

Radioactive Beef Scare and Alarmed Housewives: Narrativizing Fear in "Wide-show" Crisis News

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ABSTRACT

Months after the 2011 Tohoku earthquake, issues related to nuclear radiation contaminating food in Japan emerged. How have the Japanese media narrativized such food-related health issues as fear? What potential influence does this have on the Japanese mothers and wives typically tasked with preparing food for their families? Seen in the context of Japanese infotainment television programs focusing on consumer issues, health, and lifestyles, this paper will examine representations of the recent "beef scare" in one morning "wide-show" program, *Sukkiri!!*. I argue that these representations are essentially gendered, as the "wide-show" genre targets a middle-aged, female audience. Applying Barthes' notion of myth, the characteristics of this genre are ideologically coded, reinforcing viewers' social roles as housewives whose obligations include protecting the family from health risks. Characteristics of this genre also help construct what Langer calls a "community at risk" story-type and what Altheide defines as the "fear narrative."

INTRODUCTION

Why are the words *komaru* (be in a fix), *fuan* (worry), and *daijōbu* (safe) often associated with crises reported on Japanese television? In the aftermath of the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster, one of the many public health issues linked to nuclear radiation is food contamination. The "beef scare" in July 2011 is one such example: authorities discovered that beef contaminated with radioactive cesium far exceeding government safety standards had been dispatched to the rest of Japan for consumption. The beef scare is significant because it emerged long after fears about food contaminated by radiation had partially subsided, and because the contaminated beef had actually managed to infiltrate and remain unaccounted for in the food supply when the news was reported (Dvorak, 2011). Taking the July beef scare as a case study, this paper explores the following questions: How has Japanese infotainment on TV, such as "wide-show" programs, narrativized the beef crisis as fear? How do these narratives inform everyday consumers, particularly housewives, who are typically the ones responsible for preparing food for their families? Are these media representations ideologically coded in the language of what Kathleen Uno identifies as the "good wife, wise mother"?

Before examining these questions, some key terms and the cultural context need to be established. The "fear narrative" refers to a type of narrative in which "the pervasive communication, symbolic awareness, and expectation that danger and risk are a central feature of the symbolic environment as people define and experience it in everyday life" (Altheide, 2009, p. 81). Infotainment is loosely defined as "an explicit genre-mix of

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'information' and 'entertainment' in news and current affairs programming [emphasizing] the mode of presentation [over]... content" (Thussu, 2007, pp.7-8). The genre includes many different forms, one of which is the "wide-show" - a Japanese adaptation of American tabloid television talk shows (Ishita, 2002, p. 2). According to Saeko Ishita (2002), "wide-show" is an English term coined in Japan, and is "an information program [targeted at] housewives" (p. 2) broadcast live on weekdays since its initiation in 1964.

In her writings about *bōseishakai* (maternal society) in postwar discourse, Tomiko Yoda (2000) states that Japanese society idealizes "children who depend on and yearn for maternal love and nurturance" (p. 868). Similarly, Anne Allison (2002) confirms that the experience of the Japanese mother preparing her child's lunchbox "becomes a part of her and... who she is... [and] it is precisely through this work that the woman expresses, identifies, and constitutes herself" (p. 96). Nancy Rosenberger (2009) asserts that key to *shokuiku* (food education), which she defines as "a movement... [stressing] the importance of children learning to appreciate food," is the mother, home-cooked food, eating together, and *ofukuro no aji* (the mother's taste) (p. 250). She also observes that in Japan food "carries a heavy moral burden" (p. 250), and this is epitomized in the education of children about food, the duty of which falls mainly on the mother. Finally, the social role of many middle-aged Japanese women is idealized in the form of "good wives and wise mothers" characterized as "managers of domestic affairs in households and nurturers of children" (Uno, 1993, p. 294). This means that the social identity of the Japanese housewife is deeply ingrained in food preparation for her family, especially her children, where her duties include protecting them from any potential health risks.

