

SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS IN THE MEAT INDUSTRY  
AND INFLUENCE ON DIET

by

FRANCESCA ANNE LEONARD

A THESIS

Presented to the Environmental Studies Program of the University of Oregon  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the degree of  
Bachelor of Science  
University of Oregon June, 2021

An Abstract of the Thesis of

Francesca Anne Leonard  
For the degree of Bachelor of Science in the Environmental Studies Program to be taken June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Title: Social Representations in the Meat Industry and Influence on Diet

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Joshua Skov, Faculty Adviser and Instructor

## Abstract

*Meat has been ingrained into American culture since the birth of the nation—holidays that center around traditional meat dishes, experiences that almost always pair with some form of meat consumption, and the presence of meat as the dominant center of meals. Meat has been advertised in a way that positively enforces cultural social norms and drives consumption upward for a product known to be one of the most significant pollution sources on the planet. The industry’s power and affluence has made it a prominent actor in the political realm, with the ability to alter policies and regulations. The harmful repercussions of this industry have not gone unnoticed, and the incentive to create a new type of protein, “meatless-meat,” has become an explosive industry with companies like Beyond Beef at the forefront. Despite these emerging companies, the demand for meat in the US has not shrunk significantly. The reasoning behind this is less about ethical obligations to not kill animals for consumption, or to protect the environment, but from deeper socio-cultural norms that are reinforced by media to promote animal-based dieting and forgo plant-based alternatives.*

## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge several people who helped me through the process of completing and submitting my undergraduate research thesis. First, I want to thank my faculty adviser and mentor Professor Joshua Skov for all his assistance with research materials and revisions. Second, I want to extend my gratitude to my academic adviser Rebecca Ramos, who helped me with all of the organizational needs for this thesis to exist and her flexibility and guidance. Finally, I would like to thank the faculty and staff of the Environmental Studies Department at the University of Oregon for providing this opportunity, as well as my friends and family who offered their support along the way.

# Social Representations in the Meat Industry and Influence on Diet

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgements .....	3
Introduction .....	5
Part One: Background .....	6
Knowledge Gap/ Literature Review.....	6
Theoretical Framework.....	12
Methodology.....	13
Part Two: Social Representations of Meat .....	15
Historical and Contemporary Perceptions of Meat.....	15
Psychology of Meat Consumption.....	19
Role in American Culture .....	20
Part Three: Industry Influence .....	28
American Culture, Advertising, and the Media.....	28
Meat Advertising under Capitalism.....	33
Part Four: Social Phenomena and Ecofeminist Patterns .....	38
Leitmotif of Masculinity.....	38
Ecofeminist Perspective Applied to Meat Consumption .....	39
Future Research .....	41
Conclusion.....	42
References .....	44

**Commented [FL1]:** Edit: means I need to go back and add either notes from Josh, additional sources, sentence structure/grammar, or citations/ footnotes.

Clean: means I need to go back and format citations, sentence structure/grammar, and footnotes.

Revise: means I need to look how this part fits into the whole direction of my paper and rework it to synthesize and flow better. May need further research to make cohesive.

In Progress: means I have started but have big gaps in my writing, scattered pieces, or unfinished thoughts/ sections.

Not started: just applies to my conclusion, which I will do at the very end of my writing process. Will need to go back and work on the intro/abstract during this time too—current drafts of those pieces are more of a placeholder/ provide limited directionality but are not finalized.

## Introduction

Meat has been the center of every American experience—Thanksgiving turkey, hotdogs at baseball games, weekend barbecues dominating suburban lifestyles—and has thus become a culturally significant dietary choice in the US. Despite the national preference for meat protein, the animal agriculture industry has impacted human and environmental health for decades. Our knowledge of meat as a detriment to the environment has taken form in the strain of animal agriculture on Earth's biogeochemical cycles, abundant water requirements to meet the needs of livestock, and the expansive deforestation needed to grow animal feed (Brousseau & Pickering 2018, 1). These consequences are concerning when the consumption of red meat has seen an upward trend globally feed (Brousseau & Pickering 2018, 1). As the most resource intensive commercially produced food product, the ecologically threatening industry has become a spotlight for sustainability issues feed (Brousseau & Pickering 2018, 2). Meat advertising has perpetuated continued consumption due to various socioeconomic and cultural factors that occupy American culture and positively enforces cultural norms that drive consumption. The meat industry's power and affluence has made it a prominent actor in the political realm, and despite knowledge about the detriments of meat-based diets little has been done on behalf of the state to disincentivize consumers from maintaining the status quo. Meat substitutes, including the plant-based protein industry leader Beyond Beef have become a fast-growing industry with potential to alter the grip of the meat industry as the culturally dominant protein choice. The reasoning behind meat consumption can be traced in my analysis to the deep socio-cultural norms that are reinforced by media to for social representations about animal-based dieting and plant-based alternatives that define their role in the American diet.

