Marketing Deviance: The Selling of Cockfighting

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We use conventional marketing concepts to examine the marketing of the deviant and stigmatized activity of cockfighting and show how the two differ. Our research is based on several years of active participant observation with cockfighters and the examination of several publications devoted to the sport. We find a paradoxical situation wherein people who compete with each other in an illegal activity must also establish their reputations for honesty and trustworthiness. Aspects of a gerontocracy characterize this deviant world.

Then one day I was driving through a small town...and I noticed one of the nicest set-ups for gamefowl that I have ever seen. I stopped...and gazed....About that time an old man came out of his house and started towards me....he said he remembers seeing me...buying fowl off a friend of his. The same man who got me started in this sport....I was talking to probably the toughest, most honest and complete rooster man alive today, at least I think so. Anyway, we introduced ourselves and he told me about how he had tried to locate me about a year ago. I asked Sal why he tried to find me of all people and he said because he needed a partner. Well, when he said that, I about fell out of my shoes. Sal then explained that he had just moved to Oklahoma a few years ago and that he wanted someone who was a beginner in this sport, willing to learn what fifty years of cockfighting had taught him. (Whitney, 1991, p. 150)

Prus (1989a, 1989b) has shown us the close relationship which can exist between sociology and much of marketing. As Prus shows, the ethnographic study of marketing in action - the observation of salespeople selling, for example - can add to our knowledge of sociology. Here, we use a qualitative approach to the marketing
of game fowl and the sport of cockfighting to illuminate problems which may be common in the deliberate spread and diffusion of other deviant activities, and we note the gamefowl world's attempts at solutions.

Cockfighting is a hobby and sport for all of its practitioners, and a business venture for the many who sell gamefowl and accessories. Like any small business person, the entrepreneurial cockfighter faces a different set of problems from those that General Motors and IBM contend with, yet he too must work within a set of forces which shapes his activities. We look here at the market forces which affect entrepreneurial cockfighters and the solutions they find as they and their consumers construct the marketing of a deviant sport and the fighting cock as a commercial object. After a brief description of cockfighting, we will describe our research and discuss how cockfighters market their questionable sport. We will show how marketing deviance differs from more conventional marketing.

**Cockfighting**

Cockfighting is a very old sport – some even claim “the oldest” (Dundes, 1994, p. vii). In 386 Saint Augustine used a description of a cockfight in his “De Ordine” to illustrate evil in the world. Although cockfighting is not universal, it may be the closest to a universal sport, occurring almost everywhere that chickens live. There are cultural nuances to the fights which occur in different places, some differences larger than nuances (bare-spurred versus the “slasher” fights, for example, see below), but the elements are fairly standard, owing to the inherent elements of pitting two roosters against each other to fight.

A cockfight consists of several rounds of putting weight-matched pairs of specially bred roosters against each other in a pit. Depending on the circumstances, they usually fight until one is dead. The birds are often brightly colored, and, again depending on the circumstances, a fight may be awesomely savage and, in its way, beautiful, although bloody. Spectators usually make bets on the birds, in any of several fashions, frequently calling out bets even as the fight progresses. Birds may fight bare-heeled (rarely) or with knives (“slashers”) or gaffs (slender, pointed spurs) attached. The knife fight is quicker and bloodier, and more rounds are held during a session. During the gaff fight, it is normal for both birds to be wounded and exhausted but still living, so they may be dragged to a pit where they lie near each other. One or the other will usually rise up one last time to peck at the other, evidencing the quality of “deep gameness,” and winning the fight. They may stay in the drag pit for an hour or more. During that time, other birds are fighting in the main pit. Most of the people involved in cockfighting are men, although there are
some women involved. The settings for the fights are usually rural, and range from
the informal fight in a farmer’s yard to the formal, specially constructed pits in a few
areas of the country such as the Neighbors Game Club in Cibola, Arizona, which
seats 350 people.

Most often, a cockfight is like other rural, small town events, such as a rodeo
or a high school ballgame. Although as Bryant and Capel (1974) have pointed out,
cockfights attract people from all levels of the stratification system, our data show
that people from the high-end of the social hierarchy are underrepresented: rural
poor, construction workers and agriculturists predominate at most cockfights.
People wear levis, overalls, camo outfits, and the occasional sport shirt. They
generally sit on wooden benches or mill around. There is often a sign posted saying,
“No Profanity, Alcohol, or Gambling.” During daylight fights, there is usually
gambling, but the alcohol and profanity are less obvious than they are at night fights,
which can go on all night. Behavior at these fights can get rough, so that there may
be as much fighting in the stands as in the pits. During daylight fights, children run
around, men stand around and tell tales, women talk. There is little unanimity in the
crowd. For a person who does not have money riding on a particular fight, the scene
can grow boring. The fighting of the roosters often looks more like a pair of robins
arguing over turf in one’s front yard than a WWF scene, a lot of wing flapping and
little more. If the ground is red clay, such as in the area we studied, and the birds
both brightly colored, one may see little or no blood, just a lot of dust. The smells
and sounds resemble a rodeo more than anything else. The atmosphere is rather like
that of a secret club. Cockers do not believe that outsiders and those who oppose
the sport know anything about it, but they do not want video pictures taken or
newspaper accounts given. They feel like they are “in on something.”

