmer "wouldn't say how his pigs were euthanized, only that it was done 'humanely"' (Solon, 2020, para. 7). Yet another laments, "I spent my whole life taking care of these pigs" (Solon, 2020, para. 19), a puzzling claim given the six-month lifespan allotted to them.

[4]The video may be viewed here. Viewers are warned that it is disturbing: https://youtu.be/UhavFP9f6b4 (Intercept, 2020). In lieu of watching the video, the account by veteran investigative journalist Glenn Greenwald, co-founder of independent news organization The Intercept, may suffice. Greenwald describes the most common killing method, "ventilation shutdown," noting that millions of pigs in Iowa alone were being "depopulated" (the industry's term, as previously noted): "by sealing off all airways to their barns and inserting steam into them, intensifying the heat and humidity inside and leaving them to die overnight. Most pigs—though not all—die after hours of suffering from a combination of being suffocated and roasted to death. The recordings obtained by The Intercept include audio of piercing cries as pigs succumb" (Greenwald, 2020, para. 3).

[5]Humane Facts. Overview of "Humane" Meat, Dairy and Eggs. Available online at: https://humanefacts.org/overview/ (accessed May 31, 2021).

This emphasis on "care" was also conveyed in the claim that "It's totally against our nature… The natural thing is to keep everything alive, and give the best care we can." (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, paras. 25–26). Unfortunately, there is little that is "natural" about this industry, and maintaining in salable condition animals who live distorted, thwarted existences for a small fraction of their natural lifespans cannot plausibly qualify as "keep[ing] everything alive." The "best care" possible would be akin what the animals receive at the sanctuary mentioned at the beginning of this essay, where pigs live out their natural lives in a space where they can freely roam, choose and stay with their friends, and experience daily kindness from humans who want nothing from them but their well-being. At the most basic level, the industry's rhetoric of "care" is discredited by the mere facts of the crisis under discussion: farmers clearly cannot care for all the animals they have committed to "raising" if in a crisis the only solution is to kill them because farmers cannot afford to "care" for them once they are no longer profitable. This situation reveals that the relationship is more exploitative than caring, despite the farmers' professed that their role is that of benign stewards.

The misleading use of "euthanize," as discussed earlier, itself promotes this myth of humane exploitation. Statements of this kind included: "Farmers try everything they can to avoid euthanizing the pigs they have cared for over many months, including reducing the animals' calorie intake to slow their growth, raising the temperature in the barn to reduce their appetite…(Solon, 2020, para. 11). In other words, they starved the pigs and made them so uncomfortable they didn't want to eat, and this is framed as "care." Readers also learn: "For years, farming groups and state agencies have published guidelines on how to euthanize the animals humanely" (Corkery and Bellany, 2020, para. 30). Such statements betray that the discourse is misusing the term "euthanize": true euthanasia, done painlessly for the benefit of the euthanized individual, is by definition "humane." By contrast, it is a stretch at best to apply the term to what pigs endure in the "pork" industry.

Additional Texts

The three texts analyzed above were selected for detailed analysis; the others examined were consistent ideologically and linguistically with them in terms of the analytical categories applied in this paper. A cursory look at their headlines evidences speciesist framing, euphemism, objectification, and reverse victimology. For instance, a *Washington Post* headline reported: "Being a pig farmer was already hard. Then came coronavirus" (Bailey, 2020). It followed this anthropocentric framing and obliteration of the true victims with the sub-headline: "This Iowa farmer loves his work. But amid meatpacking plant disruptions, he's fighting to keep his pigs from being euthanized" (Bailey, 2020). This personalizes and individualizes the farmer, presented as a besieged hero kindly fighting to avoid "euthanizing" his commodified beings. This piece also, like those examined above, uncritically accepted a glorified version of animal farmers' work: "You're essential because you're trying to feed the world," the interviewed farmer proclaimed, unchallenged by the journalist (Bailey, 2020, para. 1).

Similarly, CNN released a piece headlined, "Even as grocery stores limit meat sales, US farmers may have to euthanize 10 million pigs." (Kallingal, 2020), which reported that "pig farmers around the country are having to make the unthinkable decision of having to euthanize their livestock (Kallingal, 2020, para. 1). This was followed by typically anthropocentric framing and reliance on industry representatives as sources: "The National Pork Producers Association estimates up to 10 million hogs could be euthanized between April and September. And this could lead to some farmers facing financial disaster" (Kallingal, 2020, para. 1).