Focusing on one wide-show program, *Sukkiri!!*, I argue that its representations of the July beef scare are not only gendered, they also produce the identity of the target audience as housewives, particularly "good wives, wise mothers." Just as Roland Barthes has theorized about the function of myths, the said social identity is ideologically coded in the program in which characteristics of the genre provide a "dominant reading" supporting beliefs and values that maintain the current social order. At the same time, the wide-show genre is complemented by elements of the "community at risk" story-type, which focuses on "reports where the forms of disruption and disorder [play] out at a collective rather than individual level. Impact is swift, preparedness is minimal and the results produce unanticipated, often inexplicable, turmoil" (Langer, 1998, p. 35). This story-type also plays a prominent role in narrativizing the beef scare in order to establish the dominant reading. In this sense, the text possesses the authority to inform this specific group of middle-aged women extensively on a topic that they are not usually associated with, such as the July beef scare. However, the question of how well these women would receive media coverage of this issue can only be speculated. In her ethnographic study of Japanese housewives and politics, Robin LeBlanc (1999) asserts that, contrary to popular belief, these women do have "desirable public concerns - the protection of the environment, children, the weak and aged... [and simultaneously] can present a powerful critique of... mainstream politics with very little effort" (p. 25). This means that despite their relative unfamiliarity with the topic of food contamination by nuclear radiation the target audience has the ability to criticize media content belonging to these programs.

Employing interpretive textual analysis, this paper will explore media representations of the July beef scare in one specific nationally broadcast wide-show program, *Sukkiri!!*, and how the public health problem has been narrativized on the program as fear. In the process, it aims to examine how the main text as a medium targeting Japanese housewives informs them not just about food contamination, but by extension government issues and energy policies concerning nuclear radiation. The larger social significance is that these housewives may become engaged to participate in the political realm on their own terms through the media.

The material for the main text will be limited to coverage of the beef scare in the month of July 2011 portrayed on *Sukkiri!!*, broadcast by Nippon Television Network Corporation

from 8:00 to 10:25 a.m. on weekdays. This essay is organized in a chronological sequence charting the beef scare from its introduction to its conclusion on the program during this time frame, structured according to the community at risk story-type. It will first examine how the beef scare is introduced as a community at risk story by establishing a close connection with its viewers, and then look at how the issue is sensationalized into fear through the escalation of the situation in order to elicit an emotional response. This will be followed by an analysis of how the authorities were criticized for mishandling the beef scare, through the adoption of the viewer's perspective. Lastly, the paper assesses how the crisis is resolved on the program and the repercussions this has on the social identity of the target audience.

BEEF SCARE AS COMMUNITY AT RISK STORY

According to John Langer (1998), community at risk stories "tend towards the 'macroscopic', documenting crisis as it is expressed through broader social and physical conditions... [,][and] structure meaning by framing events and their consequences" (p. 105). As a community at risk story, the July beef scare prompts the target audience to make the "preferred reading" that beef and cows have turned into a threat to society. Langer (1998) also adds that there is a "progression through normality - disruption - renewal - return, [providing] the core of community at risk stories as news" (p. 105). He argues that the story-type fulfills the ideological function of the state as "guardians and protectors" in subduing the crisis and restoring equilibrium to the community. At its initial stages, coverage of the July beef scare on *Sukkiri!!* appears to satisfy this; however, narratives supporting the state as the authority gradually start to disintegrate, peaking at the point of "disruption." Table 1 below summarizes the beef scare as a community at risk story. Material is taken from news of the crisis consecutively reported on *Sukkiri!!*, which were on the following dates: July 12, 13, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21 and 27, 2011. The following section demonstrates how the wide-show program legitimizes the said ideological function of the state and establishes a close relationship with its target audience by examining the first report of the beef scare on July 12.

Table 1
The July Beef Scare as Community at Risk Story

Structure	Strategies	News talk
Balance >	Harmony, community	"dispatched from Minamisōma, Fukushima" "sold in 10 regions including Tokyo, Shizuoka, Kanagawa, and Osaka"
Transition >	Disruption <i>the dangerous double</i>	"Cows...detected to have high levels of cesium"
Imbalance >	Impact and Aftermath <i>the inventory</i>	"42 cows were dispatched: Tokyo (13), Yokohama (14)...and other areas" "another batch...detected to have high levels of cesium in Asakawa" "total of 132 cows confirmed to have high levels of cesium" "other prefectures besides Fukushima reportedly found cesium in their cows"
Transition >	<i>images of discontinuity</i> <i>scale</i> Restoration <i>Deployment</i> <i>Delay</i>	[montage of interviews and images] "411 cows' worth of beef have been dispatched to the rest of Japan" "the government announces... ban on ... all beef from Fukushima prefecture" "contaminated beef ... has been consumed at one elementary school in Chiba and in the lunchboxes sold within the JR Tokaido bullet trains"
Balance >	Return to normal	"the government announced measures against the beef scare"

