

THESIS

“NO TOPIC IS TABOO”: PETA’S POST-FEMINIST PIVOT TO HUMAN-CENTRIC
IMAGERY

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ABSTRACT

“NO TOPIC IS TABOO”: PETA’S POST-FEMINIST PIVOT TO HUMAN-CENTRIC IMAGERY

In this thesis I argue that the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) perpetuate exclusionary and hurtful images in their “Boyfriend Went Vegan and Knocked the Bottom Out of Me” (BWVAKTBOOM) campaign. This campaign focuses on a young couple whose amorous activities leave the young woman, Jessica, with severe injuries. This campaign uses the manipulation of presence and absence to create controversy surrounding Jessica’s agency. PETA uses this controversy to help forward a post-feminist ideology. This post-feminist message allows PETA to denigrate women to reassert masculine power and identity. I argue PETA chose to do this because of the “crisis of masculinity” that permeates popular media. The campaign reasserts masculine power through the reproduction of hypermasculinity, heteronormativity, and whiteness. The BWVAKTBOOM campaign reproduces hurtful, hegemonic images to reassert (vegan) masculine identity.

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CHAPTER ONE: PEOPLE FOR THE ETHICAL TREATMENT OF ANIMALS AND “BOYFRIEND WENT VEGAN AND KNOCKED THE BOTTOM OUT OF ME”

Interest in plant-based diets is at an all time high. Google searches for the term “vegan” have more than doubled since 2005,¹ and Gallup Polling introduced a new question in July 2012 asking respondents if they were vegan, in addition to asking about vegetarianism.² The USDA reports a steady drop in meat-consumption since 2007—12.2% which equates to each person in the United States eating 20 pounds less meat per year.³ If interest in cruelty-free eating is on the rise organizations are eager to take advantage. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), is one of those organizations. A recent blog post written by a staff member of the organization exclaims, “here at PETA, we’ve seen interest in our vegetarian/vegan starter kit jump by around a third...in the last few months!”⁴ With multiple sources claiming a significant change in dietary habits, examining the motives and organizations behind such change may produce knowledge about the cultural period that we are experiencing.

PETA was founded in 1980 and since then has gained a reputation for their exploits.⁵ Peter Simonson explains that if Peter Singer launched the animal rights movement with his book

¹ "Google Trends-Web Search Interest: Vegan," <http://www.google.com/trends/explore?q=vegan#q=vegan&cmpt=q>, accessed August 22, 2013.

² Frank Newport, “In U.S., 5% Consider Themselves Vegetarians: Even Smaller 2% Say They are Vegans,” *Gallup*, published July 26, 2012.

³ Steve Meyer and Len Steiner, “The Daily Livestock Report,” 9, no. 243 (2011), accessed October 1, 2013- <http://www.dailylivestockreport.com/documents/dlr%2012-20-2011.pdf>.

⁴ Anne, “Trending Right Now: Veganism,” April 4, 2013, <http://blog.peta.org.uk/2013/04/trending-right-now-veganism/>.

⁵ “About PETA,” *PETA* <http://www.peta.org/about/default.aspx>, accessed February 18, 2013.

Animal Liberation, PETA propelled the movement into hyper-drive.⁶ Ingrid Newkirk, founder of PETA, states that the organization is “a bunch of press-sluts” that performs stunts to gain as much media attention as possible.⁷ If the goal of PETA is to raise awareness, they certainly have. Scholars and popular sources have both noted the tendency of the group towards the absurd.⁸

Since the advent of the internet PETA gained an online following. PETA’s official website states that the group has more than 3 million members and supporters.⁹ PETA’s latest campaign, *Boyfriend Went Vegan and Knocked the Bottom out of Me* (BWVAKTBOOM), boasts over 3 million views on the video’s official YouTube page.¹⁰ PETA2, the branch of the organization aimed at gathering youth supporters, has a Facebook profile with more than 600,000 likes.¹¹ Due to their online presence and commitment to provocative campaigns and publicity stunts, PETA is certainly the most well-known organizations promoting animal welfare. Wendy Atkins-Sayre notes that PETA is “one of the most internationally recognized animal rights organizations.”¹² Daniel Oliver adds that, “Other animal rights groups look to

⁶ Peter Simonson, “Social Noise and Segmented Rhythms: News, Entertainment, and Celebrity in the Crusade for Animal Rights,” *The Communication Review*, 4 (2001): 401.

⁷ Michael Specter, “The Extremist: The Woman Behind the Most Successful Radical Group in America,” *The New Yorker* April 2003, 58.

⁸ See: Peter Castro, "For PETA's Sake," *PEOPLE*, February 13, 1995, accessed August 5, 2013; Nic Halverson, “PETA’s ‘Porn’ Site Now Live,” *Discovery News*, June 7, 2012; Brett Lunceford, *Naked Politics: Nudity, Political Action, and the Rhetoric of the Body*, Plymouth, United Kingdom: Lexington Books, 2012; Jonathon Matusitz and Maya Forrester, “PETA Making Social Noise: A Perspective on Shock Advertising,” *Portuguese Journal of Social Science*, 12, no. 1 (2013): 85-100; and Daniel T. Oliver, “PETA steps Up Pursuit of Radical Goals,” *Human Events*, 53, no. 27 (1997):12-14.

⁹ “Our Mission Statement,” PETA, <http://www.peta.org/about/learn-about-peta/default.aspx>, accessed February 18, 2013.

¹⁰ “Boyfriend Went Vegan.” PETA ,February 6, 2012 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0vQOnHW0Kc>.

¹¹ “peta2.com,” PETA2 Facebook Page, <https://www.facebook.com/peta2>, accessed February 23, 2013.

¹² Wendy Atkins-Sayre, “Articulating Identity: People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and the Animal/Human Divide,” *Western Journal of Communication*, 74, no. 3

PETA for tactical and fund raising ideas.”¹³ Recognition coupled with influence makes PETA a powerhouse fighting for animal rights.

Combining the shock value PETA is now known for and a new move towards non-animal imagery is the BWVAKTBOOM campaign.¹⁴ One of the more recent campaigns by PETA, BWVAKTBOOM debuted in February of 2012.¹⁵ The campaign centers on the video mentioned earlier which mimics the style of pharmaceutical company advertisements that describe medical conditions that their drug addresses. The “condition” that the video centers on is where the campaign gleans its name—BWVAKTBOOM, or “Boyfriend Went Vegan and Knocked the Bottom Out of Me.” The premise of advertisement is that men who switch to a vegan diet show a marked increase in their sexual stamina and prowess. The sexual partners of these men are at risk for a number of injuries, ranging from rug burns to a dislocated hip, if the proper precautions are not taken. The video depicts a young woman, Jessica, who wears a neck brace and hobbles back to the apartment where her partner is. There are also flash-backs to the woman’s sexual activities that the narrator tells viewers caused these injuries. The video concludes with Jessica throwing a bag of veggies at her partner while giving him a sly smile. Due to the potentially serious bodily harm that can come to partners of these new vegans, PETA set up a website to help sufferers. The website offers stories of other people’s experiences with BWVAKTBOOM, steps for “sex-proofing” apartments, and tips for staying healthy. This campaign generated a fair amount of

(2010):309, retrieved from *Communication & Mass Media Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 18, 2013).

¹³ Daniel T. Oliver, “PETA Steps Up Pursuit of Radical Goals,” *Human Events*, 53, no. 27 (1997):12-14.

¹⁴ The word “campaign” includes both the BWVAKTBOOM video and website that contains supplementary videos and information.

¹⁵ Dylan Stibbleford, “Does this PETA Ad Featuring a Woman in a Neckbrace Promote Veganism or Violence?” *YahooNews*, <http://news.yahoo.com/blogs/cutline/does-peta-ad-featuring-young-pantsless-woman-neckbrace-222920818.html>, accessed February 13, 2012.

controversy from critics who alleged that the campaign glamorized domestic violence and objectified women.¹⁶

Journalistic sources and popular sources like blogs wrote about the campaign and the surrounding controversy as well.¹⁷ The main claim against the campaign is that PETA is promoting sexual violence as a way to stir up controversy. PETA is known for (overly) sexualized campaigns, so many people felt that this was PETA's way of pushing the envelope yet again. Due to the publicity and notoriety of this campaign it functions to create vegan identity for a lot of those who are unfamiliar with the lifestyle. The message also communicates information about PETA to those unfamiliar with the organization. By creating such controversy with a message PETA triggers the conversation about animal rights, veganism, and PETA. Because of the controversy surround this campaign and the volume and intensity of conversations about it, the campaign is a good case study of PETA's tactics and ethics. This campaign is immensely rich and represents a turning point of PETA from animal-centric imagery to human-centric campaigns. The notoriety also begins to hint at some of the underlying problems of PETA campaigns—the subjugation of people for animal rights.

Because of their popularity (or perhaps notoriety), PETA's messages warrant examination. There are two research questions that guide this investigation into PETA's tactics.

¹⁶ See: Chris Beasley, "PETA's BWVAKTBOOM Ad Campaign," *Point/Counterpoint* February 27, 2012; Annette Davis, "PETA's Use of Violent Sex as a Selling Point," *Black Feminists* March 6, 2012; Sonia Elks, "PETA Rough Sex Vegan Ad Sparks Anger for Glamorizing Violence," *Metro.co.uk* February 16, 2012; Stabbleford, "Does this PETA Ad."

¹⁷ For example: JohnThomas Didymus, "PETA's Boyfriend Went Vegan Sex Advert Raises Controversy," *Digital Journal* February 16, 2012; "David Gianatasio, "Go Vegan and Knock Your Girlfriend Around a Bit, Says PETA: Sexual Antics Leave Woman in a Neck Brace," *AdWeek- AdFreak* February 17, 2012; "Edgy Vegan Campaign Backlash," *Textifying: Trends & Issues in Public Relations*, February 19, 2012; "PETA Controversial Vegan Sex Drive Campaign: BWVAKTBOOM," *VeriaLiving* accessed November 1, 2013; and <https://twitter.com/search?q=BWVAKTBOOM&src=typd>.

First, what are the implications of PETA removing animal imagery from its campaign? Second, in what ways does the BWVAKTBOOM campaign constitute gender, sexual orientation, and race? Both questions examine how PETA forms identity. Assessing identity formation in a single PETA campaign will contribute to scholarly understanding of both PETA's rhetorical moves and of the ways that social movement campaigns create a constituency. In this chapter, I begin by reviewing the existing literature, summarizing scholarly assessments of literature on other-directed social movements as well as studies of PETA's rhetorical strategies. Next, I define the object of study and explain the method used to answer my research questions. Finally, I conclude with an overview of the thesis chapters.

Social Movements, Animal Rights, and PETA

The animal rights movement is what Charles Stewart calls an “other-directed” social movement;¹⁸ it focuses on building a collective identity, rather than an individual identity.¹⁹ An other-directed movement is one in which the cause is championed by people who would not be directly benefitted by the success of the movement.²⁰ Members of the movement do not act through self-interest, but rather because of their moral duties.²¹ Members of the movement are built up as being “saviors” of those who are exploited, with the rhetoric focused on how good the members are as people.²² Surprisingly, Stewart found that other-directed movements were not always directed at gaining attention for their causes, but instead work to establish a hierarchy

¹⁸ Charles J Stewart, “Championing the Rights of Others and Challenging Evil: The Ego Function in the rhetoric of Other-Directed Social Movements.” *Southern Communication Journal* 64 no. 2 (2009):91-2.

¹⁹ Stewart, “Championing the Rights,” 99-100.

²⁰ Stewart, “Championing the Rights ,” 91-2.

²¹ Stewart, “Championing the Rights ,” 96.

²² Stewart, “Championing the Rights ,” 97.

between organizations of the same movement,²³ a trend noted by other scholars and writers.²⁴ Consequently, it is not surprising that self-identity becomes subsumed by group identity with the movement and specific organization, a person becomes a PETA “rescuer” or “crusader,” rather than an animal rights activist, or even a woman.²⁵

Welfare, Liberation, and Rights

Other-directed social movements encompass myriad responses to animal cruelty. Some of these responses are animal welfare, animal liberation, and animal rights. Each of these responses has its own beliefs about how animal cruelty should be solved. I begin by discussing animal welfare or stewardship, followed by animal liberation, and concluding with animal rights. The exploration of these different responses focuses on the similarities and differences of the philosophies.

Animal welfare is best characterized as stewardship. The idea of humans acting as stewards for animals is not a new idea. In the Christian Bible the idea of human stewardship is given significant attention, and one passage even mentions humanity’s duty to protect animals.²⁶ J. H. Seamer offers a definition of stewardship that identifies two responsibilities of the steward.²⁷ He explains, “The first is for the care of the property which is entrusted to the steward, the farm or estate for example. The second responsibility is to the owner or employer who employs the steward to manage the farm or the estate.”²⁸ When acting as steward, those

²³ Stewart, “Championing the Rights,” 97-9.

²⁴ See Peter Castro. "For PETA's Sake." *PEOPLE*, February 13, 1995, accessed August 5, 2013 and Brett Lunceford. *Naked Politics*.

²⁵ Stewart, 91-2.

²⁶ See Genesis 9:9-10 for specific references of humans taking care of animals.

²⁷ J.H. Seamer, “Human Stewardship and Animal Welfare,” *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* 59 (1998): 204.

²⁸ Seamer, “Human Stewardship,” 204.

producing food have “a responsibility for the care and welfare of animals.”²⁹ 4-H, an organization that promotes leadership in youth, promotes animal stewardship as part of its curriculum.³⁰ One of the primary focuses of 4-H is developing the next generation of responsible farmers by having youths raise their own animals. The agricultural industry also has developed specific strategies to present themselves as good animal stewards. For example, the California “happy cows” campaign features talking cows that do anything from sing in the shower to gossip about which bull is cuter.³¹ These advertisements allow viewers to picture their dairy as coming from happy cows from pastoral landscapes. Additionally, words like “humane,” “free-range,” and “vegetarian-fed” are used by specific companies to suggest to customers that their stewardship practices are superior. These words are especially common in the egg industry.³² Stewardship is important to food producers because it is important to consumers.³³ Food organizations try to differentiate themselves from others by making stewardship a top priority. Welfare has a long history in the United States, and is still seen today in animal agriculture.

Beyond the agricultural sphere, the American Society for the Prevention and of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) also promotes a model of stewardship. The ASPCA was started in 1866 by Henry Bergh.³⁴ Bergh objected to the conditions of horses in New York City who were used primarily to pull taxis and trolleys. The horses were rarely given breaks, provided no shelter, and

²⁹ Seamer, “Human Stewardship ,” 204.

³⁰ 4-H, *Livestock and Poultry Environmental Stewardship Curriculum Lessons*, <http://www.extension.org/pages/8964/livestock-and-poultry-environmental-stewardship-curriculum-lessons#.Uk4OYxCWJng>, accessed October 1, 2013.

³¹ “Happy Cow Commercials,” *Real California Milk*, <http://www.realcaliforniamilk.com/advertising/happy-cows-spots/>, accessed November 7, 2013.

³² “About Us,” *Eggland’s Best*, <http://www.egglandsbest.com/about-us.aspx>, accessed November 7, 2013.

³³ Kaitlyn Grimshaw, et al, “Consumer Perception of Beef, Pork, Lamb, Chicken, and Fish,” *Meat Science* 96 (2014): 443-444.

³⁴ Marion S. Lane and Stephen L. Zawistoski, *Heritage of Care: The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2008):15.

regularly beaten. Bergh set out to improve the working conditions of the horses and succeeding in getting them mandatory breaks and shelter.³⁵ The ASPCA aims have not changed much since its inception. It was originally created in part to “care for the cause of animal protection everywhere in the United States.”³⁶ In the 2012 annual report the ASPCA President and CEO, Matthew Bershadker, refers to members of the ASPCA and others reading the newsletter as “stewards and protectors” of animals.³⁷ The ASPCA focuses on companion animals; its investigators working with shelter, and local police forces to document the conditions in which animals are kept and to enforce anti-cruelty laws.³⁸ The ASCPA is most well-known for their commercial, used to raise funds for the organization, depicting companion animals in dire situations with Sarah McLachlan singing in the background.³⁹ The ASPCA offers a model aligned with the philosophy of animal stewardship rather than animal rights.

Whereas welfare is a more conservative stance about mindful ownership, liberation and rights are more radical and condemn animal ownership. Peter Singer is largely credited for starting the animal rights movement with his text *Animal Liberation*. In his book Singer attempts to break down the barriers between animals and humans by explaining how animals should not be subject to the demands and exploitation of humans. Singer uses the word “tyranny” to describe the hold humans have over non-human animals and states simply, “This book is about

³⁵ Lane and Zawistoski, *Heritage of Care*: 24-6.

³⁶ Lane and Zawistoski, *Heritage of Care*: 32.

³⁷ ASPCA, *2012 Annual Review*,

<http://www.aspca.org/sites/default/files/upload/images/aspca-ar2012.pdf>, accessed October 1, 2013.

³⁸ “ASPCA at Work,” *ASPCA- About Us*, accessed October 20, 2013.