## Part One: Background

To establish the context of discussing the social representations of meat, review of the concept is necessary to determine its influence on diet and understand fluctuations in historical meat relevance. Contextual insight highlights the significance of meat as a cultural symbol to provide an explanation for its significance.

### Knowledge Gap/ Literature Review

Social representations of goods or services are likely to influence the way people think or feel about certain goods or services. Moreover, the scale at which social representation can express influence over people is powerful. Social representations concern the contents of everyday thinking and the stock of ideas that gives coherence to our religious beliefs, political ideas, and the connections we create spontaneously as we breathe (Moscovici 1988, 214). Social representations are useful to the human mind for understanding people, objects, and behaviors as we develop explanations to compare and contrast as parts of the environment or social setting (Moscovici 1988, 214). Taking on a constructivist perspective, these representations are what form societal relations, organizations, and institutions. All behavior appears as a given product of our way of representing it (Moscovici 1988, 214). Our own understandings of the world rely less so on our actual experiences, but more so on what aspects of our social settings have influenced us to hold those understandings as truths. We derive only a small fraction of our knowledge and information from the simple interaction between ourselves and the facts we encounter in the real world. Most knowledge is supplied to

us by communication which affects our way of thinking and creates new contents (Moscovici 1988, 215). This generation of an individuals own representations for everyday use and shape the individuals ideas and perceptions, which in turn can lead to the development of traits in the brain.

We know the consequences of health impacts and environmental degradation are inevitable externalities of meat consumption (Brousseau & Pickering 2018, 1-2). Yet, meat still holds symbolic and cultural significance through its social representation and integration into traditions (Grant 2020). This makes meat unique in how it is perceived by society. The comparison between the intake of alcohol and the intake of meat is a example of social theories determining why consuming a certain good is deeply rooted in social and cultural experiences. This parallel is based on a framework where shared social and cultural norms surrounding both substances is integrated into lifestyle and interactions between persons that may indicate status or define an experience. One of the most defining features of this comparison of consumption practices is the concept of social anchoring (Monaco and Guimelli 2011, 238). In this sense, social anchoring is defined as “the basing of attitudes, actions, and values on the position taken by other people” (Monaco and Guimelli 2011, 238). Additionally, alcohol as a sensitive object should lead to variations in consumer expression according to whether the person declares themselves as consumer. It can be considered as a sensitive object relatively to the aspects of its representation which relate to the question of its consumption (Monaco and Guimelli 2011, 238). Meat has become more of a sensitive topic relative to aspects of its representation because the processes and consequences surrounding livestock production have been highly publicized and exposed through modern media (Weill 2018). This

**Commented [FL2]:** Notes from meeting: 5/5/21  
Focus any background info from environmentalism all on the background of meat, but only what you're going to draw on in the rest of your paper, just to serve the rest of the paper  
Literature review  
Case studies?  
New word doc that is a first version of the whole thing, pieces don't necessarily need to be sequential  
Use bullet points, then go back and put flesh on the bones  
Use table of contents in paper to create structure and subheadings  
Empirical analysis  
Develop theoretic framework better—theory im drawing from, what im going to use, how im going to show it

**Commented [FL3]:** Cite

**Commented [FL4]:** cite

aspect of social representation being applied to alcohol similarly parallels that of meat, because the “sensitivity” of the topic with the question of consumption preferences, and the representation of such that each consumer perceives, is intrinsically tied to their social interaction regarding the subject—just in the same way a vegetarian and a meat-eater might differ in their consumption preferences based on their perceptions of meat and thus the social representation that meat holds for the individual (Monaco and Guimelli 2011, 238).

These ideas and perceptions can be misrepresented in mass media representation.

