Interactionism and Animal Aesthetics: A Theory of Reflected Social Power

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Abstract
Stemming from a study of social aesthetics, in which public reaction to human physical appearance is addressed, the present analysis considers the practice of humans associating themselves with nonhuman animals on the basis of the latter’s appearance. The study found these nonhuman animals are intended to serve as a positive reflection on the humans who deliberately choose them for their “special” traits, which the humans then utilize to enhance their own social standing. The study compares this to the same practice used by humans to associate themselves with attractive humans and serves the similar purpose of amassing social status by virtue of the association. This paper explains the phenomenon in theoretical terms; namely, symbolic interactionism, paying special attention to impression-management and dramaturgy, along with other interactionist features of attribution and social exchange. Where available, the paper uses scholarly, empirical work on the topic, supplemented by popular media observations and news articles. Viewed from an interactionist perspective, these empirical and non-empirical examples provide a novel picture of human-and-animal society as a unidirectional, status-seeking interaction intended to benefit human actors.

Keywords
attribution, exchange, interactionism, social mirror, beauty, animals

Introduction
This analysis describes the use of nonhuman animals by humans as positive representations of those humans. That is, assuming that humans want to be perceived by their immediate and broader society in a particular light, they may specifically select their animal companions and animal possessions for traits that they hope speak well of themselves as wealthy, powerful, deadly, exotic, beautiful, well-bred humans. These human-nonhuman associations are intended to rank the humans as equal to, or above, other humans in a social hierarchy, thus serving a stratifying function.
To help place this phenomenon in a theoretical context, I rely upon interactionist theoretical perspectives as understood in the sociological tradition. The following discussion is grounded in the micro-dimensional theories of attribution, social exchange, and symbolic interaction. Micro-dimensional theories have as their basic starting point face-to-face interactions between social actors. As with all worthwhile sociological theories, though, their implications are far more global, explaining larger, macro-level social phenomena such as power and inequality. Though not the first interactionist treatment of human-nonhuman relationships (Alger & Alger, 2003), interactionism here supplies the groundwork for comparing human-human relationships with human-nonhuman relationships based on physical appearance and relative power.

After a discussion of the applicable interactionist theories, I describe the meaning of social aesthetics as it applies to humans and nonhumans and its relevance for the present work. Following that are related topics such as physical alterations through which we put ourselves in order to be more socially desirable and similar alterations through which we put nonhuman animals to make them "better" representatives for humans, the latter being absent choice. Throughout, interactionist interpretations provide a useful means of understanding the phenomenon of human use of nonhuman image-builders.

As the reader will see, much of the following is about power, the power differential between categories of humans and between humans and nonhuman animals.¹ In the present work, I find similarities between how humans use other humans as positive reflections (most notably trophy partners and trophy children) and the manner in which humans use nonhuman animals also as positive reflectors; both uses are intended to accrue social power as a consequence.

**Interactionism**

Social exchange theory basically has to do with social power and dependency, with one party's power being equal to the other party's dependence on the rewards and resources derived from the relationship (Emerson, 1962). Both Bourdieu (1984, 1985) and Coleman (1988, 1990) considered this theory: Bourdieu discussed the cultural capital (largely information) exchanged in social interaction; Coleman was more interested in social capital or the favors and obligations exchanged between the parties, as the exchange medium. All social actors have something to offer (money, power, approval, and prestige) or refrain from offering (Turner, 1985); in exchange theory, the focus is on explaining social behavior in terms of what works effectively to achieve our interests—the things we want from other social actors (Calhoun, Gertais, Moody, Pfaff, & Virk, 2002).
One thing that a social actor can confer on another is social status. Bourdieu (1990) has pointed out that all of us, as social actors, occupy social statuses, positions in social space relative to each other. These statuses can be defined by wealth, income, education, occupation, physical appearance, and access to—or proximity to—social power. Our social positions are identified and made known to others by our possessions (houses, cars); leisure activities (operas, dog fights); clothing (jewelry, furs, secondhand clothes); and our consumer choices (paintings, exotic animals).