³⁹ “Sarah McLachlan Animal Cruelty Video,” *YouTube*, October 3, 2006
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gspElv1yvc&list=PL671AA3F0F73084B6>.

the tyranny of human over nonhuman animals.”⁴⁰ One of the mottos of liberation activists is, “until every cage is empty” with the “a” in cage made from bolt cutters.⁴¹ This shows the radical approach that now exemplifies the liberation movement. Animal liberation is also connected to radical or terrorist groups, namely the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), which is known for destruction of property and releasing animals from exploitative environments.⁴² Though the beliefs of groups in liberation and rights are nearly identical, liberation is seen as more extreme than rights due to its resistance to compromise and use of militant tactics.

Animal rights as a cause is championed by groups like PETA, who pursue a legal, rather than militant, route.⁴³ Similar to those fighting for liberation, animal rights activists do not believe human dominion over non-humans is inherent, necessary, or desirable. Animal rights activists are seen as more mainstream as they stick to publicity stunts and legal action, rather than resorting to illegal actions for their cause. Since its inception, PETA has been fighting to grant rights to animals.⁴⁴ PETA is most well-known for using public relations campaign and petitions to affect change. The best-known example is one of their longest running campaigns—the “Naked” campaign. This is a campaign where celebrities pose nude, but strategically covered,

⁴⁰ Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House Publishing, 1990): i.

⁴¹ “Animal Rights Quotes,” *Animal Liberation Front*, www.animalliberationfront.com/Saints/Authors/Quotes/SortQuotesPhilos.htm accessed October 22, 2013; Pete Mander, <http://untileverycageisempty.blogspot.com/>, accessed October 22, 2013.

⁴² See “Campus Life: Michigan State; Animal Rights Raiders Destroy Years of Work,” *New York Times*, March 8, 1992.; Michael Janofsky, “Feds Accuse 11 of Ecoterrorism: Targeted Meatpacker, Ski Resort, Timber Firm” *Chicago Tribune*, January 21, 2006; Kristen Scharnberg and Time Jones, “Ground Zero of Labs vs. Animal-Rights Activists,” *Chicago Tribune* June 9, 2005; Sam H. Verhovek, “Radical Animal Rights Groups Step up Protests,” *New York Times*, November 12, 2001.

⁴³ “What’s PETA’s Position on the Animal Liberation Front (ALF)?,” *PETA*, <http://www.peta.org/about/faq/Whats-PETAs-position-on-the-Animal-Liberation-Front-ALF.aspx>, accessed October 22, 2013.

⁴⁴ Oliver, “PETA,” 12 and Atkins-Sayre, “Articulating Identity,” 310.

to protest the use of fur and other animal skins in clothing.⁴⁵ In its own words PETA believes that “animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on, or use for entertainment.”⁴⁶

Scholars have studied traits of those fighting for animal rights. Followers of the animal rights movement believe that the world can be perfected, with animals and humans in a more symbiotic relationship.⁴⁷ In addition to being skeptical of Western culture broadly, animal rights activists also oppose technology and patriarchy specifically.⁴⁸ Technology represents humankind’s attempts to control nature, and patriarchy fosters many forms of oppression—including speciesism.⁴⁹ Speciesism is best defined as “the view that members of the species *Homo sapiens* are superior to members of every other species simply because human beings belong to one’s own (the “superior”) species.”⁵⁰ Linking the ideas of speciesism and patriarchy is hypermasculinity. One of the major tenets of hypermasculinity is the belief that control over nature makes a person masculine.⁵¹ Controlling and dominating other species is linked to patriarchy through hypermasculine ideals. The animal rights movement as a whole creates an

⁴⁵ See: “Fur I’d Rather Go Naked,” *Taraji P. Henson for PETA* <http://www.mediapeta.com/peta/Images/Main/Sections/MediaCenter/TrajiPETAad72.jpg>, accessed November 1, 2013; “Fur I’d Rather Go Naked,” *Khloe Kardashian for PETA* <http://www.mediapeta.com/peta/Images/Main/Sections/MediaCenter/PrintAds/KhloeKardashianNakedFur.pdf>, accessed November 1, 2013; “I’d Rather Dance Naked Than Wear Fur,” *Karina Smirnoff for PETA* <http://www.mediapeta.com/peta/Images/Main/Sections/MediaCenter/PrintAds/600-KarinaSmirnoff-peta.jpg>, accessed November 1, 2013; and “Fur I’d Rather Go Naked,” *Wendy Williams for PETA* <http://www.mediapeta.com/peta/igc/wendyPETAad.jpg>, accessed November 1, 2013.

⁴⁶ “All About Peta,” *PETA*, <http://www.peta.org/about/learn-about-peta/default.aspx>, accessed February 18, 2013.

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Lawrence, “Conflicting Ideologies: View of Animal Rights Advocates and Their Opponents,” *Society and Animals* 2, no. 2 (1994): 175.

⁴⁸ Lawrence, “Conflicting Ideologies,” 175.

⁴⁹ Lawrence, “Conflicting Ideologies,” 175.

⁵⁰ Joanne Stepaniak, *The Vegan Sourcebook* (Lincolnwood, Illinois: Lowell House 1998).

⁵¹ Donald L. Mosher, and Mark Sirkin. "Measuring a Macho Personality Constellation." *Journal of Research in Personality* 18 (1984): 151-2. Communication & Mass Media Complete, EBSCOhost.

identity that fosters critical thinking, specifically in terms of animal treatment and how Western society views animals.

One of the ways that Western society views animals is as an “other,” differentiated from the individual human. Elizabeth Lawrence argues that this othering is more easily done due to our limited interaction with animals.⁵² Animals are seen as masses, rather than individuals of a species.⁵³ She also notes that non-mammalians, including poultry and invertebrates, are even more prone to be described as machines and not deserving of protection due to their increased “other” nature.⁵⁴ Jason E. Black discusses the rhetoric of making an animal the other. He states that one of the main goals of the animal rights movement is to “engage in rhetorical strategies that strip away the labels that pigeon-hole animals as things” which provides for a base to grant equality between animals and humans.⁵⁵ PETA’s main goal is breaking down this divide between animals and humans and has been studied by Wendy Atkins-Sayre.⁵⁶ PETA creates identification through shared emotions of humans and animals, encouraging humans to experience animals’ lives, and visually placing humans in the animal world.⁵⁷

Atkins-Sayre identifies three strategies that PETA uses to blur the animal/human divide—shared emotions, shared experiences, and shared substance. Shared emotions typically involve the anthropomorphizing of non-human animals to enhance the similarities human audiences can see between the two.⁵⁸ One example of this is a picture of two small raccoons

⁵² Lawrence, “Conflicting Ideologies,” 178.

⁵³ Lawrence, “Conflicting Ideologies,” 178.

⁵⁴ Lawrence, 180 and 182.

⁵⁵ Jason E. Black, "Extending the Rights of Personhood, Voice, and Life to Sensate Others: A Homology of Right to Life and Animal Rights Rhetoric." *Communication Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (2003): 316.

⁵⁶ Atkins-Sayre, “Articulating Identity,” 309-328.

⁵⁷ Atkins-Sayre, “Articulating Identity,” 316.

⁵⁸ Atkins-Sayre, “Articulating Identity,” 316.

shown holding one another are said to be experiencing loss—the intimate nature of the photograph as well as the caption stating that they are missing their mother suggests to the audience that animals are capable of grief.⁵⁹ Atkins-Sayre explains that images like this one violate the dualism of human/animal and culture/nature because even “beyond the words of the ad, individuals can relate to the expressions...[of] the pictured animal...”⁶⁰ By using these established dualisms to draw the audience in and then proceed to violate them, PETA questions the underlying assumptions of human identity.⁶¹

Shared emotion is one of the strategies PETA uses to break down the human/animal divide; PETA also creates discomfort by showing the shared life experience of animals and humans. By masterfully combining descriptions of animals’ pain and asking the audience to imagine similar pains in their life PETA creates identification between animal and human.⁶² One example is a PETA message that shows a chicken in a microwave, with a caption explaining the cramped environments that chickens are grown in provide less space than a sheet of paper.⁶³ The unnatural environment of the microwave helps to create an interest in viewers. This message intends to create a shared experience of claustrophobia, encouraging viewers to identify with the animals.⁶⁴ By having audience members supply their own similar experiences, PETA creates a powerful message of shared experience between humans and non-humans.

Building on shared characteristics and emotions, PETA also suggests shared substance of animals and humans. This effect is accomplished by visually placing humans into scenes where animals are only thought to be. Atkins-Sayre describes an example of a woman painted with tiger

⁵⁹ Atkins-Sayre, “Articulating Identity,” 317.

⁶⁰ Atkins-Sayre, “Articulating Identity,” 318.

⁶¹ Atkins-Sayre, “Articulating Identity,” 318.

⁶² Atkins-Sayre, “Articulating Identity,” 318.

⁶³ Atkins-Sayre, “Articulating Identity,” 319.

⁶⁴ Atkins-Sayre, “Articulating Identity,” 320.

stripes on her body in a cage with a chain around her foot informing readers that exotic animals do not belong behind bars.⁶⁵ By making animal and human experiences harder to distinguish, PETA hopes to foster a radical reshaping of both identities.⁶⁶ It has been noted by many scholars that there is a trend toward using female nudity, rather than male nudity to create this type of identification,⁶⁷ which will be further explored in the next section. Atkins-Sayre explains that this type of message creates a space for “questioning human and animal relations” because they force the viewer to think of the absurdity of any kind of animal being exploited while simultaneously confronting their own animalness.⁶⁸ By confronting their own animal qualities, and the human qualities of animals, viewers of PETA messages may begin to question their own part in the exploitation of animals.

Atkins-Sayre’s model suggests that PETA’s effort to destabilize the hierarchy between humans and animals works well to explain messages that overtly draw attention to animal suffering. Recently, however, a new type of messages has been added to PETA’s arsenal. These are messages that portray either pet owners or vegans and vegetarians. Thus far, the academic conversation surrounding PETA has described many of the organization’s tactics. The latest tactic which has not been studied is the omission of non-humans in PETA campaigns.

⁶⁵ Atkins-Sayre, “Articulating Identity,” 320-1.

⁶⁶ Atkins-Sayre, “Articulating Identity,” 320-1.

⁶⁷ See Lunceford, *Naked Politics*; Lesli Pace, "Image Events and PETA's Anti Fur Campaign," *Women and Language* 28, no. 2 (2005): 33-41.; Nikki Craft, "PETA: Where Only Women Are Treated Like Meat," ACLU, Published July 18, 2002; and R. E. Doyle, "Save the Wild Pussy," *Ms.* (April/May 2000): 46-47.

⁶⁸ Atkins-Sayre, “Articulating Identity,” 321.

Though PETA is known for highly sexualized imagery,⁶⁹ this is a fairly recent phenomenon. Maneesha Deckha explains that the “I’d Rather Go Naked...Campaign...is what caught the attention of the mainstream and helped cement the association of PETA with female nudity and sex.”⁷⁰ The Naked Campaign debuted in 1991, and has focused on celebrities coming out against wearing fur.⁷¹ PETA’s campaigns have had several shifts of imagery since the beginning of the organization. Other campaigns have also included nudity and sexualization: Milk Gone Wild,⁷² cruelty-free campaigns against rabbit testing,⁷³ campaigns against elephants use in circuses,⁷⁴ campaigns against horse carriages,⁷⁵ campaigns for going vegetarian/vegan,⁷⁶

⁶⁹ See Maneesha Deckha, “Disturbing Images: PETA and the Feminist Ethics of Animal Advocacy,” *Ethics & the Environment* 12, no. 2 (2008): 35-76; Lunceford, *Naked Politics*; Pace, “Image Events,” 33-41; Craft, “PETA.”; and Doyle, “Save the Wild Pussy,” 46-47.

⁷⁰ Deckha, “Disturbing Images,” 40.

⁷¹ “Would you Rather Go Naked?,” PETA, <http://www.peta.org/action/rather-go-naked.aspx>, accessed September 23, 2013.

⁷² “Milk Gone Wild,” PETA, <http://www.peta.org/tv/videos/vegetarianism-cows/1389647429001.aspx>, accessed October 24, 2013.

⁷³ The campaign features a few women posed nude with bunnies covering their breasts: See “Be a Bunny’s Belle of the Ballroom: Choose Cruelty-Free,” PETA, http://www.mediapeta.com/peta/igc/kym_johnson_horiz_72.jpg, accessed October 23, 2013.; “Be Nice to Bunnies: Buy Cruelty Free!,” PETA, http://www.mediapeta.com/peta/Images/Main/Sections/MediaCenter/PrintAds/steph_pratt_fur_bunnies.jpg, accessed October 23, 2013.

⁷⁴ See “Shackled, Beaten, Abused,” PETA, http://www.mediapeta.com/peta/Images/Main/Sections/MediaCenter/imogenBoycottThai_PETA_300.pdf, accessed October 22, 2013; “Shackled, Beaten, Abused,” *The Hottest PETA Ad Campaigns in India*, <http://ibnlive.in.com/photogallery/7537-11.html>, accessed October 23, 2013; and “Olivia Munn Combats Circus Cruelty,” PETA, <http://www.peta.org/features/Olivia-Munn.aspx>, accessed October 23, 2013.

⁷⁵ “Kristen Johnston Poses Nude in Ad Against Horse-Drawn Carriages,” PETA, <http://www.peta.org/features/kristen-johnston-naked-peta-ad.aspx>, accessed October 24, 2013.

⁷⁶ “Eat Your Veggies: Dressing Optional,” PETA, <http://www.mediapeta.com/peta/igc/patricia-de-leon-ad-72.jpg>, accessed October 24, 2013; and “Killer Body, Clear Conscience: Try Vegan,” PETA, http://www.mediapeta.com/peta/images/main/sections/mediacenter/printads/PETA_Koval.jpg, accessed October 24, 2013.

and other anti-fur campaigns.⁷⁷ PETA even made a brief entre into pornography,⁷⁸ though the site was a bit of a flop, and now features a re-direct notice to the main PETA site.⁷⁹ The evolution of nudity in PETA campaigns has become increasingly sexualized; beginning with scantily clad supermodels and morphing into sites that depict explicit pornographic images.

Originally, PETA's campaigns focused exclusively on animal imagery. Messages depicted the cruelty that non-humans suffered and included captions that allowed readers to see their responsibility for these acts.⁸⁰ Then, as explained by Atkins-Sayre, PETA began to incorporate human and animal imagery. This shift is exemplified by supermodels signing on to promote animal rights. Cindy Crawford and Pamela Anderson were among the first to begin promoting animal rights through PETA.⁸¹ This second shift is also when PETA began to incorrectly link women's sexualization as "imperative" to the fight for animal's rights.⁸² There is another shift occurring, which is the move to human imagery exclusively, or the exclusion of non-humans from campaign imagery. This final shift began with the BWVAKTBOOM campaign.

The omission of non-human animals from the BWVAKTBOOM campaign represents a significant shift in tactics used by PETA. Instead of showing graphic images of the wrongs that

⁷⁷ "PSAs by Campaign: Skins," *PETA*, <http://www.peta.org/mediacenter/ads/Print-Ads-Skins.aspx>, accessed October 24, 2013.

⁷⁸ Tara Kelly, "PETA.xxx Site Launches, Features Sexy Photos and Animal Abuse," *Huffington Post* June 5, 2012.; "PETA's Porn Site Has Arrived!!!," *PerezHilton.com* June 6, 2012.

⁷⁹ "Now That We Have Your Attention," *PETA*, www.peta.xxx, accessed October 24, 2013.

⁸⁰ "Intentions Are Not Enough: Only Your Acts Will Free Them," *PETA*, 1989 Annual Review, back cover; "Do You Support the Animal Liberation Front," *PETA NEWS*, March/April 1990, front cover.

⁸¹ "Cindy Crawford: Faux Fur for you," *PETA's Animal Times*, Holiday Issue 1994.

⁸² Tisha Dejmanee, "The Burdens of Caring: A Postfeminist Perspective on PETA's Animal Protection Campaigns," *Australian Feminist Studies* 28, no. 77: 312.

humans commit against non-humans, PETA is showing the possibilities of what veganism can be with their BWVAKTBOOM campaign, but who does this campaign say can be vegan?

Hypermasculinity is rampant throughout the campaign. Hypermasculinity “is the value system that celebrates male physical strength, aggression, violence, competition, and dominance. It denigrates the lack of these qualities as weak, female behavior.”⁸³ This campaign focuses on the strength of male sexuality as violence and dominance. Deckha also notes that not only are women sexualized, they are also more likely to be told to alter their bodies, like removing body hair, to appeal more to men.⁸⁴ One such image shows Anna Nicole Smith proudly displaying hairless underarms to a group of men staring intently at her. The text of the photograph proudly proclaims “Gentlemen prefer fur-free blondes (original emphasis).”⁸⁵ PETA’s messages tell women to put the problems of the world as well as attracting the opposite sex before their own concerns.

Anna Nicole’s Marilyn impression does more than to assert the subordination of women, it also suppresses non-heteronormative people. Gust A. Yep defines Heteronormativity as, “the view...that institutionalized heterosexuality constitutes *the* standard for legitimate, authentic, prescriptive, and ruling social, cultural, and sexual arrangements.”⁸⁶ PETA has gained a reputation for being transphobic⁸⁷ and generally non-inclusive of queer identified people. The

⁸³ Robert W. Benson, “Changing Police Culture: The Sine Qua Non of Reform,” *Loyola of Los Angeles Law Review* 34 (2001): n.p.

⁸⁴ Deckha, “Disturbing Images,” 43-4.