Understanding the inverse process which leads from science to representations to communication among the public and mass media (Moscovici 1988, 217). A crucial element to this process is the development of these representations which are then communicated to the public. The use of marketing and advertising manipulate the social representations of certain goods or services, and thus alter the perception of a given good or service in the media. Media influence, stimulating communication within the public, becomes a source of social representations and subsequently knowledge (Moscovici 1988, 216). The capability of these tools make people want to consume or buy more of a given good or service because of these representations. Marketing and advertising are such powerful sources of influence because they have the ability to alter someone’s perception of their needs, or tie immaterial needs to a material object one can purchase and consume (Jhally 2000). Thus, these tools of business are found in the social representations we subscribe to. Society is constantly producing new representations to motivate action and make sense of human interactions that come from people’s daily problems (Moscovici 1988, 217). To solve everyday problems, i.e., to meet needs, people become party to the solutions that are presented to the conveniently by the media

Commented [FL5]: New paragraph?

Commented [FL6R5]:

(Jhally 2000). These representations can take on a power of their own, becoming “partially autonomous” and the ability to “reinforce and repel each other, forming all kinds of syntheses from mutual affinities” (Moscovici 1988, 218). These become embedded in collective memory and a stable framework of social life (Moscovici 1988, 218).

Social representations, thus are an important part of how we perceive things culturally, and can be present in communications and mass media. These representations have the ability to modify our own personal beliefs into personal truths. This connects to advertising and marketing because social representations are one of the key ways that marketing and advertising function—by manipulating social representations to influence patterns of consumption (Beckwith 1978, 465). Advertising and marketing can modify social representations and thus change public perceptions. This form of media has the power to push more consumption from the public, and feeds into the environmental disasters we have today—influencing people to buy more because they want more, rather than because they need more. Thus, our societal perception of wants versus needs becomes skewed by the affects of media. Sut Jhally reinforces these understandings, and states in his film, *Advertising at the Edge of the Apocalypse*, “these stories {of advertising} have come to shape our sense of ourselves, our values as a society and how the consumer mindset that advertising celebrates is feeding an endlessly accelerating cycle of consumption that is literally pushing the planet to the brink of collapse.” As the detrimental effects of meat consumption become one of the worst ecological crises observed in contemporary environmentalism, analyzing how our social perceptions of meat and influence of consumerism affect diet choice become critical to understanding the underlying causes of meat as an environmental issue (Brousseau & Pickering

Commented [FL7]: Add citations and further evidence here

Commented [FL8]: Citation for documentary

Commented [FL9]: This is an opinion—back up with evidence or quote.

2018, 2). If we can understand how these influences affect social perceptions, we may begin to understand how to change them.

Marketing and advertising of big businesses and corporations are not the only institutions that influence our social perceptions—environmentalists too use these tools to spread consciousness about their fight. Because these tools are so powerful to manipulate social perceptions, the right messaging must be used to gain the most publicity and attraction to the movement. Environmental activists have neglected to address meat as an underlying cause of climate change, and seek to focus primarily on oil and gas companies as the hallmark of polluter kingpins.

“Modern environmentalism has always depended on high-profile media moments to shore up the activist base. Veganism, however, hardly lends itself to this role. Although quietly empowering in its own way, going vegan is an act poorly suited to sensational publicity. Pipelines and other brute technological intrusions, by contrast, are not only crudely visible, but they provide us (the media) with clear victims, perpetrators, and a dark narrative of decline” (McWilliams 2011).

Environmental activism has used the oil and gas industry as the villains in ecological narratives and have overlooked other sources in an effort to centralize around one defining issue. The industry is easy to target with press of disastrous spills plaguing coastlines and suffocating residents, framed with visions of smokestacks pumping opaque black emissions into an endarkened sky. In contrast, images on dairy and meat products of green pastures with happy cows grazing in the sunshine poses a challenging juxtaposition for framing pollution sources (Allan 2009, 633). The difference between these pollution points are the social perceptions that dictate which of these problems appears worse. Envisioning a coal fired plant

is a clear image of environmental harm, and “symbolizes not a personal choice, or a direct source of pleasure, but an oppressive intrusion into our lives, leaving us feeling violated and powerless” (McWilliams 2011).