Indeed, the visibility of status has become much more infected by, and invested in, the postmodern U.S. consumer culture, in which consumption dominates the new capitalist economy (Baudrillard, 1988). Relevant to the topic at hand, nonhuman animals—particularly those conferring social distinction (exotic breeds, expensive racehorses, animals known for violence)—are used as consumer products to enhance human status.

Mixing social exchange and attribution theory, beauty can be seen as a commodity. Moreover, the attribution of “special” is given to physically beautiful people. That is, we attribute all sorts of positive traits to attractive humans, such as intelligence, kindness, capability, and personality. Attractive people are automatically granted the “halo effect,” meaning that they are given the benefit of the doubt regarding goodness, capability, and other traits that have nothing to do with physical appearance and are based on looks alone. The humans associated with them experience the “generalized halo effect,” meaning that they are assumed to have something to offer, otherwise they would not be associated with such attractive, socially desirable people. In other words, we attribute favorable qualities to those individuals linked to attractive people (Katz, 1995).

At this point, we return to social exchange theory. It may be that the attractive individual is getting something in exchange for being linked to the visibly unappealing individual, not uncommonly financial security. Nonhuman animals, of course, have no choice in their association with human caretakers (owners). In that sense, there is little, or no known, benefit for the animals. Perhaps the human owners treat their associated animals well—or not; however, the association clearly is based on human desires and needs, which brings us back to issues of relative power. Whether the human-nonhuman association is voluntary on the part of the nonhuman, I would argue that the basic principle of the generalized halo effect operates in the human-nonhuman context: This same process works, or is hoped to work, with ordinary, or less-than-ordinary, humans associated with exotic, beautiful, and special (expensive, dangerous) animals.

Symbolic interactionism also focuses on interpersonal relationships, with the micro-level principles expandable to societal-wide social relations. At any
level, social interactions are developed, altered, ended, and reconstructed via many routes such as by observing others’ social behavior. For instance, we observe the visual cues, like nonhuman possessions, put forward by others. In Mead’s (1934) version of symbolic interactionism, we are aware of ourselves as objects in a social environment and hope to be viewed as objects deserving of special treatment. Indeed, we know ourselves by what we see reflected in the social mirror: What society tells us about ourselves via interaction determines whether we view ourselves as important or not, attractive or not, and special or not. For purposes of this paper, if we have special animals, then we are special and are deserving of special treatment. Applying Mead’s mirror perspective, people develop their own identities: For example, in the course of interaction with others—whom they hope to impress as dangerous, successful, and pampered—people perceive themselves as dangerous pit bull owners, successful racehorse owners, or pampered owners of pampered little dogs.

Although Mead emphasized verbal and—significantly for this analysis—nonverbal symbols in the creation of social meaning, we might propose that symbols take the form of animal representatives. Blumer (1969), another prominent interactionist, points to the meanings of things as determined from interpersonal interaction. We respond to social objects, like animals, via interpretation of their social meaning for us. As true for words, gestures, clothes, cars, and other social symbols, our associated animals have social meaning and send important social messages to observers.

Most usefully, Goffman (1959; 1974) has described how we use dramaturgy as a form of social behavior to communicate information about ourselves to others and thus manage others’ impressions of us. In Goffman’s view, social behavior can be imagined as a staged performance with each actor intentionally conveying specific impressions to others. In dramaturgy, we engage in play-acting, as if we are in a play, with an audience to whom we hope to convey a particular image. Part of dramaturgy is the playing of roles. We may play the role of beauty queen or successful businessman, trophy wife or owner of trophy race horses. In general, roles, contrived or not, are intended to project a particular image of ourselves for our audience (strangers, intimate friends, and others) to view and accept as valid. To create a reality we hope the audience will adopt, scripted dialogue, gestures, props, costumes, and accessories are important to the dramaturgical roles.