Referees are usually cockfighters themselves, men who are not fighting birds
at this particular event. They are chosen and paid by the house, and ratified by the
people in attendance. If people do not trust them, they will not return to that pit. Most
are trusted by the crowds; Worden attended one fight where a referee’s wife was
fighting, but everyone believed him to be impartial. Referees are most important
when the birds are dragged to the pits; they may be accused of counting fast or slow
at these occasions.

Background

Like marrying your cousin, cockfighting is illegal in most states in this country and
frowned upon in the rest. Schiff (1995) called it a “degraded gladiatorial spectacle.”
categorizing it with professional wrestling, a comparison students often made for
us in classroom discussions, except that students ranked it much lower than wrestling, in a league sometimes with wife-beating. There can be no arguing its disvalued status in much of our society. How do people get involved in such a disvalued activity, especially one that is inherently social, shared with others, rather than a type of secretive deviance? Some cockfighters got into their sport through the propinquity that must also assist people in falling in love with their cousins, as the novelist Harry Crews describes in a short story:

[I been a cocker] all my life. My daddy given me my first chicken when I was twelve year old. Most rooster men that’s any good been in it that long. It don’t take but a lifetime to learn it. (Crews 1979, p. 35)

One informant, for example, told us that before he knew about organized cockfighting, he used to shut two roosters in his bathroom and let them fight it out. Cocks do fight each other without human intervention, and people do fall in love without social approval and sanction. However, most cockfighters do not learn the sport from watching their chickens.

Most cockers get involved with the sport through deliberate diffusion instigated by the entrepreneurial cockers. The informant who fought chickens in his bathroom later introduced a friend to the sport this way. The friend, now a cocker too, said that he had not even known that chickens fought before watching in the bathroom pit. Tales such as the archetypal anecdote about Sal with which we begin this article, about how old men pick young men, beginners, give them their first birds, and train and encourage them in the sport of cockfighting and the care and raising of fowl, are quite common. Obituaries are usually written by sons, protégés and admirers of the men who have died, rather than colleagues and peers. As we will show, old men recruit new ones in order to promote the sport and to ensure their own immortality, and young men turn to old ones as the only trustworthy people available in an ambiguous, probably disreputable, world. This gives a distinctively gerontocratic aspect to both the sport and the marketing efforts.

In order to continue the sport, old cockfighters must market it, recruit new cockfighters, sell or give them birds, and encourage them in the sport, and they must do so in a relatively covert manner because of the widespread disvalued nature of the sport and the illegality of it in most parts of the country. In order to sell chickens, they must establish their reputations as honest and knowledgeable old men engaged in an illegal activity, whose only vested interest seems to be in continuing the sport for its own sake.
Method

This paper is based upon research into cockfighting which began in the spring of 1989 and continued intensively for about three years. The data were obtained through participant observation, intensive interviewing, and analysis of secondary materials. Our naturalistic study took place along the border region of Eastern Oklahoma and Western Arkansas. Worden did the primary research and observation, with Darden’s role mostly limited to locating respondents and secondary research. This is not a sport where middle class female college professors are warmly greeted and introduced to the nuances of meaning and behavior. Although there are a few women cockers, some men’s wives attend some fights, and “sew-up girls” may repair injured birds, this is a mostly male world. The editor of *The Gamecock*, however, is a woman.

Worden has observed formal and informal cockfights at varied settings. Interviews with main informants and informal conversations with many different participants were carried out over a period of nineteen months. Finally, an informant (who has since died, allegedly shot by his ex-wife’s new boyfriend) read and commented on some of our material and corroborated its major conclusions as well as our interpretations of supporting data.

For this study, we also concentrated on 24 issues of magazines devoted to cockfighting: *The Gamecock* (various issues ranging from May 1967 to May 1991), *Grit and Steel* (several issues from 1991), and *The Feathered Warrior* (several from 1991). For comparison, we read the June 1992 and January 1993 issues of *Bird Talk*, a magazine devoted to exotic bird keeping and talked with a number of owners of such birds and one former breeder. Darden also attended the 1993 Annual Rattlesnake Roundup in Whigham, Georgia, and we looked closely at the program from that event.

Marketing Deviance

Since we are talking about marketing, it is useful to use paradigms established in that discipline to shape our discussion of the spread of cockfighting and selling gamefowl. Kotler’s (1991) version of marketing is one of the most used and best accepted; we will adapt his major concepts for our project. While the models of the conventional marketing process that Kotler (1991) and others present may describe the processes by which mass marketers and many smaller businesses operate, we wonder if they work for the entrepreneur engaged in marketing dangerous or illegal...
activities: marketing deviance? When, for example, the environment is more than merely hostile, and threatens to arrest the seller and destroy his product and production facilities, can one of these models explain that situation and help the seller to make decisions? How do you sell something illegal, to people who know it is illegal?