⁸⁵ “Anna Nicole Smith Says, ‘Gentlemen Prefer Fur-Free Blondes,’ PETA <http://www.peta.org/features/anna-nicole-smith-says-gentlemen-prefer-fur-free-blondes.aspx>, accessed October 24, 2013.

⁸⁶ Gust A. Yep, “The violence of Heteronormativity in Communication Studies,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 45 (2003): 13.

⁸⁷ Most of the controversy is regarding the “Fur is a Drag” Campaign by PETA: See “PETA’s Fur is a Drag Campaign Steps Over the Line,” *Stuff Queer People Need to Know* February 19, 2009; Ronan, “Call PETA to Protest Transphobic Ad,” *Portland Independent*

featured couple of the BWVAKTBOOM campaign, as well as eight of nine others, is heterosexual, so PETA is setting a standard for veganism that includes being straight. PETA perpetuates heteronormativity through emphasizing heterosexual relationships, and using transphobic language in advertisements.

PETA's depiction of race/ethnicity is another reason for its notoriety. Both scholarly and journalistic opinions are that PETA is whitewashed. Deckha explains how even the sexualization of women is exclusionary, because PETA shows a preference to depict the nudity and sexualization of White, heterosexual, able-bodied women.⁸⁸ This applies to the BWVAKBTOOM campaign as every person who is shown in the campaign appears White. Furthermore, Jessica is the embodiment of the “long, nimble, blond, and able-bodied White model” that perpetuates a largely unachievable standard of beauty for women.⁸⁹ A predisposition toward whiteness and racial insensitivity is not unique to the BWVAKTBOOM campaign. PETA launched a display comparing animal suffering to the Holocaust⁹⁰ and compares the conditions of animals to that of African slavery.⁹¹ PETA also demonizes other cultures, particularly the fur-trade in China⁹² and the leather industry in India.⁹³ Many of the campaigns focus around White

Media Center, July 23, 2008; and Ida Hammer “Transphobia and PETA,” *Vegan Ideal* October 10, 2008.

⁸⁸ Deckha, “Disturbing Images,” 50.

⁸⁹ Deckha, “Disturbing Images,” 50.

⁹⁰ “PETA Germany’s Holocaust Display Banned,” *PETA*, March 27, 2009, <http://www.peta.org/b/thepetafiles/archive/tags/holocaust+on+your+plate/default.aspx>.

⁹¹ “Huh?! PETA Exhibit to Compare Animal Cruelty to Slavery,” *Newsone*, July 20, 2011, <http://newsone.com/1404415/peta-slavery-exhibit-blacks-african-americans/>.

⁹² “A Shocking Look Inside Chinese Fur Farms,” *PETA*, <http://features.peta.org/ChineseFurFarms/>, accessed October 24, 2013.

⁹³ “The Global Leather Trade,” *PETA*, <http://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-clothing/global-leather-trade.aspx>, accessed October 20, 2013.

people, specifically women, and even white animals, like rabbits.⁹⁴ This white-centrism has not gone unnoticed. Many open letters have been written and there has been an outcry on social media platforms against PETA for its lack of diversity.⁹⁵ Deckha asserts that PETA chooses white bodies, of both women and animals, because whiteness remains “the repository of innocence.”⁹⁶ The whiteness presented by PETA is supposed to convey innocence, but for many it signals exclusivity.

PETA is a vanguard for animal rights. Other organizations look to them for tactics and ideas,⁹⁷ and PETA is regarded as the most influential and well-known organization fighting for animal rights.⁹⁸ These images they are perpetuating damage the minority groups they are subjugating. My thesis examines the shift in PETA campaigns to eliminating non-human animal imagery, and the implications of that shift. I also examine how the BWVAKTBOOM constitutes the identity of its ideal audience, with emphasis on gender, sexual orientation, and race.

Critical Method

My thesis investigates identity formation in the exchange of discourse surrounding the BWVAKTBOOM campaign. For identity formation I use Maurice Charland’s notion of constitutive rhetoric, which examines the ways that discourse “hails” prospective audience members and employs identification as a key rhetorical strategy. I begin by explaining

⁹⁴ See “Be a Bunny’s Belle of the Ballroom,” *PETA*; “Be Nice to Bunnies,” *PETA*.

⁹⁵ For a few examples see: “Dear PETA: Everyone is Tired of Your Bullshit,” *The Angry Black Woman* <http://theangryblackwoman.com/2009/08/21/dear-peta-everyone-is-tired-of-your-bullshit/>, accessed October 24, 2013; <http://www.tumblr.com/tagged/vegans-against-peta>; <https://twitter.com/search?q=vegansagainstpeta&src=typd>; and <http://vegansagainstpeta.blogspot.com/> accessed October 24, 2013.

⁹⁶ Deckha, “Disturbing Images,” 51.

⁹⁷ Oliver, “PETA,” 12.

⁹⁸ Atkins-Sayre, “Articulating Identity,” 310-12 and Lunceford, *Naked Politics*, 17.

constitutive rhetoric and how it relates to PETA, followed by an explanation of how I conducted my research.

Identification is at the center of constitutive rhetoric, a theory for creating collective identity advanced by Maurice Charland.⁹⁹ Charland's theory relies on Kenneth Burke's concept of identification and Louis Althusser's process of interpellation.¹⁰⁰ The constitution of the subject is also referred to as interpellation.¹⁰¹ Interpellation is the situation in which a person enters into discourse; this can be done by simply acknowledging the discourse.¹⁰² Helen Tate explains, "Constitutive rhetorics position the subjects towards political, social, and economic action."¹⁰³ When identities are successfully constituted the "rhetoric which defined them has force."¹⁰⁴ Burke explains that identification is when a person is "substantially one" with another person.¹⁰⁵ People may also be "identified in terms of some principle they share in common," therefore identification can function to classify people.¹⁰⁶ Burke's theories not only discuss rhetoric as a way to persuade audiences, but how audiences are actually formed through discourse.¹⁰⁷ Charland uses this to explain how a collective identity is manufactured by the same people it describes.¹⁰⁸ As Tate explains, the theory "considers audience members as participants

⁹⁹ Maurice Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the Peuple Quebecois," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73, no. 2 (1987): 137.

¹⁰⁰ Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric," 133.

¹⁰¹ Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric," 138.

¹⁰² Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric," 138.

¹⁰³ Tate, "The Ideological Effects," 7.

¹⁰⁴ Tate, "The Ideological Effects," 6.

¹⁰⁵ Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 21.

¹⁰⁶ Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 21-2.

¹⁰⁷ Helen Tate, "The Ideological Effects of a Failed Constitutive Rhetoric: The Co-option of the Rhetoric of White Lesbian Feminism," *Women's Studies in Communication* 28, no. 1 (2005): 6.

¹⁰⁸ Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric," 134.

in the very discourse by which they might be persuaded.”¹⁰⁹ Charland further states that all identities are a rhetorical construction, and do not exist in nature.¹¹⁰

Vegan identity is something that PETA and its followers both create together through the BWVAKTBOOM campaign. In this thesis, I examine the ways the BWVAKTBOOM campaign attempts to interpellate audience members into a vegan, or pro-animal rights, identity. Specifically, I address the following research questions: First, what are the implications of PETA removing animal imagery from its campaign? Second, in what ways does the BWVAKTBOOM campaign constitute gender, sexual orientation, and race?

To answer my research questions, I began by analyzing the BWVAKTBOOM campaign as well as the discourse surrounding the campaign. Since both leaders and followers of the movement work together to constitute identity, it is important to analyze communication from both. The non-leader discourse will be found in online newspapers,¹¹¹ as well as social media, specifically YouTube comments,¹¹² and conversations on different vegan blogs.¹¹³ To give a fuller picture of PETA and their views, in addition to assessing the BWVAKTBOOM website, I also examined interviews with Ingrid Newkirk as well as the response to the backlash against the

¹⁰⁹ Tate, “The Ideological Effects,” 6.

¹¹⁰ Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric,” 137.

¹¹¹ Didymus, “PETA’s Boyfriend Went Vegan,”; Rheana Murray, “PETA’s Boyfriend Went Vegan Ad Features a Young Woman Who Appears to Have Been Abused: Animal Rights Group Insists It’s Playful, But Some Viewers Disagree,” *DailyNews*, February 14, 2012; Hannah Roberts, “He’ll Be Able to Bring It Like a Tantric Porn Star: Controversial PETA Ad Claims Going Vegan May Make You So Good in Bed You’ll INJURE Your Girlfriend,” *Dailymail*, February 16, 2012; Stabbleford, “Does this PETA Ad.”

¹¹² PETA. “Boyfriend Went Vegan.”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0vQOnHW0Kc>, Accessed February 18, 2013.

¹¹³ “BWVAKTBOOM: Funny, or Offensive?,” *The Nail that Sticks Up*, <http://thenailthatsticksup.com/2012/02/16/bwvaktboom-funny-or-offensive/>, accessed November 18, 2013; “Dear PETA: Everyone is Tired of Your Bullshit,” *The Angry Black Woman*, <http://theangryblackwoman.com/2009/08/21/dear-peta-everyone-is-tired-of-your-bullshit/>, accessed October 24, 2013; <http://vegansagainstpeta.blogspot.com/> accessed October 24, 2013.

campaign given by PETA spokeswoman, Lindsay Rajt.¹¹⁴ Using the research already done on PETA, I examined specific themes in these texts. PETA has had several tendencies in its campaign history. These tendencies present themselves as themes in the campaign messages as well as in the dialogue of those producing it. The themes are pleasure/cruelty, hypermasculinity, heteronormativity, and whiteness. These themes were examined in the BWVAKTBOOM campaign to answer the two research questions.

First, I examined how these themes are presented in the campaign's rhetoric. This includes both verbal and visual rhetoric, metaphors, and arguments presented by PETA in the BWVAKTBOOM campaign. Next, I categorized those observations by the research question they answer. Finally, I used these observations in tandem with the previous research done on PETA to draw conclusions about the campaign. To understand the implications of PETA's removal of animal imagery from its campaign I assessed how the campaign gestures towards the missing animals through the pleasure/cruelty dichotomy. By examining the campaign carefully and understanding the images, representation, and themes regarding gender, sexual orientation, and race I answered the second research question.

In addition to identifying the strategies PETA uses to constitute audience members as vegans in the BWVAKTBOOM campaign, this study also assesses online discourse surrounding the campaign to gauge the success of PETA's strategies. Online discourse has become a haven for those who hold beliefs outside of the norm. Zickmund explains that the internet allows access

¹¹⁴Newkirk Interviews: "Ingrid Newkirk Taking on the Critics," *Animal Liberation Front*, [http://www.animalliberationfront.com/ALFront/Interviews/Interview%20with%20Ingrid%20Ne
wkirk.htm](http://www.animalliberationfront.com/ALFront/Interviews/Interview%20with%20Ingrid%20Newkirk.htm), accessed October 12, 2013 and Specter, "The Extremist," 48; PETA Spokeswomen Response: "PETA Has SO Crossed the Line with This Ad," *Rabblerouserruminations* [http://rabblerouserruminations.wordpress.com/2012/02/15/peta-has-so-crossed-the-line-with-
this-ad/](http://rabblerouserruminations.wordpress.com/2012/02/15/peta-has-so-crossed-the-line-with-this-ad/), accessed October 20, 2013. and Stabbleford, "Does this PETA Ad."

to a community of like-minded people that was not available in previous eras.¹¹⁵ The lack of geographical constraints is one of the biggest reasons for this.¹¹⁶ The internet allows for the interpellation of a wider range of people.¹¹⁷ When following a vegan lifestyle, online community becomes indispensable. Though interest in plant-based diets is at an all-time high, vegans still only make up less than two percent of the population.¹¹⁸ Given the low number of vegans many turn to online resources for support and community.

Overview of Chapters

The study is organized into the following chapters:

Chapter 1: People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and Boyfriend Went Vegan and Knocked the Bottom Out of Me

The introductory chapter reviews scholarly discussions of PETA and provide background and context for understanding the BWVAKTBOOM campaign.

Chapter 2: PETA Using Presence/Absence and Post-Feminist Ideology in the BWVKATBOOM Campaign

Chapter Two explains the three phases of imagery in PETA's campaigns. I also argue that PETA's manipulation of presence and absence in the BWVAKTBOOM campaign creates a strong reaction that can be explained by the post-feminist logic embedded in the campaign.

¹¹⁵ Susan Zickmund, "Approaching the Radical Other: The Discursive Culture of Cyberhate," *Virtual Culture: Identity & Communication in Cybersociety*, ed. Steven G. Jones, London: Sage Publications (1997): 187.

¹¹⁶ Zickmund, "Radical Other," 186.

¹¹⁷ Zickmund, "Radical Other," 186.

¹¹⁸ Newport, "In U.S., 5% Consider," *Gallup*.

Chapter 3: Constitutive Rhetoric In BWVAKTBOOM: Who Can Be Vegan?

Chapter Three focuses on the identity PETA constitutes through the reproduction of hegemonic ideologies of hypermasculinity, whiteness, and heteronormativity.

Chapter 4: People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and Humans

I conclude my thesis by reflecting on PETA's rhetorical strategies in the BWVAKTBOOM campaign and their impact on the understanding of other-directed social movements.

CHAPTER TWO: PETA USING PRESENCE/ABSENCE AND POST-FEMINIST IDEOLOGY IN THE BWVAKTBOOM CAMPAIGN

An image displays a bunny trapped from the neck down in a cramped plastic contraption, staring directly out at viewers with a heading proclaiming “Avon Killing.” The poster goes on to discuss how People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) wants to ban the practice of testing on animals.¹¹⁹ Another PETA advertisement depicts a tan, blonde woman in a bikini with different cuts of meat written on her body. The advertisement explains that “all animals have the same parts.”¹²⁰ A final message is a short video that shows a young woman hobbling down the street in a neck brace, and informs viewers that BWVAKTBOOM is a serious condition caused by boyfriends going vegan and “suddenly being able to bring it like a tantric porn star.” The commercial states that it is too late for this couple but encourages viewers to visit the BWVAKTBOOM website and learn how to go vegan safely.¹²¹ These three examples of advertisements are all PETA messages that were run during different phases of the organization’s public relations strategy.

PETA’s inception was marked by animal exclusive imagery. In the 1990s the organization shifted to the use of supermodels. Another shift in the imagery by PETA occurred in February of 2012; the BWVAKTBOOM campaign shows a new take on human/animal imagery that PETA has employed within its advertisements. PETA strives to get reactions from

¹¹⁹ “AVON Kills,” PETA Campaign Poster, 1989,
<http://animalrights.about.com/od/vivisection/a/Avon-Mary-Kay-And-Estee-Lauder-No-Longer-Cruelty-Free-Resume-Animal-Testing.htm>, accessed January 30, 2014.

¹²⁰ “All animals have the same parts,” *PETA*
<https://secure.peta.org/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=3205>, accessed February 14, 2014.

¹²¹ “Boyfriend Went Vegan.” *PETA*, February 6, 2012
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0vQOnHW0Kc>.

the general public so the organization is always looking for a new way to shock people, which is exactly what this campaign did. The evolution from animal-centric imagery to human-centric imagery speaks to the shifting tactics of the organization, but all tactics end with creating controversy around the issue of animal rights.

These PETA campaigns all depict the entanglement of humans and non-humans. This interaction is shown in three different ways. The first phase depicts non-humans in distress and humans as causing this distress. The second phase begins to weave the two together, by showing people as animals or with animals. The message remains the same—humans must do something to help non-humans. The third phase omits non-humans and shifts the focus to the benefits to humans that help non-humans. These three phases show different uses of presence and absence of humans and non-humans.

The organization's website states that "PETA has always been known for uncompromising, unwavering view on animal rights. We aren't afraid to make difficult comparisons, say the unpopular thing, or point out the uncomfortable truth, if it means that animals will benefit." In this chapter I argue that PETA's framing of animal rights issues cleverly manipulates the rhetorical strategies of presence and absence. The campaign that results exhibits a post-feminist ideology, and the divergent public responses to the campaign can be partially explained by diverse cultural reaction to feminism and post-feminism. I begin this chapter by briefly explaining the three different phases of imagery used in PETA campaigns. Next, I explore the ways PETA employs absence and presence in the BWVAKTBOOM campaign. I conclude this chapter by examining the ways reception of the BWVAKTBOOM campaign exhibited post-feminist logic.

Three Phases of PETA Imagery

PETA has gained a reputation for being both risqué and provocative, and their promotional campaigns reflect or respond to the cultural moment in which they are deployed.

The three phases of imagery present in PETA's campaigns are animal-centric, human and animals, and human-centric.

PETA originally focused on animal imagery. Messages were pictures of the cruelty that non-humans suffered, and captions that informed readers about their own complicity in such horrors.¹²² This period in PETA advertising is exemplified by anti-Avon posters featuring bunnies having chemicals tested on them, films depicting the horrors of researchers using baboons to learn about traumatic head/neck injuries, and pictures of animals with word bubbles exclaiming that they support animal liberation.¹²³ This type of campaign was used extensively in the decade after PETA was founded (1980-1990). These types of images explicitly draw attention to the wounded animals while also informing viewers how humans are responsible, and how they can stop the suffering. Animal-centric imagery was used in the beginning of PETA's campaigning to alert consumers to the suffering they supported.