Beginning with the first "balance" in the community at risk story structure, there is clearly an attempt to maintain a harmonious appearance of Japanese society usually depicted on *Sukkiri!!*. Langer (1998) calls this the "reference point from which the untoward occurrence and its narrativization begin - where events can be signified as unanticipated and a narrative equilibrium tipped off balance, giving the story momentum to commence" (p. 111). For example, the introduction of the beef scare on July 12 was replete with exact figures of cows affected, batches of beef contaminated, scientific measurement units of cesium detected, as well as the number of areas to which tainted beef had been dispatched. This precise quantification of the situation was swiftly accompanied by the use of a flowchart to delineate the process of tracing and confiscating the dispatched beef, including the dates on which it was sold and found to have high cesium levels. For instance, the first batch of 11 cows from Minamisōma, Fukushima were discovered to contain cesium levels approximately 3 times higher than usual, whereas another 6 affected cows have already been sold in 10 regions including Tokyo and Osaka during the months of May and June. The use of specific numbers, dates, and locations in the reporting of the beef scare at this point in the program's narrativization illustrates its aim towards grounding the situation and indicating that everything is in control. It also seems to affirm the state's role in keeping the community safe in the face of disaster, which, conversely, is later subverted by an intimate focus on its target audience, especially the social roles of housewives.

The news narrative is evidently targeted at housewives in two ways. Firstly, *Sukkiri!!* links the beef scare to reporting in all the morning newspapers on that day by displaying clippings of the reports on a large board. Once the larger connection is established, the news is made relevant for the target audience by using animated images on screen to trace and explain the entire process in layman's terms, including the clarification of what is meant by "high" and "standard" cesium levels. Obviously, this is predicated on two assumptions about the target audience. They are assumed to have already read recent headlines in local newspapers and already have a vague sense of what is going on. However, as housewives, they are also believed to be unfamiliar with the topic of food contamination by nuclear radiation, especially its technical terms. Hence, by constructing visual narratives for their target audience, wide-show programs make the beef scare accessible to them, in the process providing the very means by which the housewife is initiated into taking a broader interest in topics such as nuclear radiation, government action, and energy politics.

Secondly, news of the beef scare is made meaningful for the target audience from the perspective of how it may potentially affect them in terms of their social roles as housewives. For instance, while the hosts, Kōji Kato and Itō Teri, maintain that the beef scare "poses no health risks" and that there is "no need for worry," guest commentators Robert Campbell and Rika Kayama express their doubts. Campbell states that he thinks "the most frightening thing is the inability to track the six [cows] that have already been sent out for consumption," whereas Kayama declares, "we still don't know anything so we also doubt the reliability of the checks for radiation." The discussion by the program personnel reflects some sense of solidarity with their target audience in communicating what the latter would feel, say, and think about the beef scare. It is also interesting to note that other than government officials, none of the people appearing on the program in this episode can claim to be an expert on the issue. This means that they are merely expressing their opinions from a layman's point of view. Perhaps precisely because of this the text is able to comfortably address the target audience as housewives, who are understood to have added responsibility for ensuring that the food their families consume at home is safe. In addition, the authorial role of the state established at the beginning of the episode now breaks down and the onus of maintaining harmony in the community eventually falls on women whose social roles as protectors of the family become affirmed.

SENSATIONALIZING FEAR

As news of the beef scare was aired on *Sukkiri!!* on July 13, 15, 18, and 19, an escalation in the level of fear became apparent on the program as a consequence of the sensationalist

treatment of the topic. Following the community at risk story structure as shown in Table 1, balance gave way to "transition" and "imbalance," posing a disruption to the perception of a harmonious society. In adopting the fear narrative, the main purpose of which is to "promote a sense of disorder and a belief that 'things are out of control'" (Altheide, 2009, p. 95), the wide-show program frames the beef scare as fear. While David Altheide (2009) asserts that fear narratives are fundamental to entertainment news formats, they especially complement the characteristics of the wide-show genre. The latter prides itself in its dramatic representation style and sensational content, as well as its dependence on community at risk stories and visual documentation of disruptions and imbalance in society (Langer, 1998, p. 121).