Not only do we use the items that Goffman (1959, 1974) mentions but also we alter our levels of attractiveness (with cosmetics, surgeries) as a way to create impressions—authentic or not. Significantly, associated nonhuman animals are also a part of the stagecraft, as accessories, parts of the costumes, props, ornaments, and other symbols of status. Our presentations of self via
our associated animals enhance our self-image and justify our claims to social power. For the same reasons that we wear toupees to hide our baldness and push-up bras to enhance our busts, we tote around little dogs and keep pit bulls as ways of creating a social impression of ourselves—no matter how valid. We possess special animals as a way of impression management.

The Dynamics of Human and Nonhuman Social Aesthetics

In human society, we evaluate each other based on a number of factors, not excluding our physical appearance. This evaluation has enormous consequences on life opportunities, notably employment and social networks. We are denied or rewarded with jobs, marriages, friendships, and club memberships, based—at least in part—on what we look like. Social aesthetics, as described in Berry (in press) is a form of social inequality, with physical appearance standing alone as an inequality variable and as overlapping with race, gender, class, and age. That is, humans rank each other by appearance as attractive, plain, or unattractive, with some features (skin color, lip shape, nose size and shape, eye shape, hair texture, agedness of skin, and body size) being socially determined as valuable or not.

Of importance for this analysis, we not only evaluate ourselves via the actual mirror—reflecting our physical image back to us—but also through the social mirror by which we evaluate our place in the social world. Per Mead’s (1934) concept, the social mirror can be experienced as social inclusion or rejection, in the form of being chosen (or not) for jobs, marriages, romantic involvement, friendships, and the like. As we have just seen, we may be judged not only by our own physical appearance but also by the level of attractiveness of those humans willing to be associated with us. Believing that attractive people represent us favorably in their association with us and hoping for the spillover of their positive attributes onto us, we seek out physically beautiful employees, children, lovers, and friends.

Similarly, nonhuman animals, in their relationship to humans, serve as reflections of human needs for positive attributes. Nonhuman animals’ images may stand in place of the images that the associated humans hope to have attributed to themselves as successful, athletic, and unique. Based on the animals’ special features, we ascribe social traits to them; value them or not; choose to possess them or not; and place them or not in a variety of roles (as companions, work animals, entertainment animals, and breeding material). We derive, or hope to derive, social significance through them. Notably, as with human-human social aesthetics, the social issues surrounding animal aesthetics are based on our visual sense.
The Visibility of Symbols

In the human aesthetics literature, we often read the word “markers” to designate features that are valued or disregarded, such as the ethnic nose or the obese body. Mostly, we interpret physical appearance based on visual cues, with these cues being specific features (noses, eyes, skin, and body size) and—more broadly—general evaluations of overall attractiveness (beautiful or plain). It is more than visual though. Just the pronouncement that “I own a…” particular kind of animal signifies power and specialness; or, at least, such is the intention of such a statement.

Our judgments about physical appearance being primarily visual, let us reconsider Goffman’s (1959, 1974) dramaturgy and use of “props.” If we see a beautiful woman advertising a car, standing next to it or sitting in it, she is associated with it and we associate the two (the car and the woman). The same is true for beer commercials and other advertisements. We, the hapless viewers, are supposed to, if things are right in the advertising world, associate the beer with attractive people, fun times, sexual opportunity, successful athletic events, and other positive occasions. To the extent that we are susceptible to the physical desirability of the humans in the advertisements, we are encouraged to believe that, if we own this car or drink this beer, we become like the attractive models or have access to them. Likewise, when we see a human and nonhuman animal together, we associate the two: That is what the human involved has in mind. Consider the snake handler (a daring human who courts danger); the owner posed next to a champion horse (a successful, wealthy human); a decorative woman with a decorative dog (a spoiled woman with time and money and few serious cares); a commonplace human with an exotic animal such as a mixed breed wolf-dog, tiger, ferret, or a rare tropical bird (an allegedly exotic human); a pit bull trainer and his pit bulls (a physically powerful person who is ready to fight). The nonhuman animal is intended to reflect well on the human, who hopes to be viewed as daring, successful, spoiled, and exotic.