These types of advertisements give insight into PETA's approach. This first period showed the horrors that viewers themselves were contributing to on a daily basis. This shows the confrontational and uncompromising stand that PETA has on animal rights. These images confront viewers not only with gruesome images, but also with the wrongs they are, however indirectly, committing against animals. The confrontational nature of the messages also shows

¹²² "Intentions Are Not Enough: Only Your Acts Will Free Them," *PETA*, 1989 Annual Review, back cover.; "Do You Support the Animal Liberation Front," *PETA NEWS*, March/April 1990, front cover.

¹²³ "AVON Kills,"; "Do You Support the Animal Liberation Front"; "Unnecessary Fuss," PETA <http://www.peta.org/videos/unnecessary-fuss/>, accessed January 30, 2014.

that PETA is unwilling to compromise its stance on animal rights in order to protect the sensibilities of its viewers.

The first shift in imagery occurred in the early 1990s, when PETA introduced supermodels to its campaigns and quickly gained notoriety for the highly sexually-charged nature of their new campaigns. Maneesha Deckha explains, “the I’d Rather Go Naked...Campaign...is what caught the attention of the mainstream and helped cement the association of PETA with female nudity and sex.”¹²⁴ As explained in the introductory chapter of this thesis, the evolution of nudity in PETA campaigns has become increasingly sexualized. PETA began by using scantily clad supermodels and morphed into launching a hard-core porn site.

During this second phase, supermodels like Cindy Crawford and Pamela Anderson began partnering with PETA to promote animal rights.¹²⁵ PETA also began to incorrectly link women’s sexualization as “imperative to animal protection.”¹²⁶ This period shows PETA trying to expand its imagery and get viewers’ attention in a new way. By using nearly nude females’ bodies PETA shocked its viewers in a new way that the horrific pictures of tortured animals could not. The shift is not totally positive, and is one of the main reasons that PETA is so embattled in controversy. Controversy, however, has not deterred PETA. In a statement Ingrid Newkirk, the founder and CEO of PETA, states “nudity per se isn’t offensive to us [PETA]...there’s also

¹²⁴ Maneesha Deckha, “Disturbing Images: PETA and the Feminist Ethics of Animal Advocacy,” *Ethics & the Environment* 12, no. 2 (2008): 40.

¹²⁵ “Cindy Crawford: Faux Fur for you,” *PETA’s Animal Times*, Holiday Issue 1994.

¹²⁶ Tisha Dejmanee, “The Burdens of Caring: A Postfeminist Perspective on PETA’s Animal Protection Campaigns,” *Australian Feminist Studies* 28, no. 7, 312.

nothing wrong...with the ‘perfect’ human body being used to sell an idea.”¹²⁷ Newkirk further explains that “We [PETA] don’t allow sexism. We use sex. Nudity is not synonymous with sexism.”¹²⁸ PETA’s chose to “use sex” combined with their penchant for controversy has resulted in a new promotional tactic.

A third shift is occurring. This shift now excludes non-human imagery from campaigns, and began with the BWVAKTBOOM campaign. The thirty-second ad does not depict any non-human animals. There are no explicit references to non-humans verbally or visually. The removal of animals from a campaign was a strategic move by PETA, and shifts the focus from saving animals to the sexual benefits to humans that come from a vegan lifestyle. A total absence of non-human animals may demonstrate a new technique by PETA but still effectively creates controversy surrounding PETA and the rights of animals.

The impact of switching to human-centric imagery is the loss of the animal. Without explicit gestures to the animals who are suffering, PETA has changed the conversation surrounding animal rights from the suffering of animals to the benefits to humans. Next, I examine the use of presence/absence in the different phases of human and animal imagery in PETA campaigns.

Absence and Presence in PETA campaigns

¹²⁷ Newkirk Interviews: “Ingrid Newkirk Taking on the Critics,” *Animal Liberation Front*, <http://www.animalliberationfront.com/ALFront/Interviews/Interview%20with%20Ingrid%20Newkirk.htm>, accessed October 12, 2013.

¹²⁸ “Ingrid Newkirk Taking on the Critics.”

Petr Gibas explains that absence is more than just the lack of something. Absence is strategic, experienced, and relational.¹²⁹ Creating a lack of something is strategic, specifically done to allow for multiple readings of a text.¹³⁰ We experience absences physically in the recognition of something being out of place, specifically being elsewhere and not there.¹³¹ To notice something as being missing, there must be a memory of the thing being there previously, so absence also has a relationship to time and space.¹³² This is the reason that absence is so powerful, because “the person who experiences the absent entity must raise it herself [sic]...”¹³³

An absence-presence is when something is missing so blatantly that the absence of that thing can become a presence.¹³⁴ Absence-presence refers to what is missing and comes from the “disruption of expectations.”¹³⁵ Intentional omission of entities from messages creates a void for the audiences. The audiences may fill this void with something else from the campaign or from their own experiences. Building on this previous literature, I propose a new type of relationship between absence and presence: the present-absence. This refers to something that is in the text, but not as it has previously appeared. The audience members of a text still must fill in how the entity previously appeared in texts, differentiating it from presence. Changing the form of something from how it previously has appeared creates a different type of void for the audience than simply omitting it. This void is small enough for the audience to ignore, thereby their

¹²⁹ Petr Gibas, “Uncanny Underground: Absences, Ghosts, and the Rhythmed Everyday of the Prague Metro,” *Cultural Geographies*, 20, no. 4(2013): 497; Lars Frers, “The Matter of Absence,” *Cultural Geographies*, 20, no. 4 (2013): 433-4.

¹³⁰ Gibas, “Uncanny Underground,” 497.

¹³¹ Frers, “The Matter of Absence,” 434.

¹³² Frers, “The Matter of Absence,” 434.

¹³³ Frers, “The Matter of Absence,” 438.

¹³⁴ Avril Maddrell, “Living With the Deceased: Absence, Presence and Absence-Presence,” *Cultural Geographies*, 20, no. 4, (2013), 505.

¹³⁵ Frers, “The Matter of Absence,” 434.

attention is allowed to focus elsewhere in the text. For example, PETA ads have always featured a PETA watermark, typically in the lower right hand side of a message. If that mark happened to change font types or location that would be an example of a present-absence.

In the first phase, animal-centric imagery, the campaigns were explicit about animal suffering. Given that these were the first campaigns, this phase is entirely presence. Since there is nothing to refer back to, absences cannot be used. The presences in the anti-AVON campaign that was referenced in the introduction are animals in duress, captions, and a PETA watermark. Most of these presences carry throughout the other phases of imagery. Two things that have become a marker of PETA messages are the captions on the messages and the PETA watermark. The first phase contains many presences that continue throughout the campaigns and work to orient viewers to understanding that they are viewing a PETA message.

The second phase, characterized by human and animal imagery, began to change the depiction of animal suffering. Since the campaign generally featured beautiful people, and supermodels specifically, animals were pushed to the periphery of the campaign. Instead of overtly depicting the suffering of animals, PETA began to use female bodies to draw viewers' attention and then caption the picture with an animal rights message. This shift is apparent in the Pamela Anderson message described in the introduction of the chapter.¹³⁶ This message contains both presence and present-absence. The presence comes from the inclusion of a human body, specifically Pamela Anderson's bikini-clad body.

The present-absence appears as the references to the animals. Anderson has different cuts of meat painted onto her body, referring to the animals' bodies that are being cut up and eaten.

¹³⁶ "All animals have the same parts," *PETA* <https://secure.peta.org/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=3205>, accessed February 14, 2014.

The message also depicts an outline of a cow to the side, again referencing that this is specifically beef that the message is protesting. This present-absence allows the viewers to largely ignore the way that these animals' bodies are cut up and how they are killed, and instead they can look at an aesthetically pleasing female body. By using women's bodies in their advertisements, PETA shifts the focus of the audience from the horrible conditions of slaughterhouses to the bodies of humans.

The BWVAKTBOOM campaign marks the beginning of the latest shift in PETA imagery to human-centric imagery. The campaign contains no references to non-humans, either explicitly or implicitly. The campaign also displays presence/absence in new ways. The expected form of PETA advertisements and audience expectations of content are two areas where manipulation of presence/absence is strategically deployed. These manipulations of presence/absence are used to draw attention to the campaign and ensure a response from audiences.

Audience Expectations of Form

There are three things that audiences have come to expect when viewing a PETA ad: a celebrity, a call-to-action, and suffering of non-humans as a reaction to humans. Celebrity spokespeople became popularized in the second phase with the use of supermodels, and has since become a staple in PETA campaigns. Since PETA is an organization fighting for the rights of animals a call-to-action for viewers to create change in the material world is an important part of their public relations strategy. PETA has set up animal suffering as a direct cause of human actions. The viewers are also complicit and empowered (by the call-to-action) to save these animals and end their suffering. In this section, I argue that PETA fulfills audience expectations of PETA advertisements through the use of presence and absence in the BWVAKTBOOM campaign.

In the last twenty years celebrity spokespeople have dominated PETA's messages, thereby celebrities have become a staple of the organization's advertisements. The BWVAKTBOOM campaign uses comedian and former *Saturday Night Live* cast member Kevin Nealon as its celebrity spokesperson. Nealon lends his voice to the advertisement and acts as narrator/announcer for the commercial. Typically the celebrity is much more featured in the message and used visually to gain attention. It is also important to note that Nealon does not have a particularly distinct voice in comparison to, for example, that of Morgan Freeman or Gilbert Godfrey. The campaign's site does highlight the fact that "Kevin Nealon lends his voice to help prevent BWVAKTBOOM injuries," which draws attention to the celebrity endorsement embedded in the campaign.¹³⁷ The use of a non-distinct, visually-hidden celebrity creates a present-absence. PETA plays with audience's expectations of both form and content in the BWVAKTBOOM campaign.

Given PETA's history of using celebrity endorsements, the audience is likely to notice that something, a visual of the celebrity, is missing. The celebrity is still there, just in a different form. Kevin Nealon's present-absence in the campaign is in contrast to celebrity spokespeople being visually featured in previous campaigns. This encourages the audience to not be distracted by feelings about the celebrity, and rather focus on other messages in the campaign. By using an obscured celebrity, PETA points the audience's attention to the condition of BWVAKTBOOM and the humor within the message.

A call-to-action is present in most PETA messages. The organization exists to end the exploitation of animals, so every message they have will contain a link for further information, or include a simple call-to-action of "go vegan/vegetarian." The BWVAKTBOOM campaign has

¹³⁷ "Living With BWVAKTBOOM," *Living With BWVAKTBOOM*, www.bwvaktboom.com, accessed February 15, 2013.

a call-to-action that urges viewers to become vegan. However, the campaign also functions as a call-to-action to go vegan safely as well as to raise awareness about the condition of BWVAKTBOOM.

The BWVAKTBOOM campaign is an entanglement of three different calls-to-action, which is a present-absence. The three calls-to-action are for viewers to go vegan, cure male impotence, and prevent BWVKATBOOM. Like the use of a celebrity-spokesperson, the call-to-action is obscured. This strategy can force the audience to pay less attention to what the advertisement wants them to do, and spend more time focusing on the ostensible humor of the message. By focusing on the humor and leaving the audience with a web address where they can “find out how to go vegan safely,” the campaign allows viewers to enjoy the humor of the advertisement and put off the work of being vegan for later.¹³⁸

The presentation of pleasure and cruelty has always had a specific presentation in PETA campaigns. The humans were gaining pleasure from non-human suffering. For example, in the message featuring Pamela Anderson in the introduction of this chapter the pleasure/cruelty dichotomy is present. The advertisement features the suffering of animals, in this case cattle raised and killed for meat. Humans gain pleasure from eating meat, the result of non-human suffering. The messages also empower humans to end the suffering, in this case by going vegetarian. The pleasure/cruelty dichotomy is the presentation of animal suffering for the benefit of humans.

Pleasure/cruelty is presented in the BWVAKTBOOM campaign. Animals have experienced cruelty in a variety of ways in PETA advertisements. Conversely, humans have experienced pleasure in a variety ways in PETA campaigns. With the first era of animal-centric

¹³⁸ “Boyfriend Went Vegan.” *PETA*, February 6, 2012
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0vQOnHW0Kc>.

imagery pleasure is derived from eating meat, consuming dairy products, or using cosmetics tested on animals. Suffering is derived from the animal side of these activities and includes being killed for meat after living in heinous conditions, being in a nearly constant state of pregnancy to produce milk products, or being burned and maimed with chemicals. The human/animal phase is marked by the addition of sexual pleasure. PETA introduces sexual pleasure by introducing naked bodies into their messages. Cruelty is still experienced in the same ways, but now there are humans posing as animals, like the Pamela Anderson example introduced earlier. In the latest period of human-centric imagery, pleasure has moved exclusively to sex. Pleasure and cruelty have existed together in the PETA-verse and with the evolution of pleasure, cruelty has also evolved. In the first two phases of imagery, cruelty was something done to non-humans by humans. Humans were the one exploiting the animals; through animal testing, the consumption of dairy or meat, the production of flesh and by-products, humans were always complicit in the suffering of animals. Now, in the human-centric phase, the cruelty is entangled with pleasure through sexual activities. Jessica clearly sustained injuries in the sexual activities with her partner but is also seen as deriving pleasure from it. By giving into their “primal” or “animalistic” physical urges, Jessica and her partner have not only blurred the lines between pleasure/cruelty but also between animal/human. With the toss of the bagged produce Jessica demonstrates agency that animals have never had.

The BWVAKTBOOM campaign radically shifts the pleasure/cruelty principle. Instead of humans exclusively gaining pleasure and animals exclusively suffering, the campaign omits animals and entangles pleasure and cruelty in sexual activities between humans. This is shown by Jessica’s injuries, her apparent enjoyment in the flashbacks in the campaign, as well as her returning with food and smirking at her partner. Nothing in the campaign points to these

activities being non-consensual, and Jessica and her partner are shown enjoying themselves while entangling pleasure and cruelty.

The campaign adds a presence of sexual activity between two humans as the basis of the campaign. The pleasure/cruelty dichotomy gets enmeshed in this presence. What is more interesting is the campaign's treatment of non-human imagery. PETA's strategic omission of non-human animals in the BWVAKTBOOM campaign becomes an absence-presence. PETA has always had some type of explicit reference to non-humans in their previous message, so this campaign disrupts the expectations that viewers hold. The lack of non-humans completely breaks the blueprint that PETA has created in its previous messages, and also creates a void for the audience to fill in.

PETA manipulates the audience's expectation of form in the presentation of celebrities, calls-to-action, and the pleasure/cruelty dynamic. The first two are strategically obscured in what I call a present-absence. This works to lead the audience's attention to the addition of a new presence. The presence is the inclusion of human sexual activity. Another category, content, is manipulated to draw the attention elsewhere as well.

Audience Expectations of Content

When viewing a PETA campaign there are three main things audience members expect to see in the content: a wounded animal, something shocking, and people as having agency. PETA strategically deployed the concepts of presence and absence in the BWVAKTBOOM campaign to disturb audience members' expectations of form.

Since the beginning of PETA campaigns, there has almost always been a wounded animal in the campaign imagery. These images are either of real non-humans being slaughtered or people representing animals by painting themselves with fake blood and lying in plastic-

wrapped styrofoam packages to protest meat consumption.¹³⁹ Omitting a wounded animal is an absence-presence. The absence of the wounded animal is felt so strongly that audiences are invited to put Jessica in the animals' place. Since the only wounded animal in the main video is Jessica, audiences are primed from previous PETA messages to pity her and want to save her. Without an animal for audiences to feel pity and empathy for, audience members are encouraged to transfer these feelings to Jessica. This can be seen in the amount of backlash that the campaign received for portraying Jessica in such a distressed state.¹⁴⁰ The BWVAKTBOOM campaign does not depict an animal viewers are supposed to save, so the response the audience is primed for gets transferred to Jessica.

PETA has a reputation for shocking tactics. As Michael Specter put it "PETA's publicity formula—eighty per cent outrage, ten percent each of celebrity and truth—insures that everything it does offends someone."¹⁴¹ By consistently using shocking material the organization ensures someone will always be offended. The most powerful presence that PETA maintains in this campaign is the use of something shocking. By using imagery of a physically injured woman and no other outlet for people's primed response of empathy and outrage, PETA left the audience

¹³⁹ PETA, "NYC: Drop Dead (Meat)," published July 19, 2010
<http://www.peta.org/blog/nyc-drop-dead-meat/>.

¹⁴⁰ See: Chris Beasley, "PETA's BWVAKTBOOM Ad Campaign," *Point/Counterpoint* February 27, 2012; Annette Davis, "PETA's Use of Violent Sex as a Selling Point," *Black Feminists* March 6, 2012; JohnThomas Didymus, "PETA's Boyfriend Went Vegan Sex Advert Raises Controversy," *Digital Journal* February 16, 2012; Sonia Elks, "PETA Rough Sex Vegan Ad Sparks Anger for Glamorizing Violence," *Metro.co.uk* February 16, 2012; Stabbleford, "Does this PETA Ad?"; David Gianatasio, "Go Vegan and Knock Your Girlfriend Around a Bit, Says PETA: Sexual Antics Leave Woman in a Neck Brace," *AdWeek- AdFreak* February 17, 2012; "Edgy Vegan Campaign Backlash," *Textifying: Trends & Issues in Public Relations*, February 19, 2012; "PETA Controversial Vegan Sex Drive Campaign: BWVAKTBOOM," *VeriaLiving* accessed November 1, 2013; and
<https://twitter.com/search?q=BWVAKTBOOM&src=typd>.