For example, in the July 13 and 18 episodes of *Sukkiri!!*, images of discontinuity were depicted through a montage of "dash interviews" with managers and spokespersons of meat shops, restaurants, supermarkets, the consumers' association, and housewives themselves, as well as related images. The "dash interview," which has traditionally been used in wide-show programs since the 1970s, is a representation style that places the reporter in front of the camera and spontaneous reports the latest "live" news (Ishita, 2002, p. 3). This seemingly informal mode of representation again provides greater access to the target audience as it mirrors the perception of "snooping" housewives. As such, the choice of which of the dash interviews to edit and present is pertinent to the construction of the visual fear narrative.

The montage of interviews and images in the July 13 episode is presumably staged to elicit an emotional response from the target audience. While the spokesman of a *seinikuten* (meat shop) in Shizuoka is shown in an agitated tone stating: "I received such a shock it felt like I was being hit on the head; we thought it was absolutely fine to import [beef] since it had already gone through the sellers' market," the owner of a yakiniku restaurant in Hokkaido is portrayed in tears and confesses: "I have been working so hard [on my restaurant] since I was young, but maybe it is not good enough. I will face this [situation] sincerely with all my heart." This shot is immediately followed by that of a school in Kanagawa accompanied by a narration of the news that contaminated beef was used in some elementary schools and kindergartens in the area. This then cuts to a press statement from the consumers' association spokesman: "consuming contaminated beef does not do great harm to one's health, nor does it leave traces of cesium in your body. The problem [now] is to prevent this from happening again." There are a few implications to this series of interviews and images.

Firstly, as Langer (1998) asserts about images of discontinuity, they do not necessarily have a direct relation to one another as "the story is primarily cumulative rather than narrative... [and] tend[s] to build one from the other in something like a montage of fragments where the meaning 'disruption' is produced both by what is contained in the single shot and in the way that one shot relates to others around it" (p. 122). In other words, there is no real connection between the meat shop in Shizuoka, the restaurant in Hokkaido, the schools in Kanagawa, and the consumers' association, except for the contaminated beef. However, meaning is nevertheless produced for the target audience through this deliberate chopping and stringing of footage into a sequence. For example, the portrayal of the spokesman in Shizuoka and the restaurant owner in Hokkaido as ordinary people who have been unjustly subjected to the beef scare can rouse a great amount of sympathy in the audience. To promote this, the narrative is careful to include personal details, to which she is not usually privy to, such as the men's despair and helplessness regarding their situation. In this way, proximity is created for the housewife as this relationship between audience and text enables her to listen to and sympathize with the two men from a first person's perspective. Next, the shot of the schools in Kanagawa is unmistakably directed towards the housewife's social role as "good wife, wise mother" as it inserts the thought of children into the context of the beef scare. For a mother, this would have caused a degree of alarm and consolidates more fear, which may or may not be alleviated by the succeeding assurances by the consumers' association. Conversely, the juxtaposition of the

segments trigger distrust in the authorities. In this way, the fear narrative evokes a negative emotional response through an imbalance of three ordinary sources versus an authorial one as well as the building up of images and statements from having arranged these sources in a strategic manner.

Similarly, the same patterns of the fear narrative were repeated in the montage of interviews and images in the July 18 episode. In framing fear, this series changed shots in greater rapidity than the one depicted on July 13, by having the camera "travel" in quick succession from shot to shot, thus causing a disruption across the screen and creating what Langer (1998) calls a "rhythmic discontinuity in the visual register" (p. 122). The July 18 fear narrative begins with two interviews with housewives. While the first woman cautiously stated, "If I were to buy beef now, I would definitely be careful about where it comes from," the second was more resolute in her decision: "As I am not sure about the situation, I will refrain from beef for the meantime until it is clear [that it is safe]." This is then cut to a press conference headed by the president of supermarket giant Aeon, reading off a script: "We have confirmed that we have sold contaminated beef." This was followed by an interview with the meat manager in a branch of Maruei supermarket, and with the spokesman of a famous *yakiniku* (grilled meat) restaurant in Shibuya. Both were quoted as experiencing a large dip in local beef sales. However, the former emphasized that the questions he had received most from customers were: "Is the beef I bought safe?" and "Is the beef you are now selling safe?" The latter appealed to the audience with a more biased statement: "This season is supposed to be our busiest season for *yakiniku* restaurants, but this year, because of the continuing contamination problem, there was a drop in the number of customers." The fear narrative then ends with a quote from the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare that eating beef contaminated with cesium a few times does not pose any health risks, and the news that Fukushima has entreated farmers to be cautious about dispatching beef.