Nonhuman animals can be imagined as visual objects, with the concept of “material culture” suggesting a strong relationship between human behavior and animals as physical objects (Schlereth, 1985, p. 33). Borrowing from Emmison and Smith’s (2004) discussion about the social meaning of visual objects, nonhuman animals can be viewed as esteem-objects, reflecting personal self-esteem or esteem forthcoming from public recognition. Animals as esteem-objects differ from animals as exotic objects, who would be animal-objects “from far-away places,” such as African gray parrots. Exotic animal-objects are distinguished from indigenous objects “locally made and reflect local themes,” like domestic cats or prize pigs at a pork festival in a pork-centric farm town. In contrast to beautiful and socially desirable animals, animals can be stigma-objects, who are
“are associated with embarrassment, the socially unacceptable, or the marginal,” such as pit bulls or sick animals. Animals can serve as social facilitators, as when they “foster social interaction,” such as when nonhuman animals are used as attention- or date-getters. Finally, they can be occupational objects, tools of labor or professional tools, like farm animals or entertainment animals (pp. 112-113). Nonhuman animals representing humans serve as symbols in a human social context, placing those humans in the social world.

**Human and Nonhuman Constructed Beauty**

There is surprisingly comprehensive agreement, as there is with human “beauty,” as to what features constitute an attractive or unattractive animal (Etcoff, 1999). Strong consensus has long ago been reached that human beauty, especially—but not exclusively—facial beauty, is a matter of proportion. A rigid formulaic definition of beauty has been applied to describe human facial beauty, as evidenced in the faces of fashion models: The eyes must be X-proportion in width and X-distance from the nose; the nose, X-length and X-distance from the mouth. Mostly, we apply the same criteria to nonhuman attractiveness as we do to human attractiveness: proportionality, healthy appearance, and childlike features.²

Physical beauty, bear in mind, is a social construction. This is as true for human definitions of human beauty as it is for nonhuman beauty. Largely via visual media (television, newspaper, and magazine advertisements), we, globally, have come to agree that certain features constitute beauty (Berry, 2007).³ What we find beautiful in humans, especially female humans, are the same features we find attractive in nonhuman animals; for example, large eyes, small faces, and trim, well-shaped noses (Etcoff, 1999). Indicators of good health are very aesthetically appealing in humans and in nonhumans, including clear eyes, good teeth, good bodily coverings (clear skin, luxuriant and shiny hair, fur, or colorful feathers). Likewise, humans value physical prowess (good bone structure and good musculature) and athletic skills in their associated humans as they do in their animals: companion, on the farm, and used in entertainment. As just pointed out, this strong consensus on physical appeal—a social construction to be sure—is not only true for humans and nonhumans. It is also a means by which unappealing humans may become appealing (at least that is the goal) by association with appealing animals.
Aesthetic Alterations, the Absence of Choice, and What it Says about Human Reflection

Now we turn our attention to the alterations through which we put nonhumans, much like those through which we put ourselves, to “improve” appearance. Keeping with the minority paradigm noted in many works on animal rights in which the inequality issues encountered by minority humans and nonhumans are compared (Adams, 1995; Adams & Donovan, 1995; Pluhar, 1995; Nibert, 2002), let us briefly examine the social power differentials that influence our decisions to alter our and others’ appearances. Aesthetics and racial inequality issues are starkly illustrated in the lengths to which racial minorities go in order to appear more white, such as eyelid surgeries to round out Asian eyes, hair straighteners to alter the texture of Negroid hair, skin whiteners to lighten the skin of a number of dark-skinned minorities, and leg-lengthening surgeries as undertaken by Chinese. Given that whites have relatively greater social (particularly economic) power, racial minorities are encouraged to emulate them—to physically resemble them—in order to accumulate power themselves. As to the gender-appearance nexus, women are subject to greater pressure than men to adhere to good-looks standards, to strive for good looks as a way to achieve power, and thus spend proportionately more time and money to look attractive. Age is an important power-laden factor, with the not-young being undervalued in most societies and thus pressured to appear youthful in order to retain—or regain—social power. Hence, we cover our gray, moisturize our skin, and have our face surgically lifted (Bordo, 1995; Stearns, 1997; Gilman, 1999; Gimlin, 2002; Wolf, 2002; Blum, 2003). The points I am attempting to make are:

1. the more powerful humans (white, young, tall) and the more powerful species (humans) impose, knowingly or not, their appearance values on the less powerful; and
2. while humans are arguably free to make these choices to change ourselves, nonhumans are subject to human choices to change their appearance.

We impose cosmetic surgeries on them, selectively breed them, dress them, apply cosmetics to them, and enter them in contests, all in the name of having them reflect well on us.

Surgery

At the human’s request, cosmetic surgery is performed on nonhuman animals to make them more aesthetically pleasing to humans. To compete in beauty contests or for personal beautification, nonhuman animals undergo surgeries
for wrinkle reduction, eyebrow correction, eye lifts, full facelifts, ear straightening, Botox injections, breast reductions (tightened mammillae), cosmetic dentistry (teeth straightening and whitening, braces, and retainers), tummy tucks (abdominoplasty), nose correction, tail correction, and testicular implants. One of the motives for these alterations has to do with money: Prize animals cannot be used as breeders and command huge breeding fees if they have genetic defects. If the defect is concealed, the animal can still (perhaps illegally) win prizes and be used for breeding.

A veterinarian plastic surgeon in Brazil defends his practice by stating that it is perfectly ethical and perfectly reasonable to put animals under the surgical blade in order to make them more beautiful (Kingstone, 2004; Hopgood, 2005). This same doctor says that if human owners believe their animals are more attractive with surgery, the human-nonhuman relationship will be improved. Indeed, some veterinarian plastic surgeons promise “a better quality of life” for the humans and nonhumans when the latter undergo reconstruction, even though no evidence to this effect is provided (Robins, 2005). The surgeon’s declaration that it is “perfectly reasonable” for humans to order cosmetic surgery for their nonhumans leaves us to wonder if it is likewise perfectly reasonable for a husband to force his wife to undergo cosmetic surgery or for a parent to force her child to undergo such surgery in order to win prizes, to be considered as a personal prize, or to enhance the marital and familial relationship. One thing is clear: The more powerful of the dyad (the human coercing another human or an animal into surgery) is defining whether surgery is a reasonable reaction to desired change and whether the relationship is improved.

It is true that some of these surgeries—as we would find with some human cosmetic surgeries—are indeed for medical reasons. In the case of nonhumans, cosmetic surgery—as in removing skin folds in order to alleviate bacterial infections—is truly reconstructive. However, almost all plastic surgery performed on animals is purely cosmetic and human-centric. Consider “neuticles.”

Neuticles are testicular implants designed to give neutered male animals a more masculine, unneutered look. Mostly the recipients are dogs; however, cats, horses, and bulls have also received such implants. The rationale comes from the human owner believing that the animal can “retain his identity and self-esteem in the dog park.” The story of a woman who wanted to neuter her dog is revealing. Her husband refused to have the dog neutered unless neuticles were implanted, and the wife complied. The woman said, “I can tell he [the dog] would rather have them [the neuticles] than nothing.” She cannot reasonably know this; she surmises as much because, as she reports, the dog licks his neuticles. Or maybe she assumes that the dog is pleased with his implants.
because she and her husband want the dog to have them. The husband is very pleased with the surgical results but, as he complained to his wife, he would have preferred that the neuticles had been a bigger size (Robins 2005). One might speculate that the presence and size of neuticles has more to say about the human owner’s need for esteem than about the animal’s self esteem.