¹⁴¹ Michael Specter, "The Extremist: The Woman Behind the Most Successful Radical Group in America," *The New Yorker* (April 2003): 54.

no choice but to be outraged about Jessica's treatment. Since the campaign omitted other outlets, such as an animal to feel pity for, Jessica becomes the wounded animal for the audience to save.

Agency in previous campaigns has always been something enjoyed by humans. Humans are the ones asked to save the non-human animals who are suffering. In this campaign Jessica's agency is unclear. Agency in the BWVKATBOOM campaign is either a presence or an absence-presence. One of the key moments that PETA points to in the advertisement is when Jessica returns with the bag of vegetables and tosses it to her boyfriend. For PETA this is a clear sign that Jessica is enjoying herself, and "wants more." For critical viewers this is a tired old line of women being expected to provide food for men. For PETA Jessica's agency is a presence. The organization asserts that Jessica has agency over her own life, so much so that she influences her boyfriend's choice in becoming vegan. For those critical of the campaign Jessica's agency is an absence-presence. Critics of the campaign argue that Jessica is an abused object that the audience must take pity on and save.

In the commercial we see Jessica leaving her apartment. By leaving the apartment and returning Jessica is enacting her agency. This act of leaving the scene of her cruel behavior shows that Jessica can exert power over her situation. The act of returning also strongly suggests Jessica's consent in the activities. Jessica also encourages her boyfriend's choice to be vegan and thereby continuing their rigorous sexual activities. Upon returning, Jessica tosses a produce bag filled with celery on the bed in front of her boyfriend. By encouraging him to eat vegan food, Jessica again displays her complicity in the couple's amorous activities. Finally, at the end of the commercial the audience sees Jessica assuming a power position with her boyfriend. The camera captures the scene from behind Jessica, effectively trapping her boyfriend in the bedroom. This camera angle also hints that Jessica may also be aggressive in wanting a more vigorous sex life.

Jessica becomes a consenting member in the relationship through her ability to leave her apartment and her encouragement of her boyfriend's aggressive sexual behavior.

PETA asserts that Jessica has agency, thereby making it a presence. Lindsey Rajt explains that Jessica "had vigorous sex, so she looks disheveled. But the bottom line is, she's coming back from the grocery store with an armful of vegetables because she enjoyed it so much..."¹⁴² Rajt also stresses that the piece is "meant to be humorous" and is "tongue-in-cheek."¹⁴³ PETA's goal for this campaign was to make light of the dire situation for animals, and the positive impact going vegan can have on health. PETA's main goal is to break down the human/animal divide in order to grant animals basic rights.¹⁴⁴ In the past they did it through depicting the ways animals suffer at the hands of humans, and how animals and humans share experiences. In this campaign they make appeals to men and women who want better sex. This campaign grants women agency to make choices in their own lives and also change the minds of their male partners as well.

By granting Jessica agency, PETA created a new presence in their advertising. Animals in PETA advertisements have never had agency. Even if it was a person representing an animal, they also showed a lack of agency.¹⁴⁵ With Jessica's agency, PETA breaks the mold of their

¹⁴² "PETA Has SO Crossed the Line with This Ad," *Rabblerouserruminations* <http://rabblerouserruminations.wordpress.com/2012/02/15/peta-has-so-crossed-the-line-with-this-ad/>, accessed October 20, 2013.

¹⁴³ "PETA Has SO Crossed the Line with This Ad," *Rabblerouserruminations*.

¹⁴⁴ Wendy Atkins-Sayre, "Articulating Identity: People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and the Animal/Human Divide," *Western Journal of Communication*, 74, no. 3 (2010):309, retrieved from *Communication & Mass Media Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 18, 2013).

¹⁴⁵ For examples of campaigns with women having a lack of agency see: "Milk Gone Wild," *PETA*, <http://www.peta.org/tv/videos/vegetarianism-cows/1389647429001.aspx>, accessed October 24, 2013; The campaign features a few women posed nude with bunnies covering their breasts: See "Be a Bunny's Belle of the Ballroom: Choose Cruelty-Free," *PETA*, http://www.mediapeta.com/peta/igc/kym_johnson_horiz_72.jpg, accessed October 23, 2013; "Be

previous representations of women and wounded animals having agency. Jessica's resemblance to a battered woman, however, calls into question just how much agency she has in her relationship as portrayed in the BWVAKTBOOM campaign. PETA received a significant amount of flak for using women to represent animals.¹⁴⁶

The absence-presence of Jessica agency for critics of the campaign is shown by her resemblance to a battered woman. This resemblance is due to the public service announcement style of the campaign, her obvious physical injuries, and the indifference of her boyfriend to these injuries. Lesley, a staff writer for XOJane.com, explains that PETA intentionally uses the style of a PSA to confuse audiences.¹⁴⁷ The main commercial uses an invisible announcer and soft, instrumental music in the background both of which are similar to a commercial for a pharmaceutical drug. Additionally, the use of phrases such as "this is Jessica, she suffers

Nice to Bunnies: Buy Cruelty Free!," *PETA*,
http://www.mediapeta.com/peta/Images/Main/Sections/MediaCenter/PrintAds/steph_pratt_fur_bunnies.jpg, accessed October 23, 2013; See "Shackled, Beaten, Abused," *PETA*,
http://www.mediapeta.com/peta/Images/Main/Sections/MediaCenter/imogenBoycottThai_PETA_300.pdf, accessed October 22, 2013; "Shackled, Beaten, Abused," *The Hottest PETA Ad Campaigns in India*, <http://ibnlive.in.com/photogallery/7537-11.html>, accessed October 23, 2013; "Olivia Munn Combats Circus Cruelty," *PETA*, <http://www.peta.org/features/Olivia-Munn.aspx>, accessed October 23, 2013; "Kristen Johnston Poses Nude in Ad Against Horse-Drawn Carriages," *PETA*, <http://www.peta.org/features/kristen-johnston-naked-peta-ad.aspx>, accessed October 24, 2013; "Eat Your Veggies: Dressing Optional," *PETA*,
<http://www.mediapeta.com/igc/patricia-de-leon-ad-72.jpg>, accessed October 24, 2013. "Killer Body, Clear Conscience: Try Vegan," *PETA*,
http://www.mediapeta.com/peta/images/main/sections/mediacenter/printads/PETA_Koval.jpg, accessed October 24, 2013; "PSAs by Campaign: Skins," *PETA*,
<http://www.peta.org/mediacenter/ads/Print-Ads-Skins.aspx>, accessed October 24, 2013.

¹⁴⁶ See Brett Lunceford, *Naked Politics: Nudity, Political Action, and the Rhetoric of the Body* (Plymouth, United Kingdom: Lexington Books, 2012); Lesli Pace, "Image Events and PETA's Anti Fur Campaign." *Women and Language* 28, no. 2 (2005): 33-41.; Nikki Craft, "PETA: Where Only Women Are Treated Like Meat," ACLU, Published July 18, 2002; and R. E. Doyle, "Save the Wild Pussy," *Ms.* (April/May 2000): 46-47.

¹⁴⁷ Lesley, "Surprise: PETA Launches New Campaign that Offends People," *XOJane* Published February 15, 2012 <http://www.xojane.com/issues/peta-campaign-bwvaktboom-domestic-violence>.

from...” or describing BWVKATBOOM as a “painful condition” or phrases like “for Jessica it is too late” and finally directing viewers to the campaign’s website to “learn to go vegan safely” all suggest to viewers that this is a serious announcement about some type of disease.¹⁴⁸ Jessica’s injuries also were cause for the outrage of many. Jessica is shown as hobbling and in a neck brace; she also has slight bruises under her eyes, suggesting that she is sick or fatigued. Her boyfriend also shows indifference to her injuries, given the severity of her hobble and her neck brace it would make sense for him to go out and get food while she recuperates, but it is Jessica who leaves the apartment. This indifference to her injuries suggests that her boyfriend does not care as much as he should for her safety.

Audience members were primed to have a strong response to this campaign. By creating present-absences with their celebrity spokesperson and their calls-to-action PETA allows audiences to focus on the absence-presence of a wounded animal and the presence of something shocking in the campaign. By using this combination PETA ensured that viewers of this campaign would react to something in the campaign.

Reception of the Campaign

PETA considers the BWVKATBOOM a success. PETA measures the success of the campaign based on the amount of attention received by the campaign. The organization does not seem to differentiate between positive and negative attention to the campaign. In the beginning paragraphs of Rajt’s statement she states, “We [PETA] have found—and your message confirms—that people pay more attention to our racier actions. Judging by the spike in visits to our websites generated by BWVAKTBOOM, this tactic is working...”¹⁴⁹ This statement

¹⁴⁸ “Living With BWVAKTBOOM,” *Living With BWVAKTBOOM*, www.bwvaktboom.com, accessed February 15, 2013.

¹⁴⁹ “PETA Has SO Crossed the Line With This Ad.”

assumes that the increase in numbers of visitors means that the campaign is effective in turning people vegan. This is remedied by another statement given around the time of debuting the campaign PETA writer Anne exclaims, “here at PETA, we’ve seen interest in our vegetarian/vegan starter kit jump by around a third...in the last few months!”¹⁵⁰ With such a jump in visits to their site and the vegan/vegetarian starter kits being sent out, the BWVAKTBOOM campaign does seem effective at getting the word out about animal rights and veganism.

Though the campaign has boosted visits to PETA’s site and possibly triggered an increase in requests for starter kits, many sources question the effectiveness of the campaign. PETA is well-known not only by the public, but journalistic and academic circles for their shocking tactics; it is also argued that PETA only “succeeds in perpetuating PETA.”¹⁵¹ Critics of the campaign argue that PETA the campaign was not truly effective, that PETA only does shocking campaigns to perpetuate itself, and that the problematic imagery in the campaign are all reasons the campaign should not be taken seriously. The BWVAKTBOOM campaign comes from a long line of controversial or racy ads from PETA. Campaigns in every phase of imagery have responded to their cultural surroundings. I argue that this campaign was created in response to post-feminism.

In the previous section of this chapter I argued that PETA used presence and absence in the BWVKATBOOM campaign. The manipulation of presence and absence ensures a reaction from viewers. PETA used this reaction to forward post-feminist logic. The post-feminist logic, discussed in the next section, also explains the two broad categories of reaction viewers had.

¹⁵⁰ Anne, “Trending Right Now: Veganism,” April 4, 2013, <http://blog.peta.org.uk/2013/04/trending-right-now-veganism/>.

¹⁵¹ Lunceford, *Naked Politics*, 15.

The Post-Feminist Pivot

In the BWVAKTBOOM campaign, the discussion of Jessica and her perceived and given agency captures the post-feminist ideology that permeates U.S. American society currently. The objectification of women and animals has been linked for a long time. This can be seen in the derogatory names used for women like “bitch,” “vixen,” “chick,” etc.¹⁵² It is also something that Carol Adams explored extensively. Adams discusses the “connections between male dominance and meat eating,” noting that “vegetables and other nonmeat foods are viewed as women’s food” and that men who consume these foods are “effeminate, a ‘sissy, and a ‘fruit.’”¹⁵³ The reason for the link between meat and masculinity, Adams argues, is evolutionary. Since meat was such a valuable resource “those who controlled [the meat] achieved power”¹⁵⁴ Since women were the ones who collected plant foods they did not have the power. Since hunting is now a recreation rather than a necessity Adams suggests that there has been a shift from the male’s role of hunter to the role of the meat eater.¹⁵⁵

Given the history of images showing only emasculated men being vegan or vegetarian, the BWVAKTBOOM campaign showing a virile, young man seems to be a positive image for young men to see. However, the problematic imagery of violence and submissiveness of women is not positive. This campaign serves to reinforce male vegan sexuality through the illusion of female empowerment. This interplay of different positive and negative messages for men and women within the campaign and Rajt’s response captures the post-feminist ideology. In this

¹⁵² C. Robert Whaley and George Antonelli, "The Birds and the Beasts: Woman as Animal," *Maledicta: International Journal of Verbal Aggression* 7 (1983): 220. See also Julia Wood, *Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1994), 133 for a discussion of the ways in which animal and food metaphors trivialize women.

¹⁵³ Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1990), 13-38.

¹⁵⁴ Adams, *The Sexual Politics*, 34.

¹⁵⁵ Adams, *The Sexual Politics*, 36.

section I argue that the introduction of post-feminism into the BWVAKTBOOM campaign helps to explain the two forms of backlash in the campaign, as well as the hypermasculine imagery within the campaign.

Post-feminism is the idea that the work of feminism is accomplished, and the movement is no longer needed.¹⁵⁶ Angela McRobbie posits that post-feminism is feminism undoing itself, “while simultaneously appearing to be engaging in a well-informed and even well-intended response to feminism,” and is specifically aimed at young people.¹⁵⁷ Post-feminism is a “double-entanglement” of “neo-conservative values in relation to gender, sexuality and family life...with...liberalisation [sic] in regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relations.”¹⁵⁸ The BWVAKTBOOM campaign, like most of PETA’s campaigns, is aimed at young people and upholds traditional heteronormative coupling, while playing with traditional notions of sexuality.

Jessica and her unnamed partner embody the post-feminist movement. They are young, presumably cis-gendered, and heterosexual, which are the neo-conservative values post-feminism embraces. Jessica is quite unapologetically sexual, and the display of such graphic sexuality is definitely pushing the limits of choice in sexual conduct. Beyond Jessica and her partner the supplementary videos on the campaigns website also depict young, overwhelmingly heterosexual couples. Jessica and her partner are depicted quite sexually, and the flashbacks in the commercial show Jessica’s face as the couple is having intercourse. These images are quite explicit and showing a woman enjoying sex has always been controversial, so PETA is being

¹⁵⁶ Angela McRobbie, “Post-Feminism and Popular Culture,” *Feminist Media Studies* 4, no. 3 (2004): 255.

¹⁵⁷ McRobbie, “Post-Feminism,” 255.

¹⁵⁸ McRobbie, “Post-Feminism,” 255.

quite brash with this campaign.¹⁵⁹ The videos and Jessica all display women enthusiastic about having sex with partners, and as Rajt puts it “wanting more.”¹⁶⁰

Due to the backlash from the public about the campaign, PETA spokeswoman Lindsey Rajt issued a statement clearing up PETA’s intent in producing the BWVAKTBOOM campaign. Rajt explains in her statement that PETA does not take lightly domestic violence, and that the piece was meant to be “tongue-in-cheek” and a “humorous,” light-hearted way of approaching the conversation of animal rights.¹⁶¹ The two forms of backlash come from either audiences buying into the post-feminist logic, or not. Audience members who buy into the post-feminist logic see this campaign as PETA intended—a light-hearted way of promoting a vegan lifestyle. The audience members who reject post-feminism see Jessica as a victim and PETA as problematic for intentionally blurring the lines of consent.

There are two broad reactions to the BWVAKTBOOM campaign. The first reaction is as PETA intended, with audiences seeing it as a humorous promotion of veganism. This is from the audience that accepts the post-feminist logic of the campaign. The second reaction comes from the group of audience members who see the campaign as a detrimental and harmful to representation of women. These comments are critical that violence against women, regardless of how humorously intended, is never something to joke about. These reactions can be seen in an exchange of comments in the comments section on the BWVAKTBOOM website. The exchange

¹⁵⁹ Specifically the Motion Picture Association of America’s rating system regarding sexuality, for more information: Inkoo Kang, “Feminist Filmmaking Means NC-17 Rating from MPAA,” *Indiewire* published December 20, 2013; “Ryan Gosling: Why is *Blue Valentine* NC-17 when *Black Swan* is R?” *Ok!* Published December 8, 2010; Matthew Zuras, “Evan Rachel Wood Blasts MPAA on Twitter for NC-17 Rating,” *Refinery29* published December 3, 2013.

¹⁶⁰ “PETA Has SO Crossed the Line with This Ad,” *Rabblerouserruminations*.

¹⁶¹ “PETA Has SO Crossed the Line With This Ad,” *Rabblerouserruminations*; and Dylan Stableford, “Does this PETA Ad Featuring a Woman in a Neckbrace Promote Veganism or Violence?” *YahooNews*, <http://news.yahoo.com/blogs/cutline/does-peta-ad-featuring-young-pantsless-woman-neckbrace-222920818.html>, accessed February 13, 2012.

is started by a user, Mum LaCroix, who is critical of the campaign's message, saying that domestic violence is not humorous and PETA has "lost an advocate."¹⁶² The message exemplifies the rejection of post-feminist logic that it is okay to make light of serious women's issues because feminism's work is completed. In a response to the comment user Nathan Dally tells LaCroix to "come off it," i.e., to stop taking the campaign so seriously and find the humor in it. Dally continues to explain that if the situation was reversed and depicting women enjoying sex more as vegans that it would be "equally great." Dally concludes, "Equal rights and equal responsibilities."¹⁶³ The last statement particularly tells readers of Dally's comments that he believes men and women are equal and should be treated the same way. The reactions of viewers, as seen in the comment section, can be explained by either an acceptance or rejection of the post-feminist logic within the campaign.

