



Comment on "The Limited Nutritional Value of Cannibalism"

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Cannibalism

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Garn and Block have recently discussed the limited nutritional value of cannibalism (AA 72:106). If scientific reports from several parts of the world are to be credited, it is possible that the ingestion of pesticides, radioactive minerals, therapeutic (and other) drugs, food additives, and so on, may be rendering human flesh unfit for human consumption. The question must remain moot, however, until a government agency or scientific body establishes the necessary and appropriate standards.

Reference Cited

Garn, Stanley M., and Walter D. Block
1970 The limited nutritional value of cannibalism. *American Anthropologist* 72:106.

Comment on "The Limited Nutritional Value of Cannibalism"

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Although the calculations by Garn and Block (AA 72:106) on the nutritional value of human flesh are, as they suggest, data necessary to any discussion of cannibalism, another of their comments needs some qualification: "...it is doubtful that regular people-eating ever had much nutritional meaning."

Granted that this statement is probably valid on historical criteria, Garn and Block seem to have based it purely on biological criteria, which, alone, may not be so sound. Whether gustatory cannibalism has ever been the normal mainstay of any group of humans is doubtful; however, this does not preclude the possibility that human flesh is comparable in nutritional value to the flesh of other "game" animals. Is the value of human flesh any more "limited" than that of any other animal?

Any discussion of cannibalism using the data supplied by Garn and Block should also

include comparative data on non-human flesh available to the group and its value compared with that of the human.

Reference Cited

Garn, Stanley M., and Walter D. Block
1970 The limited nutritional value of cannibalism. *American Anthropologist* 72:106.

Pigs, Proteins, and People-Eaters

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In our view a number of qualifications are in order regarding Garn and Block's (AA 72:106) discussion of the human body as a nutrient source and the implications of such measurements as theirs for theories regarding the significance of cannibalism.

First, it is not necessary to assume that cannibals would share our own culinary bias regarding choice cuts; Garn and Block's quantification of the protein content to be garnered from a human being is based on the ratio of sixty-six pounds of edible muscle mass per 110-pound individual. But muscle is not the only edible component of the human body, any more than it is of the bovine. Though perhaps not as tasty as muscle tissue, other parts of the body have been known to be eaten, including viscera, lungs, liver, brain and nervous tissue, genitalia, and skin. Even bones may be pulverized and eaten. These parts contribute not only protein but other important nutrients, such as vitamins and minerals. Certainly, man is not quite so skimpy as Garn and Block suggest.

Second, the significance of cannibalism has no necessary connection with the invention of hypothetical populations who depend entirely on human meat for their protein, nor has the existence of any such group ever been substantiated. Garn and Block state that cannibalism is valid only as an emergency supply of protein, and not as a regular source. To those people who suffer from kwashiorkor and other nutritional deficiencies, to those people whose only source of protein is an occasional piece of