Studies of drug sales, prostitution, and other vices help in this connection, but only to an extent. Many studies (Adler & Adler, 1983) have described the various techniques of drug-dealing. Two major differences between drug-dealing and cockfighting are the relative ephemerality of drug dealing compared to cockfighting and chicken-raising, and the relative visibility of the contraband which the owner must hide or disguise.

Although the small, local drug dealer may continuously maintain possession of a large enough amount of drugs to send him or her to prison, the bigger dealer usually maintains possession for a very limited amount of time, if any, before distributing the product to others who will merchandise it in smaller amounts to others. People who grow chickens, however, have committed themselves to several years’ worth of labor, possession, and visibility. An airplane full of illegal drugs is extremely visible, but it is also portable and soon emptied. A pound of cocaine or marijuana will fit in an easily carried container. A couple of acres of loud and brightly colored roosters tied to little sheds is also very visible, not portable, and relatively permanent. Law enforcement uses specially trained animals to sniff out drugs, but anyone who knows what to look for can spot a rooster yard (Figure 1).

Prostitutes face the visibility problem from a slightly different perspective. Call-girls, masseuses, and others at the higher end of the profession may have normal, conventional marketing problems, but the street hooker has to be out and available to customers without attracting the attention of law enforcement. This is a tricky act, with various solutions. Some women rely on the portability idea, moving frequently, from corner to corner, which makes repeat sales difficult. Some believe (wrongly) that they can hide or deny their activity by “passing” as dates if they do not mention money first. Some rely on pimps or other forms of word-of-mouth, and likely others pay law enforcement people to ignore them. Again, though, the chicken farmer’s size and visibility present problems which prostitutes can handle with relative ease.

Still, cockfighters have not thought of themselves as outlaws, but as little guys who have fallen victims to big guys, little guys who are maintaining a noble tradition with a long and respectable history, including George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, and other notable chicken men of their times – in face of terrific odds. These odds include not only “the many crazy laws that are trying to be passed”
(Abacherli, 1991, p. 171) and the animal rights activists, but the "big money men" who fight in the knife fight variation which runs costs up beyond the reach of the average little guy. In this form of cockfighting matches are over rapidly and many more cocks are destroyed (Worden & Darden, 1992).

How do these people continue to think of themselves as embattled practitioners of a noble sport which is illegal? Most believe that the birds will fight anyway, that birds just do fight. Many say that birds do not feel pain, owing to their simple nervous systems. Hearne (1994) would likely disagree with this point. In her essay on "Parrots and Philosophers," for example, she says, "...even a cat isn't as good at keeping control of a conversation as a parrot is" (1994, p. 4). Barber (1993) would definitely disagree with the notion that birds are too simple to feel pain. In his book The Human Nature of Birds, he demonstrates that birds are intelligently aware.
While breeders of exotic birds generally take a position somewhere between Barber's and that of cockfighters, owners of pet exotics emphatically agree with Barber, finding their pets not only intelligent but cuddly, lovable, and loving. Cockers, of course, may admire their birds and love their sport, but they do not love their birds. It is a rare rooster who even gets a name. Exotic bird breeders usually leave the naming of birds to the people who will buy and love them, as do dog breeders. Some particularly courageous and game roosters do get names. Pigeons are never named; they all receive numbers and are identified by their numbers only (Worden, 1992).

In defending their sport, cockers also point out that nature itself is bloody. If a poultry farmer has 100 chicks, for example, and eight live, the farmer is doing well. For the cockfighter, who has watered, fed, trained, and tended these birds for at least two years, the argument is simple: these birds get treated better than do those raised for food, and they may die with the dignity that nature intended for them, in a fight. Others ignore the whole question of animal rights by believing that chickens are fowl, not animals. The illegality issue they nullify by saying that the government is overreaching itself, getting into issues that are none of its concern, that the government has no right to regulate a group of gentlemen making wagers.

With the outlawing of the sport, however, and the often highly publicized efforts of both law enforcers and animal rights activists, cockfighting has in recent years attracted adherents who do think of themselves as outlaws. "Just tell me something is illegal, and I'll do it," one informant said. While the "fraternity of cockers," as they often call themselves, probably contains no armed robbers or hit men, many cockers probably grow and sell marijuana on some scale or own illegal weapons. The story circulated among some of our informants that two men had tried unsuccessfully to set up a "clean" pit, and when it failed, they sold out to people rumored to be big drug-dealers in the area. It is likely that at least some drug money is laundered through cockfighting, since cash is the usual standard of exchange.