Significant capital and profit are involved in surgical enhancements to race-horses. Racehorses are very expensive animals, bringing in huge sums when they win important races like the Kentucky Derby and Preakness Stakes (Drape, 2005). To increase their monetary value, thoroughbred horses may undergo shock-wave therapy, acupuncture, or electro-stimulation to make their throats clearer (indicating breathing capacity) and look fuller. They may have a transphyseal bridge (also known as “screw and wire”) inserted into the knee to make the leg appear straight. They may have their farriers (hooves) shaved and cut for reshaping purposes. They can undergo a periosteal elevation surgery which “encourages bone growth in a different direction in the hope of straightening the leg” (Drape, p. 18). Or, they may be forced to ingest anabolic steroids to create fuller chests and fuller hindquarters. If the horse looks good, the human owner looks good.

Breeding

We tamper with human and nonhuman breeding to improve the species. Eugenicists believe strongly that better humans, usually meaning white European humans, ought to be selectively bred (Black, 2003). Similarly, we selectively breed nonhumans to create hardier, stronger, bigger, more productive work-animals; to improve the entertainment value of race horses and racing dogs; and to develop exotic animal companions.

More broadly, some humans value the breeding qualities, per se, of nonhumans. For example, they are impressed by, and hope to impress others with, the pure blood breeding of their nonhumans; some are impressed by, and hope to impress others with, the nonhuman’s exotic breeding, notably species cross-breeding.

Clothing and Cosmetic Use

Humans outfit their animal companions with human-style jewelry and clothing, which may be uncomfortable for the animals but pleasing to the human eye. In Tokyo, a fashion show for dogs—more accurately, for dogs’ humans—features poodles, Chihuahuas, and dachshunds modeling the latest canine fashions. The dogs modeled raincoats, rugby jerseys, T-shirts, sunglasses, and even a wedding dress (BBC News, 2004a).
It is not an uncommon practice for humans to dress up their animal companions, dye their hair, and paint their nails. In a story about a dog being dyed red for Christmas and dressed in festive Christmas clothing, her human owner remarked that the dog, “enjoys all the fuss and attention…. She absolutely loves the attention” (BBC News, 2004b). It is unknown, and perhaps unknowable, if she does. Many humans apply all manner of grooming techniques to their animal companions in order to enhance the companions’ looks—from the human point of view.

**Beauty Contests**

Much of nonhuman contests (“best of” shows and the like) are about physical appearance. Balanced head-body ratios, quality of coat, ease of movement, and other physical features are among the standards for winning (BBC News 2004c). These contests are about more than looks; notably, behavior and temperament are important judgment criteria.

As with the Miss America contests, women are judged not only on looks—which are crucial—but also on virtue, grace, personality, and social ease (Banet-Weiser, 1999). Child beauty contests also apply these same criteria. The reader may recall the role that child beauty contests played in the notorious Jon Benet Ramsay case. Jon Benet Ramsay, a frequent winner of child beauty contests, became the victim in an unsolved murder case. Her life and death highlighted the enormous performance pressure placed on such children, often molding them into adult-looking sexual objects. Some parents proudly display their children for their physical attributes as well as for their deportment, talent, decorum, and pliability. Apparently, the same expectations apply to nonhuman contests: Physical appearance is of foremost importance, but good personality traits are also essential. Excitability, forlornness, and grumpiness are not good traits—a willingness to please is.

The difficulty in determining the winner in nonhuman contests is key. We might suspect that the human owner is the winner, the animal serving as a winning reflection.

**Summary**

So we find that some humans put their nonhuman companions through the same looks-conscious rigors that they may put themselves and their human companions—going on the assumption that having desirable (human and nonhuman) animals accrues power to the humans associated with them. The surgeries, the makeovers, the selective breeding are all designed to mold ordinary
beings into desirable, sought-after beings. The social pressure to apply (to others) and to undergo (ourselves) these looks-altering changes—be they hair color, surgery, or ingestion of questionable substances (steroids, growth hormones)—are sourced in the need for social prestige.