In this chapter, I have argued that PETA campaigns have been characterized by three phases which affect the ways the campaign is received by audiences. The first was in the 1980s when PETA's imagery was animal-exclusive and focused on the atrocities that humans commit against non-humans. The next period has dominated the last 20 years of PETA's advertisements and uses humans and animals in conjunction with each other. This period also focuses on the use of female sexuality to gain attention for animal rights. The BWVKATBOOM campaign marks a new tactic used by PETA, that of human-exclusive imagery. This campaign included no non-human animals in its imagery or verbal cues. Though this is a new tactic, the campaign still accomplishes the goal of creating a lot of buzz around PETA, and embodies a lot of PETA's past missteps. PETA's history of racist and sexist campaigns also work to generate buzz, and many

¹⁶² Mum LaCroix comment on PETA. "Living with BWVAKTBOOM." accessed February 18, 2013. <http://www.bwvaktboom.com/>.

¹⁶³ Mum LaCroix comment on PETA. "Living with BWVAKTBOOM." accessed February 18, 2013. <http://www.bwvaktboom.com/>.

academics and non-academics claim this is the only reason PETA does such racy advertisements. PETA's rhetoric has far-reaching effects, not only to the organization itself but also to the animal rights movement. In this chapter I argued that through the manipulation of presence/absence PETA ensures two types of responses that direct the conversation of animal rights around themselves.

The BWVAKTBOOM campaign embraces new representations, such as the absence of non-humans and post-feminism, but to the same end—controversy. There are two present-absences in the campaign: Kevin Nealon as an obscured celebrity spokesperson and the inclusion of a muddled call-to-action. Both of these present-absences work to allow viewers to focus on the humor of the campaign and put off the work that the campaign calls to them to do. The presentation of the pleasure/cruelty dichotomy is different than it has been in the past, with the exclusion of the non-human, an absence-presence, and the entanglement of pleasure and cruelty in human sexual activity, a present. The absence-presence refers to the strategic omission of an element that is crucial to previous texts, and becomes so noticed that the absence becomes a presence.

Jessica's representations coupled with Rajt's response make this text post-feminist. Jessica and her partner are unapologetically sexual, and are expanding the definition of heterosexual relationships while still maintaining heterosexuality and cis-gendered ideals that epitomize post-feminism. Rajt's response demonstrates the well-intentioned undoing of feminism that post-feminism is also engaging in.

Jessica is the way that the BWVAKTBOOM campaign gestures towards wounded animals. One of the main goals of feminism is re-examining how we assume that women are natural victims. Naomi Wolf explains “women are not natural victims, but they sure *are*

victimized” (original emphasis).¹⁶⁴ Women are assumed victims. Since there is no wounded animal, and women are assumed to be victims, the empathy the audience would normally feel for the animal is felt for Jessica.

PETA succeeds in creating controversy. The BWVAKTBOOM campaign succeeds in doing that through the interaction of presence and absence with regards to previous campaigns. The text also stirs up controversy with the post-feminist ideals that the campaign disseminates. Rajt explains that PETA has “found...that people do pay more attention to our racier actions...”¹⁶⁵ which means that while tactics change PETA remains the same organization trying to get a conversation going with the use of absurd and sometimes offensive tactics. The BWVAKTBOOM campaign obscures things traditionally in a PETA campaign to create controversy which is explained though post-feminism. In this chapter I argued that through the use of presence/absence PETA obscured their message of animal rights. The manipulation of presence and absence allows not only harmful representations of masculinity and femininity but also for other aspect of identity. The next chapter will explore the ways the campaign represents gender, race, and sexual orientation.

¹⁶⁴ Naomi Wolf, *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change the 21st Century* (New York: Random House, 1993), 141.

¹⁶⁵ Wolf, *Fire with Fire*, 141.

CHAPTER THREE: CONSTITUTIVE RHETORIC IN BWVAKTBOOM: WHO CAN BE VEGAN?

When PETA debuted the BWVAKTBOOM commercial in February 2012 one viewer stated “this gimmicky (at best)/tactless and women-hating (at worst) crap is really off-putting.”¹⁶⁶ Another quote about the campaign says, “Quit doing things to push away people who would otherwise be passionate supporters of your cause. We want to help animals, too, but being in any way associated with you right now is repulsive to me.”¹⁶⁷ These quotes demonstrate some of the failures of PETA and the BWVAKTBOOM campaign. These failures are largely due to a lack of identification between viewers and the organization.

Kenneth Burke discussed the concept of identification. Burke explains, “In being identified...[one] is ‘substantially one’ with a person other than himself [sic].”¹⁶⁸ This is different than previous conceptualizations of persuasion because Burke insists that a person must have connected interests in order to be persuaded. Burke’s theories begin to explain how audiences are formed through discourse.¹⁶⁹ Other theorists have described the ways these symbolic processes also can shape an audience member’s own identity. Louis Althusser theorized interpellation as the process of the subject entering into discourse, arguing that one

¹⁶⁶ Steven Whitright, “Tips for Playing It Safe,” *BWVAKTBOOM* <http://www.bwvaktboom.com/Tips.aspx>, accessed February 12, 2013.

¹⁶⁷ “Dear PETA: Everyone is Tired of Your Bullshit,” *The Angry Black Woman* <http://theangryblackwoman.com/2009/08/21/dear-peta-everyone-is-tired-of-your-bullshit/>, accessed October 24, 2013.

¹⁶⁸ Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1969), 20-1.

¹⁶⁹ Helen Tate, “The Ideological Effects of a Failed Constitutive Rhetoric: The Co-option of the Rhetoric of White Lesbian Feminism,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 28, no. 1 (2005): 6.

may be interpellated simply by acknowledging the discourse.¹⁷⁰ Joshua Gunn and Shaun Treat explain that interpellation is “the process by which ideology ‘hails’ the concrete individual into...a particular performance of selfhood.”¹⁷¹ Drawing on Burke and Althusser, Maurice Charland insists that all identities are rhetorical constructions and do not exist in nature.¹⁷² Charland argues that rhetoric is an ideological agent that "constitutes" subjects through the identification rituals of ‘interpellation.’¹⁷³ Charland’s theory of constitutive rhetoric explains how collective identities are formed through rhetorical processes.

Since the introduction of human imagery into PETA’s campaigns, PETA has been attempting to constitute a vegan identity. Many of those attempts have come under fire for being exclusionary and bigoted. Consequently, PETA’s attempts at interpellation are not always successful. Vegan identity is something that PETA and its followers create together, through constitutive rhetoric. This constitution of vegan identity is something that PETA fails to do in the BWVAKTBOOM campaign. Through the BWVAKTBOOM campaign PETA attempts to create both who makes an ideal vegan and who is an ideal PETA member. In this chapter I argue that the identity PETA constitutes in the BWVKATBOOM campaign is a hypermasculine, heterosexual, White man. I begin by examining the ways the BWVKATBOOM commercial exemplifies hegemonic notions of hypermasculinity, heteronormativity, and whiteness. I conclude by examining how effective this strategy was for PETA.

¹⁷⁰ Maurice Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the Peuple Quebecois," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73, no. 2 (1987): 137.

¹⁷¹ Joshua Gunn and Shaun Treat, “Zombie Trouble: A Propaedeutic on Ideological Subjectification and the Unconscious,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 91, no. 2 (2005): 155.

¹⁷² Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric,” 137.

¹⁷³ Gunn and Treat, “Zombie Trouble,” 145.

PETA's Harmful History

This identity that PETA attempts to constitute in the BWVAKTBOOM campaign is hurtful due to the lack of diversity in the campaign, specifically the White-centric and queer erasure present in the campaign. PETA's depiction of race/ethnicity is one of the main reasons for its notoriety. Both scholarly and journalistic opinions are that PETA is whitewashed. PETA launched two displays comparing the conditions of animal suffering to atrocities committed against humans; the first display referenced the Holocaust¹⁷⁴ and the other African slavery.¹⁷⁵ PETA also demonizes other cultures, particularly the fur-trade in China¹⁷⁶ and the leather industry in India.¹⁷⁷ Many of the campaigns focus around White people, specifically women, and even white animals, like rabbits.¹⁷⁸ As discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, Maneesha Deckha explains how even the sexualization of women is exclusionary, because PETA shows a preference to depict the nudity and sexualization of White, heterosexual, able-bodied women.¹⁷⁹ This whitewashing has not gone unnoticed. Many open letters have been written and there has been an outcry on social media platforms against PETA for its lack of ethnic/racial diversity.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁴ “PETA Germany’s Holocaust Display Banned,” *PETA*, March 27, 2009, <http://www.peta.org/b/thepetafiles/archive/tags/holocaust+on+your+plate/default.aspx>.

¹⁷⁵ “Huh?! PETA Exhibit to Compare Animal Cruelty to Slavery,” *Newsone*, July 20, 2011, <http://newsone.com/1404415/peta-slavery-exhibit-blacks-african-americans/>.

¹⁷⁶ “A Shocking Look Inside Chinese Fur Farms,” *PETA*, <http://features.peta.org/ChineseFurFarms/>, accessed October 24, 2013.

¹⁷⁷ “The Global Leather Trade,” *PETA*, <http://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-clothing/global-leather-trade.aspx>, accessed October 20, 2013.

¹⁷⁸ See “Be a Bunny’s Belle of the Ballroom,” *PETA*; “Be Nice to Bunnies,” *PETA*.

¹⁷⁹ Maneesha Deckha, “Disturbing Images: PETA and the Feminist Ethics of Animal Advocacy,” *Ethics & the Environment* 12, no. 2 (2008): 35-76.

¹⁸⁰ For a few examples see: “Dear PETA: Everyone is Tired of Your Bullshit,” *The Angry Black Woman* <http://theangryblackwoman.com/2009/08/21/dear-peta-everyone-is-tired-of-your-bullshit/>, accessed October 24, 2013; <http://www.tumblr.com/tagged/vegans-against-peta>; <https://twitter.com/search?q=vegansagainstpeta&src=typd>; and <http://vegansagainstpeta.blogspot.com/> accessed October 24, 2013.

In addition to being criticized for its “whitewashing” practices, PETA has gained a reputation for being transphobic.¹⁸¹ PETA released a series of photographs featuring drag queens with captions like “Fur is a drag.”¹⁸² By equating “drag” with the connotation of fur being bad, PETA engaged in transmisogyny.¹⁸³ This campaign is a specific form of transphobism that is against transgendered people who identify as female. The campaign is transmisogynistic because the campaign only used drag queens and no drag kings.¹⁸⁴

PETA has also received flak for its portrayal of women. The biggest complaint is the unnecessary sexualization of women.¹⁸⁵ Deckha notes that not only are women sexualized, they are also more likely to be told to alter their bodies, in ways such as removing body hair, to appeal more to men (again furthering heteronormativity).¹⁸⁶ One such image shows Anna Nicole Smith proudly displaying hairless underarms to a group of men staring intently at her. The text of the

¹⁸¹ Most of the controversy is regarding the “Fur is a Drag” Campaign by PETA: See “PETA’s Fur is a Drag Campaign Steps Over the Line,” *Stuff Queer People Need to Know* February 19, 2009; Ronan, “Call PETA to Protest Transphobic Ad,” *Portland Independent Media Center*, July 23, 2008; and Ida Hammer “Transphobia and PETA,” *Vegan Ideal* October 10, 2008.

¹⁸² “Using Transphobia to Fight Animal Abuse?” *The Colonic:Socio-Political Detox* Published February 17, 2009.

¹⁸³ “Using Transphobia to Fight Animal Abuse?”

¹⁸⁴ Ida Hammer “Transphobia and PETA,” *Vegan Ideal* October 10, 2008.

¹⁸⁵ See: Nikki Craft, “PETA: Where Only Women Are Treated Like Meat,” ACLU, Published July 18, 2002.; R. E. Doyle, "Save the Wild Pussy," *Ms.* (April/May 2000): 46-47; Brett Lunceford, *Naked Politics: Nudity, Political Action, and the Rhetoric of the Body* (Plymouth, United Kingdom: Lexington Books, 2012); Lesli Pace, "Image Events and PETA's Anti Fur Campaign," *Women and Language* 28, no. 2 (2005): 33-41; “PETA—People for the Egregious Treatment of Adult (Women),” *About-Face: Don’t fall for the Media Circus* published March 8, 2012; and “PETA Sexualizes Women & Uses Rape Culture Imagery to Raise Awareness For...What?,” *Feminspire* Published May 28, 2013.

¹⁸⁶ Deckha, “Disturbing Images,” 43-4.

photograph proudly proclaims “Gentlemen prefer fur-free blondes” (original emphasis).¹⁸⁷ PETA’s messages tell women to put the problems of the world as well as attracting the opposite sex before their own concerns.

Despite contrary opinions in academia, PETA believes their controversial tactics are working. A PETA spokeswoman for the BWVKATBOOM campaign, Lindsey Rajt, explains that “We [PETA] often do “shocking” things to get the word out about animal abuse. PETA’s job is to draw attention to animal suffering, and we have found that provocative tactics yield more attention than the facts alone, which, in today’s tabloid media, aren’t enough to attract interest.”¹⁸⁸ Unsurprisingly, these confrontational tactics are also seen in the BWVAKTBOOM campaign. In this campaign PETA attempts to constitute a male vegan whose virility is connected to violence. The male vegan depicted in the main commercial of the campaign put his partner’s head through a wall, resulting in her having to wear a neck brace due to the injuries. Other injuries that are bragged about in the campaign range from rug burns to a dislocated hip.¹⁸⁹ By using violence to decrease the stigmatization of male veganism, PETA increased their reputation for being controversial. Using Charland’s model to examine PETA’s advertisements allows us to see whose vegan identity PETA affirms. Given PETA’s insensitive past and reproduction of dominant cultural mores there is a specific identity the BWVAKTBOOM campaign idealizes as vegan: a hypermasculine, White, straight male.

¹⁸⁷ “Anna Nicole Smith Says, “Gentlemen Prefer Fur-Free Blondes,” *PETA* <http://www.peta.org/features/anna-nicole-smith-says-gentlemen-prefer-fur-free-blondes.aspx>, accessed October 24, 2013.

¹⁸⁸ “PETA Has SO Crossed the Line With This Ad,” *Rabblerouserruminations* <http://rabblerouserruminations.wordpress.com/2012/02/15/peta-has-so-crossed-the-line-with-this-ad/>, accessed October 20, 2013.

¹⁸⁹ PETA, “Living with BWVAKTBOOM.” Accessed February 18, 2013. <http://www.bwvaktboom.com/>.

BWVAKTBOOM Perpetuating Dominant Ideologies

Hypermasculinity

Richard Benson explains that hypermasculinity “is the value system that celebrates male physical strength, aggression, violence, competition, and dominance. It denigrates the lack of these qualities as weak, female behavior.”¹⁹⁰ Hypermasculinity not only increases the worth of masculinity but does so by decreasing the worth of femininity. This outcome is important when viewing the BWVKABTOOM campaign because it does the same thing. It celebrates and targets masculinity for praise and builds up men while conceptualizing women as weak and pushing them down.

Donald L. Mosher and Mark Sirkin offer a more specific definition of hypermasculinity that will be used to structure this section of the chapter. The first component of hypermasculinity is a calloused attitude towards women which assumes that “sexual intercourse with women establishes masculine power.”¹⁹¹ The next element of hypermasculinity is the notion that violence is manly. Mosher and Sirkin describe this as, “the attitude among some men that violent aggression, either verbal or physical, is an acceptable, even preferable, masculine expression of power and dominance toward other men.”¹⁹² The final requirement of hypermasculinity is the notion that danger is exciting. This requirement manifests itself as “the attitude that survival in dangerous situations, including ‘tempting fate,’ is a manly display of masculine power over the

¹⁹⁰ Robert W. Benson, "Changing Police Culture: The Sine Qua Non of Reform." *Loyola of Los Angeles Law Review* 34 (2001): n.p.

¹⁹¹ Donald L. Mosher, and Mark Sirkin. "Measuring a Macho Personality Constellation." *Journal of Research in Personality* 18 (1984): 151-2. Communication & Mass Media Complete, EBSCOhost.

¹⁹² Mosher and Sirkin. "Measuring a Macho Personality Constellation." 151.

dangerous environment.”¹⁹³ My examination of the BWVAKTBOOM campaign illustrates the ways it exemplifies these two definitions of hypermasculinity.

The BWVAKTBOOM campaign is saturated with hypermasculinity. One of the possible reasons for using the hypermasculine imagery found in this campaign is to reverse the stigma that vegetables are “women’s food,” and to make them manly again. According to a 2012 Gallup poll, seven percent of women in the United States consider themselves vegetarian, but only four percent of men do.¹⁹⁴ While a three percent difference does not seem significant, it means that women are 175 percent more likely to abstain from eating animals than men. In order to “beef up” (pun intended) their image, male vegans need to assert their power over females and appear as masculine as possible. As noted in the preceding chapter, Carol Adams contends that “[m]en who choose not to eat meat repudiate one of their masculine privileges.” And those who give up meat and opt for women’s food become “effeminate, a ‘sissy,’ a ‘fruit.’”¹⁹⁵ Vegan food being associated with womanhood was not the only reason PETA elected to hypermasculinize male vegans.