Kotler uses several core concepts of marketing to look at the processes of conventional marketing, and we will adapt these to look at our data and describe the selling of deviance. These concepts are: needs, wants and demands; product; value; exchange; and market (1991, p. 4).

Needs, Wants and Demands

According to Kotler, needs are basic and biological. Wants are ways of satisfying needs, and demands are elaborated satisfiers. Consider food, bread, and croissants.
While the idea of needs is a little too psychological and too motivational for us, we are willing to talk about wants and desires/demands here. Conventional marketers protest, perhaps rightly, that they engage in satisfying existing wants rather than creating new ones. The case of gamefowl is largely an exception, as the established chicken men must depend on finding new chicken men and getting them to want chickens. Cockfighters talk about wanting entertainment and wanting to continue the traditions of the "great sport" of cockfighting. The novice and the more experienced chicken man who buy chickens want to win money in the pits.

Although marketers usually consider sellers' long-range goals to be the obvious financial profit, those who sell chickens have an additional long-range goal. The epitome of the sport consists of becoming a legend whose fighting record is attested to by having his name attached to the stock which will be preserved by those who come after him.

Sandy Hatch may well not recognize the fowl that bear his name today as having much of a connection with the fowl that he had way back when. The important thing would be that he would be so extremely proud that his name and legend had lived on and was passed down to today's fowl, who contain little true old-time Hatch blood. His name is synonymous with the tenacious, game, powerfully enduring fowl for which his fowl were known for. The qualities of endurance and power liken today's hatch type fowl to those from the hands of the originator himself. (Warbird, 1991, p. 29)

Most cockers want to become trustworthy old men who can choose younger men to train and entrust with their fowl (Prus 1989b, p. 102-130). Immortality is the ultimate desire/demand of the chicken man, seller and buyer. In the short run, this reputation as a trustworthy old man helps to sell chickens, too, and it is often a deliberate construction on the part of the seller.

Products

Product includes services, and refers to satisfying needs, wants, and desires. Here, the major product is a chicken. Since fighting the chickens is illegal in most states, and shipping animals across state lines for the purposes of fighting is against federal law, most sellers sell brood stock, and the buyers experiment with crossbreeding the fowl to produce battlecocks for fighting. As with drugs and prostitution, there is no product stability or standardization with chickens. The best breeding chickens are usually considered to be the pure lines with the original breeders' names attached.
I continue to read with interest the arguments against pure this or pure that. Well, if anyone is so shallow or nitpicking as to condemn such a practice by those of us that purchased fowl under this premise, whether we think them to be pure as the original breeder bred them or not, it still remains our right to call them what we want! If anyone wants to nitpick such a trivial difference with you, then tell them to stick it and walk away. You will have done yourself a favor. (Warbird, 1991, p. 29)

If there ever were pure lines of chickens, the resurgence of cockfighting in this country after World War II probably ended them. Whether there once were or not, the establishing of a chicken as a pure breed today is a social construction. One cannot look at a chicken and know from its physical characteristics that he is a Hatch or a Kelso. Color, comb size, leg color, and other features once distinguished the various breeds, but they no longer do. There are many arguments over the ostensible breeds of specific chickens. The chicken that is sold as a “White Hatch” is a socially constructed product in that only through the claims that the breeder makes and the breeder’s reputation and fighting record can the buyer form any idea of what he is purchasing. The features of a bird which breeders and buyers stress are things such as muscle and the quality of his conditioning. A desirable bird has just the right amount of muscling in his legs. Too much muscle makes a bird unable to act; he can’t “cut” (is too slow and cannot aim). A bird that can “cut” can aim his gaff or knife, a skill which comes from an inbred instinct, cockers believe. The bird that cannot cut just flails away in the direction of his opponent. Superb conditioning results in rock-hard strong legs and wings. A bird with “bottom,” probably a genetic feature, is one that can sustain punishment. “Gameness” is the key to a superior bird, that ability to persevere in the face of obstacles, to peck his opponent with his last dying gasp, to “hang in there” until the end. Stories are told about cockers who come with birds in polished wooden cages, put their birds in the pit with those of guys who bring their birds in paper bags, with mites crawling all over them, and lose to the mite-infested bird that is “deep game.” A bird that is ready to fight, genetically superior and in condition, will swagger and cut his wings side to side before a fight. Handlers say that they can feel the tension in the birds and tell when the birds are ready. They also believe that the birds can feel the confidence and courage that the good handlers impart to them through holding them before a match. They also say that a good handler can feel the electricity go out of a bird during a match, when the handlers separate the birds. Advantages that some handlers are said to use include strychnine, which can cause a bird to attack even his handler, and steroids. Such chemicals are considered invasions on the pure sport by most cockers.
The cheapest fowl probably come from Mexico or the Philippines, but most American and Spanish cockers currently prefer to “Buy American,” particularly fowl from the Arkansas-Oklahoma area where it is believed that the cold winters produce birds with fewer parasites and the “ground” is superior. The ground refers to just that, the portion of earth the chicken uses, but it has become a bit mystified among cockers and includes in its meaning the climate and weather, the other living things which share it, such as parasites, and other uncontrollable forces of nature. There is a fad element to choosing birds, in that at various times and places, one breed will be “in” and others “out.” Being in results from winning, or being thought to win, at derbies and other fights. Instability of the chicken as product also results from biological factors. Genetics and breeding are always a gamble and when the birds are kept outside, available to predators and other natural elements, with parentage often unknown, the risks become quite high. A breeder may find his “nick,” the absolutely best fowl, in a set of brothers, but may never be able to reproduce them. It takes two years to raise, train and fully test a battlecock. By the time a breeder is certain that he has a superior battlecock, the parents (if he knows which birds they were) are two years older, a long and significant time in the breeding life of a chicken. The care, feeding, and training also matter, so that genetic perfection may not prove out in the pits for an inexperienced owner. This product instability makes the breeder’s reputation as a trustworthy, winning old man even more critical and problematic. Sellers offer services, too. A typical display ad in *The Gamecock* offers:

SPECIAL – With the purchase of fowl you may spend 1 week at my expense seeing how we take care of our fowl and go to a derby with us to watch our roosters perform. (Think about it.) SPECIAL CONSIDERATION GIVEN TO BEGINNERS!!!

Videotapes, magazines, books, personal phone calls, all back up the chicken seller and offer advice on feeding, training, keeping, and handling birds. Often these include strange advice: “A ounce of cure is worth a pound of remedy” according to Long Spur (1991, p. 77). This follow-up service is particularly crucial because the young guys are thought not to know what they are doing. Like new guys in any endeavor, new guys, beginners, in cocking must pay their dues (thus enabling the old guys to fleece them from time to time), but not to the point of driving them out:

To misinform beginners or purposely mislead someone can probably do more harm to this sport than some other more often talked about enemies. (Roberts, 1991, p. 24)
His customers are experienced cockers that know ace battlecocks. Not beginners that don’t know a good cock from a bad one. (Fulldrop Jr., 1991, p. 136)

In closing, I have a word for all the beginners out there. Keep with it and be as strong-willed as the gamest cock alive! So often I read short articles about beginners being involved in raw dealings. I have been very fortunate in not being involved in many. I would just like to tell you there are plenty of experienced cockers that are willing to guide and help the beginners. The beginner only needs one prerequisite, to be strong-willed. (Whitehackle Haven, 1991, p. 87)

If they do not recruit and keep the young guys, the sport will not continue and there will be no one to trust with their immortality. More importantly, they cannot make money in the pits. Much of the money that changes hands in the pits goes from beginners who bet without sufficient knowledge of the real variables – the trainers and handlers – to the more knowledgeable experienced men.

There is other equipment available for breeding and fighting birds. Breeding equipment is pretty basic and seldom used by cockfighters. Incubators for hatching eggs, for example, are expensive and not thought to be worth the money. Medications are sold as for any other kind of livestock, so that one bypasses the veterinarian as often as possible. Worming medications, feed supplements, and other sorts of medications are usually as much related to lore passed down and around as to any sort of scientific research that a veterinarian may have access to and charge a lot of money for. In contrast, *Bird Talk*, a magazine for exotic bird keepers and breeders, has a column written by a veterinarian. Other paraphernalia, such as tie-downs, are also sold. Some breeders tie each rooster to his own little shed, to keep the birds from fighting with each other, wandering away, or getting into any other kind of trouble. Tied-down birds cannot be carried away by predators such as hawks.

The equipment for fighting the fowl, the knives and gaffs, is probably, next to the birds themselves, the single most important item available to the cocker (Worden & Darden, 1992). The world of cockers is divided into those who fight with the gaff, the traditionalists, and those who fight with the more deadly knife. A large variety of these instruments is available, as are cases for containing them. Some men make their own elaborate wooden cases. Attaching the gaff to the bird is considered an art by many, and is often done in secret. It involves wrapping the gaff with tape to attach it to the bird’s heel.

The chicken, then, is the major product, other than the sport itself. As we have suggested, the chicken may represent a man’s hopes for financial gain and even
immortality, but he remains basically a chicken. He is not a pet. He is not beloved.
although he may be admired. He is not cuddled or named, only trained. tended and
bred. Pictures of winners with trophies are published in cockfighting magazines.
whereas Bird Talk pictures pets with Santa Claus and with favorite toys. He is a
product.

Values, Cost and Satisfaction

Values are "the consumer’s estimate of the product’s overall capacity to satisfy his
or her needs” (Kotler, 1991, p. 6), and are usually expressed in terms of price.

There is very little price competition among gamefowl sellers. The value of
chickens at the time of sale is established by the breeder’s record in the pits and his
reputation.