We can cross-refer this address of nonhuman animal aesthetics with Wolf’s (2002) and others’ feminist notions of physical alterations and choice. Bordo (1995) for instance, says that undergoing appearance changes is not necessarily a “done-to” process involving patriarchal, “totalitarian interference with self-determination” (p. 20). As long as freedom to choose is present, according to Wolf, there is nothing anti-feminist about undergoing change. The massive difference between humans putting themselves through appearance alterations and putting nonhuman animals through these same procedures is that nonhumans undeniably have no self-determination in the matter. Certainly not all humans prize nonhumans for their physical appearance, their uniqueness, their abilities, and so on. Of those who do, their associated animals serve the role of image-enhancers, as reflections of humans’ hoped-for images.

Conclusion

The desire on the part of some humans to be associated with unusually beautiful or unique humans is also present in human-nonhuman associations, largely because the purpose of the association is the same. Association with attractive or exotic animals purportedly represents the humans, perhaps inauthentically, as special. In essence, ascribing positive traits from the animals to the humans, the special, nonhuman animals are supposed to reflect positively on the human owners.

Interpretations that immediately spring to mind to explain the phenomenon of human preference for particular types of nonhuman associates include the following:

1. attribution theory in combination with social exchange theory;
2. symbolic interactionism (particularly Mead’s notion of the social mirror and Goffman’s notions of impression management and dramaturgy).

Humans want to reflect well in the social mirror and thus undergo the necessary changes to make themselves acceptable, desirable, and—as a consequence—socially powerful. Another avenue by which humans can reflect well in the social mirror is, as believed by the more trophy-conscious among us, to surround ourselves with attractive and select humans and nonhumans. The desire to be associated with beautiful and unusual humans and nonhumans is not just a frivolous game of vanity. It is about impression-management,
constructed stratification based on physical images, and inequality created where none validly exists.

Notes

1. Society-and-animals studies are replete with descriptions of relative power with inequality between humans and nonhumans explaining our use and abuse of them. Alternatively, an equalization of power between humans and nonhumans creates a foundation for animal welfare and animal rights. Animal rights analyses, not surprisingly, have commonly examined the similarities between human rights attitudes, activities, and movements and animal rights attitudes, activities, and movements (see, for instance, Berry 1997), with the primary goal for all equal rights activities being access to power.

2. Although, this proposition is opposed, in the writings of Edmund Burke, who, in the 1700s, described proportionality of features (head, neck, legs, etc.) as unimportant to animal or human beauty. Instead, Burke describes animal beauty in terms of function. For example, while we may not usually consider the pig, porcupine, the hedgehog, and pelican beautiful, they may be so considered given the utility of their “ugly” features such as the snout, the quills, the prickly hide, the bag appendage to the bill (Burke, 1729-1797). This begs the question of why we do not consider pitbulls, bulldogs, and farm animals beautiful since they are highly functional. Perhaps because we are not, on the whole, interested in their function, as we are so far removed from the farm animal industry. Or perhaps we are far more interested in their uniqueness in the case of pit bulls and bulldogs, with their unique looks serving our function of setting us, the associated humans, apart.

3. Globally, the standards of human beauty include significant height, thinness, blonde hair, light eyes, light skin; in short, we are pressured to look like white Northern Europeans. Nonhuman animals, like humans, should be (to be considered socially desirable) young, evenly-featured, with good hair (feathers, etc.), and so on in order to be considered attractive.

4. Surgical enhancement to animals is not without a social backlash, albeit a minor one. Tail-docking and ear-cropping are prohibited in some European countries, and at least one city in the US (West Hollywood, California) wants to make such procedures illegal. In 2003, West Hollywood banned cat declawing. The new law, put forward in 2005, and as yet undecided as far as I know, would make all nontherapeutic, cosmetic surgeries on animals prohibited by law (Reuters, 2005).

References