Although still exhibiting speciesist scripts, an article in the *Chicago Tribune* was unique in including some voices of non-human animal advocates. The headline euphemized violence ("Slaughterhouses reopen but farmers still euthanizing pigs"), and the lead objectified sentient beings and trivialized moral objections by calling them "complaints" ("..production backlogs are forcing farmers to euthanize thousands of hogs that can't be processed, drawing complaints from animal welfare advocates" [Pitt, 2020, para. 1]). However, the piece cited the exposé by Direct Action Everywhere mentioned earlier in this essay, including a screenshot from the undercover video. "In the video, pigs can be heard squealing," the journalist relayed (Pitt, 2020, para. 9). Matt Johnson, identified as a Direct Action Everywhere leader, was quoted saying "the longstanding systemic abuses of animal agriculture have been openly exposed for the world to see" (Pitt, 2020, para. 11). Also quoted was Ingrid Newkirk, president of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals: "'Steaming pigs alive and roasting them to death show that cruelty to animals is a part of pig farmers' way of life, and the only way to stop this—given that pig farmers have made themselves above the law—is for people to run from buying pork, screaming as loudly as the pigs scream in the barns,' Newkirk said in a statement" (Pitt, 2020, para. 13).

These statements in favor of animal rights were followed by the claims of industry members deploying a rhetoric of in reverse victimology by blaming animal activists for allegedly targeting farmers unfairly: "It is no surprise that, at this most difficult moment, an animal activist group is attempting to use this to promote their own agenda…We are in tremendous pain knowing that this awful decision had to be made. Recording and releasing video of the euthanasia process only reinforces the hurt our team feel," declared Iowa Select Farms owner Jeff Hansen, who promoted the humane myth by claiming that "his company worked with animal welfare experts, veterinarians and technicians to oversee the process after making 'the painful decision to euthanize some of our herd'" (Pitt, 2020, paras. 16-17). State Agriculture Secretary Mike Naig concurred, lamenting: "I think that our producers are experiencing an unprecedented disruption in their business and their way of life and we've got folks with a clear agenda and they're kicking our farmers when they're down" (Pitt, 2020, para. 20). It is common for mainstream discourse to accuse animal activists of having an "agenda" (as if that were a moral failing in itself), while neglecting to highlight the much more monetized and culturally propagandized agenda of the animal farming industries to cajole consumers into purchasing ever-larger quantities of the products that result from their undertakings. In sum, while this *Tribune* article

stood out in the sample for quoting two activists, it ultimately reverted to reporting patterns that reinforced the legitimacy of the "pork" industry.

CONCLUSION

The U.S. news media's reporting on the COVID-19 "pork" industry crisis reproduced speciesist ideologies and legitimated violence against pigs. The media thereby made themselves complicit in non-human oppression. They did this by framing narratives purely from oppressor perspectives, deflecting agency for violence, masking atrocities through euphemism, objectifying non-human animals as commodities and ignoring their sentience, and propagating industry-created falsehoods about "humane" exploitation. Although the present essay is limited in scope to one incident unfolding over 2 weeks of news reporting, and therefore may not be taken as representative of the press on a wider basis, it nonetheless can be said that based on this sample, there was no discernable improvement in the press's coverage of issues affecting non-human animals exploited for food since earlier, related studies were published (e.g., Freeman, 2009/2016; Stibbe, 2012; Davis, 2018). The media's May 2020 representation of pigs as examined above is inexcusable in light of abundant data about pig sentience (compiled in Marino and Colvin, 2015), including in the popular press (e.g., Bekoff, 2015).

A justice informed approach to food-systems communication may with reason call the news media to account for such representations. Scientific evidence of the multifaceted mindedness of non-human beings is easily accessible and includes public affirmations such as The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness (2012), a statement by hundreds of world-class scientists asserting non-human animals' advanced cognition, emotional complexity, and capacity to suffer on par with humans. Non-human animals, including the mammals, avians, and fishes commonly used for human food, have sophisticated inner worlds. To deny that their experiences matter, either overtly or by omission, is inconsistent with both moral and scientific reasoning, and such denial can only be maintained through the irrational ideology of speciesism, propped up by the commercial entities that profit from its perpetuation.