Adding on to the implications of the July 13 example, the July 18 episode seems to magnify the fear established in the former episode. The two statements from the housewives are clearly chosen for broadcast on the basis that they seem to be a reflection of the target audience and an estimation of how they would react. In this case, both housewives appear guarded about the beef scare and distrustful of the authorities' ability to resolve the problem. This ultimately conveys the message to housewives in the audience that it is indeed not safe. More fear is provoked in the next shot by having supermarket giant Aeon admit that it has sold tainted beef in 14 of its chain stores, cutting the account off abruptly, depriving the audience of further explanation. This is sharply contrasted with subsequent interviews with personnel belonging to Maruei and the Shibuya *yakiniku* restaurant, who are portrayed in a much more sympathetic fashion than Aeon. As in the previous example, the fear narrative ends with the authorities trying to reassure the public that eating contaminated beef is still safe after such an extensive build-up of "evidence" to the contrary. Fear is not only magnified and sensationalized through this accumulation of misgivings, it is also superficially addressed by quoting authorities, who avouch that the situation is under control.

Another aspect in *Sukkiri!!* augmenting fear is the presentation of cows or beef as the "dangerous double." Langer (1998) defines the "dangerous double" as something "normally taken-for-granted as benign, helpful or merely present... [but] turns with unexpected speed into something 'other,' and once in this condition becomes a dark purveyor of harm, threat and risk to the social organism or its parts" (p. 112). In the case of the beef scare, food is something that we take for nourishment, but can quickly turn into something harmful. For the target audience, especially housewives, who are tasked with the role of preparing meals for their families, the dangerous double presents even more of a concern and is a larger disruption to their lives. In the program, the dangerous double is firmly implanted by two characteristics of the wide-show genre.

The first aspect is the genre's penchant for "live" information and sensational content. The

program's episodes from July 13 to 19 offer almost daily updates on the beef scare. This builds up fear and adds to the suspense of the target audience, who are anxious to know whether or not beef is safe for consumption. The preference for live information is intricately tied to the type of content in the program, which Ishita (2002) says focuses on "specific interests/desires for women," including "housewives' gossip," which is likened to "snooping" and common chatter (p. 4). This means that the montages of interviews and images discussed above can be seen as an attempt to play up the sensationality of the content and live information that the target audience are used to. Fear is unnecessarily created not only because a familiar subject such as food is turned into a dangerous double, but also because the greater the access these housewives have to the program, the greater the apprehension they will feel when interpreting the potential threat that the beef scare presents.

The second element is the wide-show genre's tendency towards what Ishita (2002) calls a "persistent repetition of fragmental information" (p. 8). As a dangerous double, cows or beef already assume the characteristics of being both harmless and harmful, depending on the situation. However, with consistent repetition of the news of beef contamination in *Sukkiri!!!*, recycling and reuse of the same footage of cows and cow farms, as well as the reiteration of figures and numbers of tainted cows, this representation style according to Ishita amplifies fear amongst house wives by familiarizing them with shocking news related to the story. This once again highlights the obligations of a housewife to protect the interests of her family by constantly putting her on guard against any object in the home that may turn dangerous. Presenting the beef scare as a dangerous double additionally magnifies fear for its intended viewers precisely because of their established belief in their capacity as "good wives, wise mothers," an identity manufactured, propagated and reinforced by representations in the program, which ultimately define the scope and nature of their fear.