Given PETA’s long history of using women’s bodies as the focus for their campaigns, using the male body is a new technique. The focus of this campaign is using a vegan diet to heighten sexual prowess for men. The campaign states succinctly, “more and more men are discovering the perks of a plant-based diet.”¹⁹⁶ This shift to discussing the male body comes from what has been coined the “crisis of masculinity.” The crisis of masculinity refers to the

¹⁹³ Mosher and Sirkin. “Measuring a Macho Personality Constellation.” 151.

¹⁹⁴ Newport, Frank. “In U.S., 5% Consider Themselves Vegetarians: Even smaller 2% say they are vegans,” *Gallup*. Published July 26, 2012. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/156215/consider-themselves-vegetarians.aspx>.

¹⁹⁵ Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, 38.

¹⁹⁶ “Living with BWVAKTBOOM,” *Living With BWVAKTBOOM*, www.bwvaktboom.com, accessed February 15, 2013.

onstensible disappearance of “real men” in society. Proponents of the “crisis of masculinity” theory assert that as men’s roles no longer neatly conform to hegemonic notions of masculinity, their essential nature as men erodes. One component of traditional masculinity is being a provider. With the disappearance of “brawny jobs,” the way that men have traditionally provided for their families, through physical labor, is slowly disappearing.¹⁹⁷ Leanne Payne defines it simply as “the fact that this separation and affirmation of identity is not happening...”¹⁹⁸ In other words, men are not being affirmed in traditional masculine identities. Many cite the feminization of the workforce for this crisis.¹⁹⁹ Since men can no longer be providers, their masculine identities are at risk. Gary R. Brooks states that “many men cope with this discrepancy between the impossible masculinity ideals and the realities of their own self-perceptions through the adoption of a range of self-defeating ‘macho’ behaviors.”²⁰⁰ Given this crisis there has been a surge in hypermasculine imagery, and this campaign is no exception.

By putting his partner’s head through a wall Jessica’s boyfriend is embodying the proverbial caveman dragging his mate back to his cave after rendering her unconscious. The male in the main video is also fixing the hole in the wall, reinforcing the idea that men should fix things up around the house. The video also reinforces traditional gender roles with Jessica going to the grocery store to do the shopping. The BWVAKTBOOM campaign affirms vegan male identity through displaying hypermasculine, or macho, personality traits.

¹⁹⁷ Andrew Romano, “Why We Need to Reimagine Masculinity,” *Newsweek* Published January 5, 2011.

¹⁹⁸ Leanne Payne, *Crisis in Masculinity*, (Grand Rapids: Hamewith Books, 1995), 12.

¹⁹⁹ John MacInnes, “The Crisis of Masculinity and the Politics of Identity,” *The Masculinities Reader* edited by Stephen M. Whitehead and Frank H. Barrett, Cambridge: Polity Press, (2001): 320-2 and Romano, “Why We Need to Reimagine Masculinity.”

²⁰⁰ Gary R. Brooks, *Beyond the Crisis of Masculinity: A Transtheoretical Model for Male-Friendly Therapy* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2010), 32.

PETA also elected to use a sexualized woman in this campaign, something that inherently dehumanizes them more than non-sexualized women.²⁰¹ Jeroen Vaes, Paola Paladino, and Elisa Puvia found that when women and men observed depictions of objectified women, both women and men associated the objectified women with animal concepts rather than human concepts.²⁰² Further, the women in the study distanced themselves from sexually objectified women.²⁰³ By turning Jessica into a sexual object for her male partner, PETA de-humanizes her. Since this tactic of dehumanizing Jessica is used in conjunction with the hypermasculinization of male vegans it was mostly likely done to reinforce the humanity of male vegans. PETA uses the sexualization of women, specifically Jessica, to boost male persona in this campaign. This two-part approach by PETA intends to redefine the image of male vegans by building men up and pushing women further down.

The BWVAKTBOOM campaign was sparked by the “crisis of masculinity.” PETA used the combination of hypermasculinizing vegan men and sexualizing vegan women to provide a way for men to be macho and vegan. Using Mosher and Sirkin’s three criteria of hypermasculinity, I explain how the campaign is saturated in hypermasculinity.

Mosher and Sirkin contend that a key component of hypermasculinity is the “attitude that sexual intercourse with women establishes masculine power.”²⁰⁴ Discussion of males’ sexual prowess with women is a key component of the BWVAKTBOOM campaign. The campaign’s website also displays calloused attitudes towards women. The main page states that women have been going vegan for years due to the “physical, emotional, and karmic benefits of veganism”

²⁰¹ Jeroen Vaes, Paola Paladino, and Elisa Puvia, “Are Sexualized Women Complete Human Beings? Why Men and Women Dehumanize Sexually Objectified Women,” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 41, no 6 (2011): 774–785.

²⁰² Vaes et. al, “Are sexualized Women Complete Human Beings?” 778.

²⁰³ Vaes et. al, “Are sexualized Women Complete Human Beings?” 780.

²⁰⁴ Mosher and Sirkin. "Measuring a Macho Personality Constellation." 151-2.

but men are only now going vegan for the sexual benefits.²⁰⁵ In essence, the only reason that these men are converting to veganism is to have better sex with their partners. This puts men in the position that they deserve sexual gratification from women. The women also seem to be enjoying their new sex lives as well. The supplemental videos on the website show women quite literally delirious with happiness over their sex lives. One woman gleefully explains the benefits of her boyfriend's new stamina assuring viewers that he can "go all night, and then some"²⁰⁶ The campaign operates under the assumption that the males viewing this want to have sex with women and with great vigor.

Nudity is one of PETA's main campaign strategies. Jessica and her boyfriend are wearing little else than their underwear. PETA's use of gratuitous nudity has received substantial scholarly and journalistic attention.²⁰⁷ Scholars have argued that nudity, itself, is not problematic. In some contexts, it can be celebrated as liberatory. Brett Lunceford states that "something can happen when you take your clothes off and...the act of disrobing can have social and political consequences."²⁰⁸ However, the nudity and sexualization in the BWVAKTBOOM campaign is problematic. Jessica's nudity and sexual availability is the basis of the campaign. This nudity is a reflection of the post-feminist logic, discussed in chapter two, which again results in two contradictory readings of the campaign.

The first is PETA's position that Jessica's nudity/sexualization is liberatory. The message leads us to believe that Jessica had a significant impact on her boyfriend's decision to go vegan.

²⁰⁵ PETA, "Living with BWVAKTBOOM." Accessed February 18, 2013. <http://www.bwvaktboom.com/>.

²⁰⁶ PETA, "Side Effects," Youtube Video, accessed February 18, 2013.

²⁰⁷ See Adams, "PETA and a Pornographic Culture," 1-8; Nikki Craft, "PETA: Where Only Women Are Treated Like Meat," ACLU, Published July 18, 2002; R. E. Doyle, "Save the Wild Pussy," *Ms.*, (April/May 2000), 46-47; Lunceford, *Naked Politics*; and Lesli Pace, "Image Events and PETA's Anti Fur Campaign." *Women and Language* 28, no. 2(2005): 33-41.

²⁰⁸ Lunceford, *Naked Politics*, 15.

This is done in the commentary where the announcer explains that women have long been experiencing the benefits of a plant-based diet, but that men are just now discovering the benefits; hence, Jessica lead her boyfriend to veganism by example. Jessica becomes a stand-in for other women to turn their boyfriends vegan. The other reading, one that rejects the logic of post-feminism, sees Jessica as highly objectified and presented only as an outlet for her boyfriend's sexuality. Jessica becomes an object for the male gaze; she needs to be desirable so as to entice men into changing their minds. By choosing to sexualize Jessica PETA makes her an object, not a person with true agency. Through Jessica's strategic nudity and sexuality she becomes an object for the male gaze.

Jessica's representation also displays gathering plant foods as "women's work," something that Adams identifies as a component of patriarchy. In the commercial Jessica is walking back to the apartment carrying a small sack of vegetables. Upon entering the apartment she tosses the vegetables to her male partner, letting the audience know that the vegetables were not even for her.²⁰⁹ Jessica is placed firmly in the female role that dictates she does the shopping and gathers vegetables for her male partner.

To add insult to injury, literally, she is shown as hobbling down the street and walking pained up the stairs and pictured in a neck brace.²¹⁰ Showing Jessica as the one who gets injured reinforces the idea that women are the "weaker sex." Jessica and her partner are engaging in the same sexual acts, but he remains visibly unscathed from the interactions while Jessica is hobbling, in a neck brace, and has several large bruises visible to the audience. The fact that Jessica is so injured seems to suggest that the boyfriend only cares about his sexual gratification, not her safety. The entire campaign is based on the presupposition that men want to have sex,

²⁰⁹ PETA, "Boyfriend Went Vegan." Youtube Video. Accessed February 18, 2013.

²¹⁰ PETA, "Boyfriend Went Vegan." Youtube Video. Accessed February 18, 2013.

specifically better sex with their partners. Wanting to establish masculine power through intercourse is the first characteristic of hypermasculinity, and the presupposition behind the BWVAKTBOOM campaign.

The second theme of Mosher and Sirkin's definition of hypermasculinity is that the campaign displays "violence as manly." Violence is one of the main themes of the campaign. The campaign's purpose is to draw attention to veganism as a way for men to gain more sexual stamina. But the sexual virility in this campaign is quite violent. The violence in the BWVAKTBOOM campaign takes the form of sexual aggression/violence.

Violence is seen in the use of the word "victim" to describe those living with BWVAKTBOOM. Since PETA is portraying BWVAKTBOOM as a medical condition with the use of words like "epidemic" and "side effects" on the official website and "suffers" and "condition" in the main video with Jessica and her boyfriend, other words could have been used instead of victim. Words like "patient" or phrases like "people who are living with" or "people who are affected by this" all convey the same meaning with much less negative connotations. The choice to use the word "victim" for those living with BWVAKTBOOM is deliberate, and positions the partners of these male vegans as lesser.

The backlash against the campaign also centered on Jessica's injuries. Many people pointed to the fact that she was wearing a neck brace, could not walk properly, and had visible bruising. They argued that this was not a "good romp in the bedroom"²¹¹ but rather an abusive and/or dangerous situation.²¹²

²¹¹ Lindsay Rajt, a PETA spokeswoman, responded to a question about the allegations of abuse in the campaign by stating "The woman in our spot is still smiling from a romp with her boyfriend. She had vigorous sex. She enjoyed his energy so much she went out to buy him more vegetables. It is a humorous spot and men and women are getting that." From Dylan Stableford,

PETA's response did not help. In a response by PETA spokeswoman Lindsey Rajt explained that those who were upset by the campaign simply did not get the joke. She explained that "the piece is tongue in cheek" and that using humor can be a good way to "open them up to receiving more somber information."²¹³ Rajt further claims that the message worked, explaining there has been a spike in visits to the website "and more people than ever before are learning and thinking about going vegan."²¹⁴ To explain the campaign, and PETA itself, Rajt assures readers that "As an organization staffed largely by feminist women, we would not do something that we felt exacerbated the very serious problems that women face."²¹⁵ Instead of apologizing for the potentially triggering or offensive images, PETA instead opted to tell audiences that they did not understand the humor the message offers.

One of the biggest backlashes against the campaign came from those protesting the campaigns images of an abusive relationship.²¹⁶ User Steven Whitright comments directly on the

"PETA campaign director defends controversial vegan ad: 'The underlying message is a helpful one,'" *YahooNews* Published February 14, 2012.

²¹² For example see: Beckie Smith, "People for the Ethical Treatment of People," *Cis White Female* <https://ciswhitefemale.wordpress.com/tag/bwvaktboom/>, accessed November 15, 2013; "BWVAKTBOOM: Funny, Or Offensive?," *The Nail That Sticks Up* <http://thenailthatsticksup.com/2012/02/16/bwvaktboom-funny-or-offensive/>, accessed November 15, 2013; Rabble Rouser Reverend Amy, " PETA Has SO Crossed the line with this Valentine's Day Ad," *The New Agenda* published February 16, 2012; Dylan Stabblerford, "Does this PETA Ad Featuring a Woman in a Neckbrace Promote Veganism or Violence?" *YahooNews*, <http://news.yahoo.com/blogs/cutline/does-peta-ad-featuring-young-pantsless-woman-neckbrace-222920818.html>, accessed February 13, 2012.

²¹³ "PETA Has SO Crossed the Line With This Ad," *Rabblerouserruminations*.

²¹⁴ "PETA Has SO Crossed the Line With This Ad," *Rabblerouserruminations*.

²¹⁵ "PETA Has SO Crossed the Line With This Ad," *Rabblerouserruminations*.

²¹⁶ For more examples see: Chris Beasley, "Point/Counterpoint: PETA's "BWVAKTBOOM Ad Campaign," *The Vanguard Online* published February 27, 2012 <http://www.thevanguardonline.com/opinion/733-point-counterpoint-petas-bwvaktboom-ad-campaign-.htm> and Megan Kearns, "A Feminist Vegan & Domestic Violence Survivor on PETA's Latest Ad Which Glorifies Domestic Violence," *Fem2.0* published February 22, 2012 <http://www.fem2pt0.com/2012/02/22/a-feminist-vegan-domestic-violence-survivor-on-petas-latest-ad-which-glorifies-domestic-violence/>.

campaign's site stating that the "neckbrace-wearing domestic abuse..." is "counter-productive and polarizing..." and questioning "Who on earth is converting to veganism/vegetarianism because of this?"²¹⁷ Lesley, a writer for xoJane.com, states that the commercial strikes some uncomfortable parallels with domestic abuse.²¹⁸ Explaining that the use of the public service announcement style "intentionally conflates the two issues and in so doing muddies the waters of what is acceptable and consensual and what is not."²¹⁹ Those commenting critically about the campaign insist that any portrayal of violence against women is wrong, and a petition was even started to halt the campaign.²²⁰

Portraying violence against romantic partners, even when done "playfully," should not be done. PETA is an organization that strives for the end of exploitation of non-human animals, but in this campaign it achieves this outcome, in part, through the exploitation of human animals. Since the violence portrayed is done by men through sexual acts the calloused sexist attitudes are another major theme in the campaign. With all the controversy over whether Jessica is a victim of domestic violence, the conversation about animal welfare is lost, which works against the aims of an organization that hopes to end the exploitation of animals.

The third component of hypermasculinity is the notion that danger is exciting, which involves having control over the dangerous environment. The message presents men as having control over the environment by controlling their sexual partners. Women are seen as closer to

²¹⁷ Steven Whitright comment on PETA, "Living with BWVAKTBOOM." accessed February 18, 2013. <http://www.bwvaktboom.com/>.

²¹⁸ Lesley, "Surprise: PETA Launches New Campaign that Offends People," *XOJane* Published February 15, 2012 <http://www.xojane.com/issues/peta-campaign-bwvaktboom-domestic-violence>.

²¹⁹ "Surprise: PETA Launches New Campaign."

²²⁰ Sacchi Patel, "Petitioning PETA: Tell PETA Violence Against Women is Never Okay," <http://www.change.org/petitions/tell-peta-violence-against-women-is-never-okay> accessed February 18, 2013.

nature than men, so when the campaign depicts men controlling their female partners that activity also represents controlling nature.²²¹ The videos on the supplementary website feature partners of the new vegans describing their sexual activities. One explains that after her husband went vegan, three months ago, they have “been having sex ever since.”²²² Another video also explains that her boyfriend has been “bringing it like [she] has never seen before, [she’s] had three concussions since he switched to veggies.”²²³ Due to the marked increase in frequency, duration, and power reported by the partners of the newly vegan men it is clear the partners are controlling the sexual activities.

The campaign was sparked by masculinity being in crisis. PETA solves this crisis by depicting a hypermasculine male vegan. I explored three different hypermasculine characteristics in the BWVAKTBOOM campaign. The first characteristic, calloused attitudes towards women, is shown by the campaign presupposing that men want to have better sex with women as well as Jessica’s representation as a means to get this sexual gratification. The second, “violence as manly,” is seen in the violence throughout the campaign. The campaign focuses on sexual aggression/violence. The new-found stamina and vigor these male vegans have discovered is putting their partners at risk of serious injury, the campaign also purposefully mimics a PSA style to draw more attention to the violence. Danger as exciting, the final criterion of hypermasculinity, is illustrated through the ways in which male vegans are encouraged to control their female partners. In doing so male vegans figuratively control nature. Hypermasculinity is

²²¹ See: Deckha, “Disturbing Images”: Naomi Wolf, *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change the 21st Century* (New York: Random House ,1993), 136-7.

²²² “Side Effects,” *BWVAKTBOOM : People’s Stories*
<http://www.bwvaktboom.com/PeoplesStories.aspx>, accessed February 18, 2013.

²²³ “Helmet,” *BWVAKTBOOM : People’s Stories*
<http://www.bwvaktboom.com/PeoplesStories.aspx>, accessed February 18, 2013.

one of the components to the campaign that constitutes vegan identity in the BWVKATBOOM campaign. Another component of the campaign's constitution of vegan identity is whiteness.

Whiteness

George Lipsitz argues that "Whiteness is everywhere in U.S. culture, but it is very hard to see."²²⁴ Whiteness is both ubiquitous and invisible; therefore, it "never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations."²²⁵ Monica McDermott agrees stating that whiteness functions as an "invisible privilege."²²⁶ Since whiteness functions as a ubiquitous, invisible privilege it is important for rhetorical critics to draw attention to this privilege and examine how it functions in the texts they study and the outside world.