I have to put in a good word for Papa Buck. Both Tom Johnson and myself
have gotten the Brown Reds from Buck. Both of us have had the very best
success with them. They are not only agile and able fighters, but have the
bottom to hang in there just as long as it takes and then some...not a trait
for which Brown Reds are known for. (Warbird, 1991, p. 30)

Because the line of chickens a man produces does not stop at the man’s death,
especially if he has passed his stock and lore on to a younger man, his obituary may
even become part of his reputation and of someone else’s promotional material.
Probably for these reasons, the obituaries in the magazines tell more about a man’s
chickens than about the man and his life; perhaps, in this instance, his chickens are
his life:

MSGT. Milton M. Hall, U.S. Army Air Corps, born July 24, 1915, died
March 23, 1990. Services were held at Cochran Mortuary in Wichita,
Kansas. A veteran of World War II, he passed away at home. He was
known for his Canadian Mugs, which he had won numerous derbies at
different pits in Kansas. Before his death he tied a 33 derby at BJ’s in Ponca
City, Oklahoma. Winning a hack and four in a row. He leaves a wife, son,
and daughter. We will miss him. (Bert White, 1991, p. 214)

In conventional market arenas, where a buyer can rely on sellers’ reputations,
histories, credit ratings, and so forth, buying still involves “uncertainties, risks, and
dilemmas” (Prus 1989a, p. 135).

Despite attempts to make purchasing more “professional”...buying re-
mains a gamble. Not only does buying entail strategies and gaming, trust
and cooperation, and deception and competition, but buying activity takes place within a setting of shifting uncertainties and reflects dependencies on others outside the immediate transaction. (Prus, 1989a, p. 139)

Buyers of fighting chickens, quite naturally, fear "phony chicken-peddlers." The real secret to obtaining value in buying chickens lies in the old man who spots a promising youngster, what Prus (1989a) describes as a "seeker," and gives him his chickens. All other deals are suspect:

Mr. KinCannon is the only major breeder that I know that does sell super blood lines (when he does sell fowl). His word is his bond and he sells out every year to repeat customers. (Fulldrop, Jr. 1991, p. 136)

Many informants asked, "Why would a guy sell his best chickens to someone he may meet later in the pits?" Their answer is that most will not, leaving anyone who offers fowl for sale open to the charge of being a "phony chicken peddler." "However a small percentage [of beginners] get hooked up with an honest cocker and tries to learn and goes ahead to make an excellent cocker," according to RWN (1991, p. 30). Sometimes people buy out of state, figuring that a seller who lives at a distance might be willing to sell good chickens, but they know that sellers often fight out of state, too, so they cannot depend on that method of finding a trustworthy seller. The second best method is to buy from a pure line (in conventional marketing, an established brand), but you can never be sure that you are doing that. Our observations confirm the dubiousness of the pure line; on several occasions Worden watched a breeder stroll through his yard, pick up eggs and put them unmarked into his pocket, so that he had no way of knowing which chickens produced which eggs.

Some deny the importance of the brood fowl, saying that the stock is less important than the regimen of care and training.

I'm sure many of you cockers have read this best selling book on nutrition and I'm going to try to emphasis to you as a game fowl feeder that it is just as important to fowl as it is to a human being. I think we under emphasize feed and proper nutrition and over emphasize the importance of paying large amounts of money for a trio. (Dutcher, 1991, p. 148)

These people offer their secrets, again backed up by pit records and reputations, either free through letters and columns in the magazines or by purchase as books, pamphlets or video tapes:
The purple powder is a strong grease cutting biodegradable detergent that you can buy at a wholesale outlet store for around $2.50 to $3.00 a gallon. If you can find the orange powder, it is the strongest. (Long Spur, 1992, p. 76)

Customer satisfaction is defined very simply: "When you don’t kill ‘em." Chickens are usually sold with the admonition, "If you do not like them, kill them." Sellers do not want buyers to give away unsatisfactory chickens, because doing so might dilute the purity of the blood lines. Chickens can be battletested, i.e., pitted against each other unarmed in controlled circumstances to observe their apparent abilities as fighters, at 6 months as "baby stags," and at one year as stags. If owners are not pleased by the chickens’ performances at these ages, they usually kill the chickens. (And, of course, the full-grown 2-year old or older battlecock who loses in the pit usually dies, too.) A man who keeps the chickens he has bought, then, is a satisfied customer, as is, obviously, a repeat customer.

**Exchange, Transactions and Relationships**

This refers to obtaining products we want, offering resources in exchange for them. The epitome here is "relationship marketing," wherein the seller tries to build up long-term trusting relationships with customers (Bigus, 1972; Prus & Irini, 1988). Advertising, promotion, sales force training, distribution, and repair service are all methods of effecting exchange and developing relationships in conventional marketing.

Word-of-mouth is still the most effective means of advertising and promoting in all forms of marketing. For the cockfighter/chicken seller, this extends to winning in the pits and constructing and maintaining a reputation as a good chicken man: usually honest, religious, sometimes considerate and caring, a man of integrity.