CRITICAL VOICES FROM THE GROUND

Although fear arouses chaos in an otherwise well-ordered society, Altheide (2009) contends that the fear narrative can be seen as a double-edged sword, for constructing the fear of something is also "the foundation for longstanding efforts to regulate and control" (p. 81). What this means is that instead of merely disrupting the social order, fear can also be used in the text to suggest a means to control the fear unleashed in the narrativization of the beef scare. When footage of former Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano's announcement of the government ban on dispatching beef from Fukushima was aired on July 20 on *Sukkiri!!!*, the community at risk story marked a transition towards "restoration." However, the shift back towards harmonious balance in society was fraught with obstacles. The main one was the juxtaposition of repeated reassurances by the Japanese government that there was minimal health risk in consuming contaminated beef and profuse criticism by program personnel regarding the poor handling of the beef scare. On the one hand, the text can be seen as ideological in implementing corrective measures to reinforce the social order, but critical, on the other hand, in censuring the authorities for indirectly actuating harmful consequences for society by allowing beef contamination to occur through their lapse in judgment. A similar trend was observed by Rosenberger (2009) in her recent study on Japan's global food terror, in which the Japanese media "built a complex case of blame" (p. 240) in response to Chinese poison *gyoza* (pot-stickers) in Japan's food system. At the same time, she stresses that although the fabrication and interpellation of these food risks by the media force considerable social debate, it was their own selves that Japanese citizens ultimately turned to for a solution instead of the authorities (p. 241). In this case, the housewife is exposed to media narratives of the beef scare on a nearly everyday basis, including their criticisms of the authorities. Yet what is most crucial is her final decision as to how to handle the crisis for her family's sake.

In the July 20 episode, after airing part of the announcement by Edano, the program switches to a recap of events, including an animation of what was at that point generally established as the main cause of the problem - cow feed distribution. The effect of this is

an encapsulation of all the information and fear that had been presented in the previous episodes, followed by a deliberate focus on the plight of the farmers with the open-ended question: "What will happen to the future of Fukushima agriculture?" Employing the same techniques characteristic of the wide-show genre, such as construction of visual narratives, repetition of fragmental information, and the preference for live information, the text frequently interweaves footage of interviews with or statements from authorities with those of the ordinary people, as with the examples in the previous section of this paper. What is different in this episode, however, is that the text's perspective shifts distinctly to one portraying Fukushima farmers in a sympathetic light. As mentioned in my introduction, LeBlanc has listed the environment as a major public concern of Japanese housewives. This means that the text attempts to address their concerns by slanting the focus to concentrate more on the farmers instead of other issues related to the beef contamination, such as the financial costs to be borne by the government.

In addition, an in-depth discussion of the government-driven sample cow checks in the same episode is beyond a doubt an attempt to engage housewives in the politics of the beef scare and tap the disproportionate fear generated in all previous coverage of the issue. This is achieved after an explanation of how these checks are done in layman's terms using a colorful on-screen diagram: one cow or more is selected from each farm to undergo the check. Once the selected cow passes, all cows from this farm will obtain clearance for distribution. However, this sample check only applies to the very first batch of cows from each farm. Once this is revealed, the same reporter, Keisuke Mori, immediately raises three main reservations on a separate placard, thereby displacing any reassurance that the target audience may have had about the government ban at the beginning of the episode. The first is whether or not just one cow or more from each farm is enough, while the second doubts the safety level of having checks conducted only for the first batch from each farm. Lastly, the third questions the safety level of the farms outside the affected area. A discussion between Mori, Kato, and guest commentator Yukio Kikuchi ensues. The conversation starts off with Kato asking if the measures implemented are safe enough, but ends with both Kikuchi and Kato concluding that the check is *fuau* (worrisome) and that "it is better to look for a safer method." Kikuchi himself even mentions that he sees it "from a consumer's point of view," thus establishing an intimate connection with the target audience by looking at things from their perspective.