Thomas Nakayama and Robert Krizek study how whiteness is constructed. Nakayama and Krizek explain that whiteness "is constituted only through the rhetoric of whiteness."²²⁶ This explanation of whiteness fits perfectly with Charland and Burke's assertions that identity is rhetorically constructed. Nakayama and Krizek also state that they intend to "seek an understanding of the ways that this rhetorical construction makes itself visible and invisible..."²²⁷ Jessie Daniels examines the ways the internet is constituted by whiteness. Daniels argues that because of this it is even more important to interrogate the whitewashing of the internet because "To do otherwise leaves the field of Internet studies entranced by the spectacle

²²⁴ George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit From Identity Politics* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1998), 1.

²²⁵ Monica McDermott, *Working Class White: The Making and Unmaking of Race Relation*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 40.

²²⁶ Thomas K. Nakayama and Robert L. Krizek, "Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81 (1995): 293.

²²⁷ Nakayama and Krizek, "Whiteness," 293.

of the Other, denying racism and unable to see its own whiteness.”²²⁸ I will examine the ways whiteness is invisible and visible in the BWVKATBOOM campaign by looking at the representation of race in the campaign as well as the discourse surrounding the campaign.

In the BWVAKTBOOM commercial, Jessica’s sexual activities gain attention because of her racial privilege. Historically, only white women’s virtue has been commodified or protected.²²⁹ PETA’s choice of using a White couple was strategic. PETA not only uses White women, but also White animals to convey innocence.²³⁰ By using White people, and specifically a White woman, PETA plays on old notions of virginity and chastity. Sexual transgressions by White women are considered radical because White women are assumed to be chaste. By violating the long-held beliefs of White purity, Jessica’s sexuality is deemed radical. Jessica’s unapologetic sexuality is a product of her privilege as a White woman. The BWVKATBOOM campaign created so much controversy, in part, because of its play on old notions of White women’s chastity. Jessica’s privilege comes from her race and sexual orientation. I examine how Jessica’s whiteness affects the construction of identity within the campaign and how whiteness affects who can be vegan.

PETA’s presentation of what males want reinforces Western ideals of beauty for women. As previously noted, Deckha explains how even the sexualization of women is exclusionary, because PETA shows a preference to depict the nudity and sexualization of White, heterosexual, able-bodied women.²³¹ Though Jessica is hobbling, she has no visible disabilities and the same is

²²⁸ Jessie Daniels, “Race and Racism in Internet Studies: A Review and Critique,” *New Media & Society* 15, no. 5 (2013): 17.

²²⁹ Kimberlee Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989): 147.

²³⁰ Deckha, “Disturbing Images,” 50.

²³¹ Deckha, “Disturbing Images,” 50.

true for her boyfriend. This applies to the BWVAKBTOOM campaign as every person who is shown in the campaign appears White. Jessica and her boyfriend can both be ascribed as visually Caucasian. Jessica has blonde hair and light blue/green eyes, her boyfriend is brown haired and brown eyed. Jessica is the embodiment of the “long, nimble, [and] blond...model” that perpetuates a largely unachievable standard of beauty for women.²³² Jessica’s lean frame and long limbs mirror the beauty standards set by U.S. American media. Beyond only featuring a white-skinned couple, there are other markers of the privilege Jessica and her boyfriend possess. The couple inhabits a large apartment at the top of a building in a bigger city. The apartment is quite lavishly decorated with plants, candle holders, lamps, and a large bed in the parts of the apartment the audience can see. Jessica’s clothes also hint towards the couple’s financial means. Her jacket is trendy and her bra and panties are both new and appear to be well-made. Another marker of the socio-economic status of this couple is that Jessica appears to have received medical attention. By wearing a neck brace the young woman has seen a physician recently. These markers of privilege (clothing, lavish apartments, white skin) are present in each of the other couples that are featured in the campaign as well. The BWVAKTBOOM campaign only features White privileged couples, thus PETA is enforcing whiteness as ideal in its campaign.

Emma Halliwell, Helen Malson, and Irmgard Tishchner found that women viewing messages with women as “agentic sexual subjects” showed an increase in weight dissatisfaction.²³³ Jessica shows some amount of agency in this commercial, but since she is still a thin, White woman, her depiction still can produce negative results in women. By perpetuating the image of whiteness as ideal in the BWVAKTOOM campaign, PETA uses exclusionary

²³² Deckha, “Disturbing Images,” 50.

²³³ Emma Halliwell, Helen Malson, and Irmgard Tishchner “Are Contemporary Media Images Which Seem to Display Women as Sexually Empowered Actually Harmful to Women?” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 35 (2011): 42.

practices regarding people of color. The campaign features only white-skinned people, and they overwhelmingly have blue or green eyes, even in the background of the main commercial. By not depicting a single person of color within the campaign it makes it difficult for ethnic/racial minorities to identify with the campaign. Without identification persuasion is impossible. Without identification the message of the campaign would be lost, and PETA loses potential support for their cause. By not representing people of color PETA makes interpellation difficult, thus making people of color identifying as vegan or a PETA supporter difficult. Another group that is invisible in the campaign is queer people.

Heteronormativity

Gust Yep explains that in Western cultures sexuality has been “organized around the homosexual/heterosexual binary” also creating a “marginal category (homosexuality) with a privileged class (heterosexuality).”²³⁴ Similar to whiteness, heterosexuality is “marked as a natural and given category...a ubiquitous and invisible force permeating all aspects of social life.”²³⁵ Even though heterosexuality is normalized, there must be work done to keep it so. This is called heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is when heterosexuality is institutionalized and “constitutes *the* standard for legitimate, authentic, prescriptive and ruling social, cultural and sexual arrangements”(original emphasis).²³⁶ Heteronormativity ensures that heterosexuality remains a ubiquitous, invisible privilege.

PETA reinforces heteronormativity. As discussed in the introduction of this chapter, PETA has a history of being insensitive to other sexual preferences and genders and continues to do so in the BWVAKTBOOM campaign. While the genitals of couples featured in the campaign

²³⁴ Gust A. Yep, “The Violence of Heteronormativity in Communication Studies,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 45 (2003): 12.

²³⁵ Yep, “The Violence of,” 13.

²³⁶ Yep, “The Violence of,” 13.

are never shown, the overwhelming majority of couples presented are male and female dyads. The campaign's website offers nine additional videos featuring other couples and their stories of dealing with BWVAKTBOOM. Of these nine couples eight are heterosexual couplings and one features two men gearing up for a weekend of sexual activities. By representing heterosexual relationships as desirable the BWVAKTBOOM campaign reproduces heteronormativity.²³⁷

Ignoring other forms of relationships hurts PETA and the animal rights movement by not allowing for identification from those people who identify as queer. Eliminating a space for queer people to occupy in the BWVAKTBOOM campaign does not allow them to be a part of the movement. By not including queer people in the campaign designed to promote collective identity making PETA makes it exceedingly difficult for queer people to have a place in the movement as well. Without representation within the campaign, and considering PETA's history of bigotry towards queer people, it becomes very hard for queer people to get behind PETA's cause and find a place for themselves within the animal rights movement.²³⁸

The invisibility of people of color and queer people works to further erase them not only in the media, but in the animal rights movement as well. By not depicting these co-cultural groups/individuals PETA shows that they are not the ideal vegan constructed in this campaign. Renata Bongiorno, Paul G. Bain, and Nick Haslam show that de-humanizing women does not work when dealing with a campaign that has an ethical message.²³⁹ These studies support that if the message of the campaign was one of ethical matters, animal rights, the sexualization of

²³⁷ Yep, "The Violence of," 13.

²³⁸ Most of the controversy is over the "Fur is a Drag" campaign by PETA: see "PETA's Fur is a Drag Campaign Steps Over the Line," Ronan, "Call PETA," "Using Transphobia to Fight Animal Abuse?" and Hammer, "Transphobia and PETA."

²³⁹ Renata Bongiorno, Paul G. Bain, and Nick Haslam, "When Sex Doesn't Sell: Using Sexualized Images of Women Reduces Support for Ethical Campaigns," *PLoSOne* 8, no. 12 (2013): 1-6.

women would be hurtful. But if the campaign truly aims to support the status quo of male power in a patriarchal, heteronormative society the sexualization of women works to support the message.

Conclusions

PETA has a history of being insensitive to marginalized groups. Vegans do not need to devalue women, or other minorities, to further animal rights. The campaign prevents identity formation many ways, but through this it creates another identity of bigotry. The campaign perpetuates the idea that young, White, heteronormative, hypermasculine men are the ideal vegans and PETA supporters. By perpetuating bigotry PETA loses out on the potential to further their cause.

Eliminating animal imagery has far-reaching effects on PETA and the animal rights movement. Using Charland's argument that constitutive rhetoric necessitates action in the material world, without the animal the reason for change is lost. If going vegan is made about sexual satisfaction, the animals can be ignored. Going vegan only addresses part of the animal rights movement. Animal homelessness, environmental destruction, and other mistreatment of animals are not solved by a plant-based diet. Combined with PETA's past insensitivities and the history of marginalization within their campaigns, PETA needs to explore other ways to mainstream veganism.

CHAPTER FOUR: PEOPLE FOR THE ETHICAL TREATMENT OF ANIMALS AND HUMANS

With an ostensible crisis of masculinity occurring, PETA shifted their rhetorical tactics in an effort to continue to shock audiences and offer a solution to this “crisis.” This thesis examined the manipulation of presence and absence by PETA in their BWVKATBOOM campaign. I also examined the ways the campaign reinforces dominant notions of gender relations and post-feminist ideology, arguing that diverse audience responses to the campaign were influenced by individuals’ relationships to feminism and post-feminism. Finally, I assessed the ways the campaign exacerbates hypermasculinity. In this concluding chapter, I review the findings of this thesis, considering the implications of these findings for the field of Communication Studies, outline limitations of my study, and offer suggestions for further research.

Review of Findings

In chapter two, the first analytical chapter of this thesis, I argued that PETA uses the manipulation of presence and absence to ensure a strong response to the BWVAKTBOOM campaign. The two reactions to the campaign can be seen as a rejection or acceptance of the campaign’s underlying post-feminist logic. By playing with presence and absence PETA allows the audience’s attention to be focused on Jessica who is seen as a wounded animal since there are not any wounded non-humans in the campaign. The audience has been primed from previous campaigns to expect a suffering animal and Jessica is the only wounded animal, therefore the pity and sense of urgency are transferred to her. Jessica’s traumatic injuries are one reason that people responded so strongly to the campaign.

There were two broad responses to the campaign. The first response treated the campaign as a humorous, light-hearted way to talk about the serious issue of veganism/animal rights. This position is the one that PETA intended. The second response asserted that the campaign was offensive and made fun of domestic violence. Both positions can be found in the audiences' response to the campaign. These responses from the audience are how the BWVAKTBOOM campaign exemplifies the current post-feminist moment we are in. The first response is likely to come from those who subscribe to a post-feminist view of gender relations. Because Jessica owns her sexuality and possesses so much agency, she is able to influence her boyfriend's choice to become vegan. The second response resists post-feminism. Viewers who critiqued the gender dynamics within the BWVAKTBOOM campaign understand that feminism's work is not done, and that making light of a serious issue for women (domestic violence) is not acceptable. Post-feminism not only helps explain the two responses to the campaign by audience members, but also why the campaign targets male vegans.

In my third chapter I utilized Maurice Charland's concept of constitutive rhetoric. Constitutive rhetoric explains how collective identity is formed through discourse. The BWVKATBOOM campaign constitutes a hypermasculine, White, heteronormative vegan identity. The campaign was sparked after a discussion about how masculinity needs to be saved by popular media sources. In response, the BWVAKTBOOM campaign reifies vegan, masculine identity through the use of hypermasculine qualities. I explained how this campaign possesses three characteristics of hypermasculine identity: calloused sex attitudes, violence as manly, and control over the environment. Calloused sex attitudes are shown through the injuries received by partners of the new male vegans and that masculine power is established through intercourse in the campaign. Violence as manly is depicted by the language used to describe Jessica and the

other girlfriends as “victims” and Jessica’s injuries. Control over the environment is shown by men controlling their female partners and that authority is translated into control over nature. The crisis of masculinity is a big theme in the campaign, but only certain types of masculine identities are reified.

Whiteness and heteronormativity are also important components of the identity that PETA constitutes. Whiteness is seen in the lack of representation of any racial/ethnic minorities, but also in White privilege. The apartments that are shown as being inhabited are all very lavish and the sexuality that Jessica and her partner display are only radical due to their whiteness. Heteronormativity comes from the minimal representation of queer people in the campaign. The campaign only features one gay, male couple out of ten couples shown and they are only seen on the website as opposed to being the main campaign commercial. The campaign presupposes that audience members are straight men wanting to have intercourse with women.

This thesis examined the ways PETA uses presence and absence to ensure a response to the campaign and how PETA reifies masculine identity. PETA’s mission statement discusses how they want to end oppression for all animals, but this campaign does not seem to do either. The use of presence and absence in the campaign ensures that audience members will have a campaign. Lindsey Rajt’s response states that there has been a bump seen in the visits to a website, but offers no comments on whether the visits were for positive or negative reasons. By not acknowledging whether or not the reception of audience members is positive or negative PETA gives the impression that they do not care about the type of attention, as long as they are getting attention. The campaign offers a new version of hegemonic ideals that are exclusionary and hurtful. The BWVAKTBOOM campaign perpetuates White, straight men as the ideal consumer. This positioning of masculinity also affects feminine people by making them

subservient to masculinity. This campaign does not seem to solve the problem of non-human suffering choosing instead to elicit a strong emotional response and reinforce dominant ideologies.

In addition to providing insight into PETA's rhetorical strategies, this thesis expands the theoretical understanding of the presence/absence dynamic by developing the concept of present-absence. Present-absence is when something appears in the text, but in a different form. Changing the form of the presence is a deliberate move by those creating texts. In the BWVAKTBOOM campaign the present-absences functioned to allow audiences' attention to go elsewhere. By allowing viewers' attention to not be focused on filling in the voids created by an absence, PETA was able to use the present-absence to focus attention on Jessica. This prompted audience members to have a strong reaction (either positive or negative) to the campaign. Since PETA's primary motivation was drawing attention to themselves through the campaign the deployment of present-absence served PETA's strategic purpose.

The notion of present-absence can be applied to a variety of texts to help explain the ways that audiences' attention is manipulated. Although I applied it to a media text, it can be employed when assessing any text that exhibits characteristics of a genre. Generic patterns are sequences of presence and absences. When a generic precedent is strategically violated, that does not necessarily exempt it from the generic category. Instead, the expectations of the genre, itself, shape the rhetorical function of the present-absence.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

There are four limitations I identify within my study. The first is developing a new concept that has not been tested or proven. The second is a limitation of methodology. The final two limitations come from a limitation of scope: the focus on identity formation in the campaign,

and the concentration on a single campaign. I will explain each of these limitations and then make suggestions for future research based upon these limitations.

The first limitation comes from the development of a new concept. The concept of the present-absence concept has only been applied to the BWVAKTBOOM campaign. This warrants application of the concept to other rhetorical genres to explore how the concept works in other rhetorical situations. The application of this concept to other rhetorical constructions will either confirm or challenge my assertions made about presence and absence in this study.

The second limitation of this study comes from the critical methodology used in this thesis. Future research could engage in a more empirical analysis of the BWVAKTBOOM campaign. My review of comments on blogs and videos suggest the ways viewers react to the campaign, however, additional data collection would strengthen the links between message design and audience response.

A third limitation is the use of identity as the primary lens for studying this campaign. Choosing a focus of a study necessitates other pieces of the text being pushed to the fringe. By focusing on the identity PETA constitutes in this campaign, I could not focus on other textual components of the campaign. Investigating the link between BWVAKTBOOM and rape culture would produce additional insights. Examining how the campaign reinforces other problematic cultural mores would allow a critic to make further claims about PETA's intentions behind creating campaigns. Since the organization focuses on social justice for animals, the critique of excluding other forms of social justice becomes quite powerful.

The final limitation of this project comes from small sample size. This project focused on the BWVAKTBOOM campaign's rhetorical strategies. Given the depth offered by this project, I would suggest a study that offers more breadth of rhetorical strategies in messages discussing

non-humans. Contrasting the BWVKATBOOM campaign with other campaigns, perhaps from the ASPCA or other animal welfare or animal rights organization, would perhaps provide a model for PETA to follow. The last way this could be done would be to contrast BWVAKTBOOM with a campaign promoting the consumption of animal byproducts, like the California Happy Cows campaign or the “Beef it’s what’s for Dinner” campaign. This contrasting would allow researchers to see the differences and similarities in how organizations promote an omnivore diet and vegan diet.

PETA has a long history of exclusionary depictions in its campaigns, and the BWVAKTBOOM campaign is no different. By perpetuating hegemonic ideals they not only hurt themselves but also the animal rights movement more largely. PETA also alienates a large number of the vegan and omnivore population by perpetuating these hurtful images. Since PETA continues to make these hurtful representations in their campaigns they either do not want to include other “fringe” groups in their group, or do not want to make serious change in the world. PETA is criticized for only doing things to perpetuate themselves; after examining this campaign I agree that the organization works to reinforce dominant ideologies at the expense of marginalized humans. Ultimately, PETA should not have to further denigrate already marginalized groups of humans to grant rights to non-humans.