Maybe the most important thing, by all means, be honest in all your dealings. This is probably the most important as you can get a bad reputation much quicker than an honest one. I have birds, thru friendship and small amounts of cash, that wasn’t for sale at any price. (Cogburn, 1991, p. 158)

Personal sales, where the buyer and seller jointly define the chickens as breeders of potential winners from proven lines, without any or much third-party interven-
tion, account for most sales. Cantrell and Brannan, Ohio cockers, invite potential buyers to "bring two of the best cocks you have or can acquire and we will be more than glad to show you [ours] in action" (The Gamecock, 1991, p. 18). Many people buy mail order chickens, a process which most chicken men agree is absurd. The idea is to find those honest chicken sellers who will sell good chickens out of state and not have to face those chickens in a nearby pit. Most mail-order buyers are disappointed.

The major third party intermediary or facilitator in the marketing of fighting chickens is the magazine. Although professionally printed, all three seem to be the results of desktop publishing of one sort or another. The Gamecock reports a circulation of 13,000. Spelling, grammar and punctuation vary from poor to awful, as does the quality of photographs and their reproduction. The content is about 50% advertising, much of it informal and folksy in tone. The editorial content is about 40% letters and 60% columns, articles, and notices. Most of the editorial content is informational, about choosing and caring for chickens. There are some letters asking for help, but most letters are gratuitous offers of expert information from old cockers with secrets to share, what Prus (1989a, p. 205) might call "cultural entrepreneurship." These likely have the effect, and perhaps the intention, of boosting the writer's reputation:

After several requests, I have written a Cocker's Guidebook....I hope it will be helpful to many cockers, especially beginners....I have been so blessed in my life that I feel the least I can do is share with those less fortunate. (Roberts, 1991, p. 24)

The information is welcomed by all of the cockfighters we know.

I thank The Feathered Warrior people for publishing a fine magazine, month after month, for the benefit of many. Good information is there to read each month. It seems that it is getting better as time goes on. The many pictures published each month are appreciated by cockers worldwide. (Roberts, 1991, p. 24)

These are the only magazines many cockers read, although some also read Field and Stream, and, interestingly, The Pigeon Journal. Most readers relate to the magazine very personally, as if they knew the editor, the authors, and the other readers.
I enjoy your magazine and the articles by Bill Roberts. He is one good man and doesn’t mind helping you in any way he can, and also Sleepy. I went to see him and his better half, they are just as nice as can be. I enjoyed the coffee and chicken talk. They make you feel welcome and at home, and ask if there is any way he can help you. (Trull, 1991, p. 156)

Many of the authors use only their nicknames: Long Spur, Whitehackle Haven, the Traveller. The magazines form the core of a community for most cockers. The relationship is so intense and personal for many that we heard comments such as, “I’m gonna cut his [the editor’s] balls off for letting that guy advertise his phony chickens.”

Relationships among cockfighters show a great deal of respect and deference. Good friends will tease and interact informally, using nicknames, but acquaintances call each other “Mr.” Mr. is usually an honorific, implying an older, respected, experienced man. The articles in the magazines use Mr. and use specific names only when they have something good to say about a person. Perhaps in response to the possibility of slander or castration, an author who has something bad to say about another person usually avoids mentioning that person’s name.

Many of the ads in the magazines play on the “old man” theme:

After 31 years of raising, selling and fighting gamecocks, I am ready to slow down a little and take it easy. (The Gamecock, 1991, p. 34)

The story among our informants is that one man ran the same ad saying he was old and ready to retire for 20 years.

The idea of vicarious competition is implicit in much of the magazine content and in cockers’ conversations. Many cockers are rural, poor, aging athletes, disabled, and overweight – they cannot themselves compete physically, so they enjoy the competition among their birds. Although it is perhaps peripheral, it is worth noting that in every society in which men fight gamecocks, at least one word referring to the birds is also a slang reference to the penis. (Dundes, 1994)

Another theme obvious in the magazines and conversations is death. Fighting birds is about death, equanimity in the face of death, stoicism, physical courage, and an unflinching acceptance of pain. These are old agricultural and masculine values, so it is not surprising to find them here. These values combine easily, too, with the theme of the God-fearing older man who is the hero of the sport and of most of its stories.
Markets

For chicken sellers, the potential market is mostly younger guys, beginners, since older guys usually have their stock or will know whose stock they want and often get it free. The younger guys are seen as naive if not stupid, and in need of a lot of help and advice. The market is crucial, of course, as it always is, but perhaps even more so because it also offers posterity, the ultimate reason many of the chicken men are in the sport.