With the conclusion of this discussion establishing that the beef checks are generally unsafe, the housewives watching it may identify with the opinion that they can no longer count on authorities to ensure that the food they put on their dinner table is safe. However, what is even more significant is that it manages to channel fear into what could be considered a positive and reassuring measure taken by authorities. As Mori disputes, the underlying problem of the beef scare is rooted in the unreliability of the sample cow checks, not just in the failure to stop contaminated cow feed distribution as previously acknowledged by authorities. What this means is that the same authorities that citizens depend on to protect them from harm and that the wide-show program, like all other media, rely on for information and protection are ironically also the ones responsible for causing the beef scare. Considering the weight of this responsibility and the severity of the crisis, it is impossible for the media to ignore the role that the Japanese government seemingly played in the beef scare. Therefore, despite having sensationalized the beef scare as a fear narrative, the program also paradoxically makes the assertion that there is real danger in maintaining such low safety levels of monitoring food meant for consumption. The call for safer methods for inspecting food is echoed by program personnel, and coincides with their criticism of the authorities bearing slack attitudes toward food safety. Hence, even though the use of fear in portraying the beef scare began as a threat to social order, the text also employs it to resist the same threat previously established, emphasizing genuine danger, and admonishing the official guardians of public safety.

Another obstacle preventing the return to balance is a "delay" of any sign of the beef scare improving at all, which is depicted in the July 21 episode. This delay is illustrated in the

form of news that tainted beef has been consumed at one elementary school in Chiba, and by customers who bought lunchboxes sold within the bullet trains of the Japan Railway Tōkaidō line. According to Langer (1998), the delay in a community at risk story "[makes] the situation out to be worse than initially predicted... [and] also produces... the suspense effect where specialists are not only confronted with the initial disruption but also have to handle the added burden of a continuously unfolding disturbance which seems to give no warning about its direction" (p. 127). For the target audience, the beef scare situation may have been aggravated not just because of the accumulation of damaging reports over several preceding days, but more so because additional news of innocent children consuming contaminated beef has been unearthed. Again, this news is aimed at housewives, who may be mothers themselves, since the reporting explicitly mentions that the school has written letters to every parent of the affected children to explain the situation. Although this is swiftly followed by the same reassurance by authorities that there is minimal health risk from eating the affected beef, the delay still produces a heightened sense of danger. Therefore, the delay not only provides an important moral lesson to housewives about letting their guard down, it also confirms their wariness over entrusting food for their families to the authorities. By extension, it may also encourage these housewives to think seriously of taking matters into their own hands.

EPISODE RESOLVING THE BEEF SCARE

The entire beef scare episode on *Sukkiri!!* concluded on July 27 with the government's announcement of proper measures being taken to resolve the problem. According to Langer (1998), in the last stage of the community at risk story, "[the] severity of disruption may require a story to draw further attention to actions which directly convey to us the efforts being made in re-establishing equilibrium" (p. 130). In the wide-show program's case, the strategy of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) was discussed and expressly stated as an attempt to win back consumers' trust. This reflects just how badly consumers, in particular housewives since they are normally the ones buying fresh food at the supermarket, have been affected by the predicament. MAFF's strategy was meticulously delineated through a colorful flow chart explaining how checks will now be done on all beef traced back to Fukushima. If found to contain levels of cesium higher than normal, consumers were advised to send the meat back to the distribution center to be burned, after which they would be compensated. Should the beef contain levels of cesium lower than the standard, consumers were recommended to freeze the beef in their refrigerators. Compensation for this also was to be provided. The monetary claims for straightening out the issue were to be claimed from Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO). There are a few implications to this resolution.

Firstly, the use of the flow chart is interesting because it mirrors that which was used in the introduction to the beef scare on the July 12 episode. This resonates strongly with the community at risk story structure, in which the beginning and the end paralleled each other. It also aligns with wide-show genre characteristics, which are predicated on sensational content and the need to generate a large audience response, resulting in news stories being rapidly replaced by more evocative and recent content. It also suggests that the beef scare episode is now only one of many news reports in the program and no longer has any lingering impact once it stops being mentioned. However, I disagree that the reporting of the beef scare does not have any lasting impression on the target audience.

Certainly, the July 27 episode of the program provided a relatively weak resolution to the issue, including a relatively objective and straightforward portrayal of MAFF's strategies, and the absence of any commentary from program personnel. While this may appear like a satisfactory answer to the problem, the program does not conclude with solutions offered by the government, but with a comprehensive recap of the beef scare. For instance, the total amount of beef affected up to then was reported to have increased to some 2,900 cows' worth, and this is accompanied by the same images of cows in farms as before. A map of Japan is used to visually illustrate which parts the contaminated beef were traced

to with an announcement confirming its completion. Lastly, the total costs of the whole beef scare situation is stated as amounting to approximately 20 billion yen, which includes compensation of 50,000 yen per cow to be provided for affected farmers.