To reflect more broadly on the analysis undertaken in this essay, one may evaluate the May 2020 "pork" industry crisis through a food systems (deep structural issues) rather than an episodic (dramatic focus on individuals) lens[6]. Although systems are made up of individuals, food-justice perspective can fruitfully extend beyond the claims of individual farmers in order to aid public understanding of the advantages and weaknesses of various facets of the existing food system. Indeed, the COVID crisis put into relief the flaws of an animal-based food system, which generates disease and facilitates its transmission and is extremely vulnerable to supply-chain disruptions. It is also inhumane, as some of the interviewed farmers' statements seemed to recognize (for instance, speaking of the "emotional" and "spiritual" consequences of the crisis, Corkery and Bellany, 2020, para. 11). Farmers regularly kill pigs on a limited basis, but they do not typically perform routinized killing directly. That task is allocated to some of the most marginalized food-system workers in the U.S., many of whom experience PTSD and physical impairments from the dangerous and grueling work of slaughterhouses. Unlike farmers, slaughterhouse workers are not idealized by the public and are unlikely to be interviewed in mainstream media. That farmers were reportedly shaken by briefly experiencing an approximation of slaughterhouse work affirms the mentally unhealthy effects of committing violence against other animals[7]. When consumers buy the resulting products, they are paying for others to experience these deleterious effects. What is more, "pig farming"—and all animal agriculture—has severe environmental costs and negatively impacts humans who consume sentient beings like pigs. Such consumption is conclusively linked to increased risk of cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and a host of other illnesses prevalent in societies that consume meat-heavy diets (Esselstyn, 2008; Fuhrman, 2012, 2016; Gregor, 2015; Campbell and Campbell, 2016; Barnard, 2018).

Perhaps some of the farmers affected by the 2020 crisis have or will transition out of the non-human-animal-farming business into plant-based sectors of the food system. Others have done so before them and now speak out about industry's cruelties (Free From Harm, 2018), and organizations exist whose mission it is to assist farmers who want to shift from animal to plant-based agriculture, such as the Rancher Advocacy Program. Beyond the decisions of individual farmers, evidence is strong that mass veganism is a necessary precursor to a sustainable food system. The COVID-occasioned crisis simply displayed in more-vivid-than-usual ways the severity of the defects of animal-based food systems[8].

It has been well-established that humans do not have to consume the flesh and reproductive secretions of other animals in order to be healthy,[9] and that doing so is in fact linked to many health risks.

Whether it is in stories on animal agriculture or in other contexts, representing the interests of non-human animals is obligatory if the press is to adhere to its social responsibility to include relevant perspectives of all groups affected by the issues on which it reports. Carrie P. Freeman and Debra Merskin call for such inclusion, citing the United States' Society of Professional Journalists' code of ethics, which mandates that journalists "give voice to the voiceless" (qtd. in Freeman and Merskin, 2016, p. 205)[10]. Freeman et al. (2011) argue: "As part of journalism's

[6]The media framed the crisis episodically, or in terms only of individual social actors rather than deeper structural issues, as they do with virtually all social issues. See Iyengar, 1991, pp. 14-16 on episodic vs. systemic or "thematic" framing.

[7]See Joy, 2011, for an overview of the post-traumatic effects experienced by slaughterhouse workers, and their higher propensity to commit family and other human-to-human violence because of this.

[8]If it were not for government subsidies and bailouts, the animal food industries would already economically unviable. See Fortuna (2016) and Sewell (2020) for a discussion of the approximately multi-billion-dollar yearly U.S. taxpayer subsidies to these industries and its political underpinnings. Solon (2020, paras. 20-22) references the USDA government assistance provided to bail out "pork" farmers during the 2020 crisis.

[9]Mainstream health organizations such as the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics have deemed vegan diets healthful for all life stages; see Melina et al., 2016.