Kotler (1991) presents the following model of the relationships among the various factors in the conventional market:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Starting Point</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>Ends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factory</td>
<td>Products</td>
<td>Selling and promotion</td>
<td>Profits through sales volume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td>Consumer</td>
<td>Coordinated needs marketing</td>
<td>Profits through satisfaction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) The selling concept

(b) The marketing concept

This overall picture shows that marketing deviance differs considerably from conventional marketing. Instead of being an example of one of Kotler's two contrasting strategies (the marketing concept or the selling concept), selling gamefowl appears to be a hybrid of the two, the deviant marketing concept.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Starting Point</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>Ends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Producer as factory</td>
<td>Reputation of product</td>
<td>Word of mouth, uncoordinated activities</td>
<td>Profits through side activities (i.e., gambling), immortality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. The Deviant Marketing Concept
There are fewer steps in the process of marketing deviance. The factory, as Dutcher (1991, p. 149) says, is often the producer. The product is unstable and unstandardized. The producer is the seller, who has only the one intermediary/facilitator (the magazines) to worry about. There are no wholesalers or sales forces. Distribution is usually from one hand to another, although occasionally interstate shipments are made, which legally limits the kinds of fowl which can be sold. Word-of-mouth is a strong determinant of sales and is highly dependent on building a reputation as an honest competitor; but the seller as competitor is suspect. Marketing efforts are so uncoordinated as to be fragmented. Profits are made in an ancillary fashion through betting in the pits and through taking advantage of the people the trustworthy old man must convince of his trustworthiness. And this entrepreneur works within a particularly hostile environment (not so hostile, perhaps, as the drug-dealer or the prostitute, who may be killed): given the size of the setup required to keep and raise chickens, and its obvious signs, the gamecock breeder’s operation is extremely visible and relatively permanent. In some places there is probably collusion with authorities, since a drive down many secondary highways in this country yields the obvious signs of fighting chickens being kept.

The threat to destroy the product is particularly harsh for the chicken man, since his product is also his factory. While the drug-dealer may face huge financial loss if his or her stock and other possessions are confiscated, these things can be replaced. Most arrests for prostitution result in fines, some in jail terms; either way, the prostitute has lost only time and money, not her product. When the law destroys the last of Mr. Smith’s Hatches, however, there are no more. And Mr. Smith loses his shot at immortality.

Conclusions

We have described the processes involved in the marketing of a deviant activity, cockfighting. Cockfighting is illegal in most states in this country, and yet the breeding and selling of fighting chickens is legal, and the traditions and history attached to cockfighting maintain that the sport is old, honorable and gentlemanly, descended from such figures as George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. We have found that those engaged in marketing the sport and its paraphernalia, including the chickens, must conduct their activities in ways which differ from the marketing activities of more conventional businesses, as described in the marketing literature. We have found that there is an apparent paradox involved, in that while the participants usually consider themselves fine, upstanding citizens, they trust each other only slightly, knowing that they may well end up pitting their birds...
against each other. This results in the necessity for establishing one's reputation as an honest, trustworthy person who is engaged in illegal and stigmatized activities. Since the organization of the marketing efforts is very loosely structured, with no sales force and only one third-party medium for advertising, the most effective form of advertising and marketing is word-of-mouth, which can spread rapidly through this community of mostly rural people who communicate through their magazines and through face-to-face encounters at fights and in informal meetings. Having winning birds and winning honestly, without taking advantage of neophytes, is the best method of establishing one's reputation for honesty and trustworthiness. Winning, however, can sometimes come at a cost of the honesty reputation.

The marketing of fighting chickens, because of this deviant nature and stigmatized tradition, has a distinctly gerontocratic aspect. As the stories, perhaps myths, of the old man giving his chickens and his blessing to the promising youngster demonstrate, a chicken man can never trust an opponent. Yet, in order to keep the sport going, to insure that there is a history for a man to go down in, chicken people must recruit new chicken people, who become opponents. The only trustworthy person is the old man who no longer competes (cf. Adler & Adler, 1983). As Whitney (1991, p. 150) concludes:

So to all you other beginners out there, when your driving around and see some old man out tending his birds, stop and introduce yourself. Maybe you're what he's looking for. If not then, good luck.

Does this gerontocratic aspect characterize the marketing of other deviant activities? It probably does to a greater degree than researchers have noticed. The smart drug buyer, for example, tries to maintain an established, trustworthy source: prostitution is stratified in terms of trustworthiness. This gerontocratic aspect of the marketing of deviance deserves further attention.

Notes

1. Please direct all correspondence to Donna K. Darden, Department of Sociology and Philosophy, Tennessee Technological University, Cookeville, TN 38505. We thank Bobby Tisdale, Lydia Worden, Coy VanMeter, Mark Watson and Clint Sanders for help with this project.

2. Among both prostitutes and their customers, the call-girl is ranked most highly and the street walker is lowest. The call-girl works for a service which vouches for her, has a phone number, and has usually been in business for a long time. The street walker is a transitory person in that role, perhaps even changing street locations several times a night. She has no credentials except, perhaps, a pimp.
References