Highlighting the monetary factor, both for the ordinary consumer and for the farmers affected, especially in the resolution, appears to be strategic in addressing its viewers as "good wives, wise mothers." On the one hand, the promise of an immediate solution through compensation appeals to the target audience, typically housewives bound to be worried about disposing any contaminated beef they possess. On the other hand, they are also concerned about the overall problem regarding farmers in Fukushima. Thus, the statement that these people whom housewives presumably feel sympathetic towards will also receive compensation for their loss is a source of comfort for them. However, any temporary sense of relief felt by viewers is at once displaced by the use of exact figures and an attempt to quantify the beef scare, evoking its introduction on the July 12 episode. The target audience would have realized that the numbers have ballooned since then and that the spread of affected beef across the country has become almost epidemic.

Hence, the last impression that these viewers are left with of the beef scare is not one of relief that the issue has been resolved. Instead, it is a growing anxiety that this is but merely one chapter in a larger series of problems surrounding food contamination caused by nuclear radiation. In fact, a weak resolution like this is characteristic of the wide-show genre, since its repetitive nature ensures that the beef scare news can be revisited anytime in the program even after its initial run has long ended. The significance this has on the target audience is that their social roles as "good wives, wise mothers" will continue to be reinforced and reproduced alongside these media representations at the text's disposition.

CONCLUSION

Through the examination of the July 2011 beef scare as presented on *Sukkiri!!*, I have argued that the program's narrativization produces and reproduces the gendered identity of the target audience as "good wives, wise mothers." This is done by constantly referencing this particular social identity through the use of wide-show genre characteristics, fear narratives, and community at risk story types, all of which ideologically reinforce the current social order under the pretext of educating the housewife about beef contamination. Despite being ideological in this respect, the text is relatively attuned to the needs of the housewife, often looking at the situation from her perspective. A strong sense of solidarity seems to bind the text and the housewife together, especially in the former's use of the fear narrative to censure the authorities.

Closely following the community at risk story structure, the text first establishes a personal connection with the housewife while legitimizing the authorial function of the state, and then manipulates her emotions by sensationalizing the risks and dangers of the beef scare. The social order is thus temporarily subverted, since officials of the state, who are supposed to guard public safety, are chastised for their incompetency in resolving the problem. However, both the housewife's social role and her family's safety are genuinely threatened, as the text calls for higher safety measures of food to be consumed. Although the social order is partly restored when the beef scare episode ends, its indefinite resolution leaves a lingering impression that food contamination and, by extension, government and energy policies linked to nuclear radiation are recurring problems. For the housewife, this moral lesson demands more knowledge of issues having larger social implications, as well as better preparation to tackle future predicaments.

Underscoring representations of the beef scare in *Sukkiri!!* is a fundamental paradox in producing these housewives' gendered identity, or what LeBlanc (1999) calls the "paradoxical position" of the housewife. She asserts that while the housewife is a "mainstream" occupation and a "socially recognized public position" (p. 59) for women, she is clearly not recognized as a proper working person in the world outside the home. The same paradox emerges in

the text's representation of the crisis. On the one hand, based on her status as "good wife, wise mother," an identity manufactured and propagated by the state through the media, the text portrays the housewife as having to conform to the social order by complying with authority. On the other hand, it also demonstrates her individuality in fulfilling these social roles, especially where the safety of her family is concerned. In other words, the text shows that when the need arises, the housewife is not afraid to challenge authority in defending her duty to protect her family. Nonetheless, this still means that the housewife willingly fulfills her social role as "good wife, wise mother," despite being aware of this paradoxical position, with or without sanctioning the state, thereby validating this gendered identity.

In order to do a deeper analysis of the beef scare case study, this paper has been limited to one infotainment wide-show program as its main text. As the medium's main audience has been Japanese housewives since its initiation, it was specifically chosen in a bid to explore its close relationship with this group of viewers. New directions for research include comparing representations of the beef scare from other media with those of the wide-show genre and conducting interviews with actual housewives to discover their reception of crisis news from wide-show programs.

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