[10]Merskin and Freeman's (n.d.) website on the topic of media representations of animals in media is also an excellent resource for media practitioners and activists alike.

commitment to truth and justice. . . journalists have an obligation to provide the perspective of non-human animals" (p. 1). I concur with these arguments, and it should be possible to implement more careful and informed representations of non-humans even in the current capitalist, industry-influenced media environment, at least to a limited extent. For instance, based on the analysis provided in this essay, it is recommended that journalists:

1. Consider and include the experiences of non-human animals and the viewpoints of humans who advocate for them, rather than only quoting individuals with a financial interest in the continued oppression of sentient beings.
2. Make agency and accountability clear when reporting acts of speciesist violence, rather than engaging in reverse victimology and implying that non-humans consent to their exploitation.
3. Avoid euphemism and other inaccurate semantics that normalize or conceal violence. For instance, only use the term "euthanasia" according to its proper definition: painless killing of a being experiencing incurable suffering, and only for the benefit of that being and not of the one doing the killing.
4. Present non-human beings as the sentient individuals that they are by granting them subjectivity rather than objectifying them with industry terms and other degrading language forms.
5. Question agriculture industry representatives' claims that what they do to non-human animals is "humane."

These recommendations have meaningful overlap with those of Freeman and Merskin (2016), who recommend that "[non-human animals] and their perspectives should be routinely covered and included in news about them" (p. 210); and that journalists should "avoid primarily using industry terms (especially euphemisms)" (p. 213) and instead represent non-human animals "as sentient individuals (fellow species who share the planet) rather than presenting them primarily in human-centered terms" (p. 211). Similarly, advertisers should "avoid 'humane-washing'", i.e., presenting exploiters' practices as benign (Freeman and Merskin, 2016, p. 213). They also suggest that media authors "balance industry and government sources with activist sources" (Freeman and Merskin, 2016, p. 212), which was done in only one of the news items on pig massacres examined for this study. Moreover, my analysis of reverse victimology and the obscuring of agency where speciesist violence is concerned builds on Freeman and Merskin (2016) observation: "Privileging human interests can give the impression that [non-human animals] do not also have interests at stake" (p. 211). Indeed, not only did journalists almost universally not take non-human interests into account: they went so far as to represent human oppressors as the victims of the very violence they perpetrated on millions of defenseless, sentient individuals.

The imbrication of capitalist media with speciesist institutions and most journalists' own ignorance about non-human issues are currently impediments to more just and accurate approaches to food-systems communication in mass media. Another obstacle is the litigiousness of the animal exploitation industries, who have a history of using any legal or extra-legal tactics available to them to silence those engaged in communication that might impede their quest for profits (Foer, 2009; Andersen, 2015; Broad, 2016; Sorenson, 2016; Greenwald, 2017, 2018, 2020)[11]. Under these repressive conditions, journalists willing to form a vanguard of conscientious and informed reporting on non-human animal exploitation may have to assume personal and professional risks. Should such a vanguard arise, it will correct current journalistic deficiencies by taking the perspectives of non-human animals seriously through personalizing them and portraying their emotions and experience whenever possible, rather than dismissing their moral significance through a wholly anthropocentric discourse. Conscientious reporters would also balance any viewpoints of those who profit from speciesist exploitation with commentary by those who advocate for non-human rights. Animal exploitation and rights are social justice issues with weighty moral, environmental, and public-health implications, and the media should display effort to inform the public about them.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The ethics of our treatment of other animals was a long-neglected topic in media studies, discourse studies, and even in traditional animal studies, which generally adopted a disengaged approach that ignored humans' political marginalization of and moral obligations to other animals. The emergence of critical animal studies (CAS), and more recently, the subfield of critical animal and media studies (CAMS), have redressed this oversight through scholarship that examines the human-non-human relationship in ethical, political, and discursive terms. The present study applies close readings approaches from critical discourse analysis (CDA) in order to add to work in CAS and CAMS, and brings a needed focus on non-human animals to CDA. By examining the prevalence of speciesist ideology in news reporting on the "pork" industry crisis in the U.S. during COVID-19, during which farmers brutally exterminated millions pigs on farms, this study adds to and updates previous CAMS work on the news media's role in manufacturing consent for the oppression of non-human animals. By bringing close attention to semantic features such as euphemism and the misplacement of agency, the study adds not only to CAS, CAMS, and CDA, but also to the study of discursive representations of violence and power more generally.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding authors.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

[11]As an example of the intimidation enacted by these industries: Investigative journalist Glenn Greenwald, who provided a candid report on the May 2020 "pork" industry crisis, wrote that the industry whistleblower who provided details about cruelty to pigs "originally wanted to speak on the record but changed their mind due to fear of reprisals from the industry that dominates their state" (Greenwald, 2020, para. 16).

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