Hope for a new type of “meat” has become popular within the past decade as upcoming companies such as Beyond Beef and Impossible have initiated a cultural shift away from conventional meat and toward plant-based alternatives, and have thus far been met with success in their endeavors:

“The California company Beyond Meat had one of the hottest I.P.O.’s in recent memory, and it’s barely slowed down: their market cap now is over \$9 billion. Impossible Foods also appears to be headed for an I.P.O. and perhaps a similar success” (Dubner 2019).

The growing market and startups attempting to engineer meatless meat has become a huge movement within the US and internationally (Dubner 2019). Using subsidiaries to distance their brand from their “eco-friendly” labels, meat companies opt for names such as “Happy Little Plants” or “Pure Farmland” to reframe the public perception of their company image (PBFA, 2020). By separating themselves from their meat operations label, these companies are able to tap into the profits from the meat alternative sector while perpetuating the very industry alternatives seek to replace.

In the following parts of this thesis I will expand upon all of the idea’s I have presented in this literature review, with the inclusion of contextual factors of American culture that make US social representations unique. The ideas presented in this introduction should serve as a framework from which to view the social representations of meat in American culture as a

Commented [FL10]: Cite

significant norm that can be utilized to identify how to implement cultural reform for environmental purposes.

## Theoretical Framework

For my theoretical framework I plan to take theories from the Moscovici 1988 analysis on social representations and apply them to meat consumption, particularly meat consumption in America. The two key theories developed by Moscovici I will be observing are (1) how social representations are useful for understanding people, objects, and behaviors and develop explanations to compare as parts of the environment or social setting; and (2) how knowledge is supplied to us by communication which affects our way of thinking and creates new contents (Moscovici 1988, 215, 214). I will analyze the social representations of meat in society which cause us to develop truths and explanations about social settings or environments, in addition to how communication alters our knowledge about meat consumption and creates new explanations. To do this, I will look primarily at what the roots of social representations are as defined by observed cultural patterns in the US, and the supply of knowledge through communication in the form of advertising to create new explanations. To reiterate Moscovici's simplistic analysis of this concept, "all behavior appears as a given product of our way of representing it" (Moscovici 1988, 214). Thus, people tend to "see what they want to see" when intaking new knowledge, a key influence of social representations of meat. I will use these theoretical bases in my analysis of meat consumption, and assume marketing and advertising as the primary way the meat industry communicates to the general public. I will add into these

theoretical bases the foundational pillars that structure American culture, particularly the individualistic, patriarchal, and capitalist agendas in relation to the meat industry. My analysis will identify the use of media and observe how it has been impactful in determining these social preferences and establishing cultural norms surrounding meat preference.

## Methodology

My main research objective is to observe why people make the choices they do about meat consumption in the context of media influence and social norms that govern these choices. Information about the psychology and sociology around meat consumption is based in feminist literature, sociological journals and critiques, and policy research. These sources will be where I gather qualitative data and points to structure my research based on social theory and psychological influences. Quantitative studies of food preferences using various methodologies assess the different preferences, opinions, and attitudes people have regarding food, specifically meat. Quantitative data will be obtained mostly through metrics defined in psychological or economic studies, or data released through scientific journals and government agencies. Analyses of mainstream cultural examples may come from informal sources, as these source often are beneficial in providing accessible means of communication to the public. The combination of these assets will assist in addressing why the continuation of meat preferences is deeply ingrained in US culture through social representations. I will be using concepts defined in US social structure to emphasize the hegemony of meat in American diets. The goal of this thesis is to find elements in other studies and sources to identify clear patterns and

synchronicities between media influence and social norms in respect to diet preferences, and the weight of public perceptions and social constructions. The application of this research to the meat industry issue and its relationship to media presence will fill the knowledge gap of why consumer preferences remain unchanged despite learning new information, which in turn can be used to determine an socioecological understanding of consumer choices. The interdisciplinary analysis of this thesis will draw from sociology, economics, business, psychology, and humanities perspectives, offering more depth and insight on the breadth of the animal agriculture industry while synthesizing predated research in a cohesive review. This analysis will be helpful in creating more insight on causes dictating consumer choices for environmentalists.

## Part Two: Social Representations of Meat

This section serves to formulate the thematic perceptions surrounding meat that have been prevalent in American culture, and why they exist. Using the theoretical framework and background established in the prior section, this analysis observes the social representations of meat specific to American culture based on dominant cultural norms.

### Historical and Contemporary Perceptions of Meat

Agricultural historian James Mc Williams once said, “every environmental problem related to contemporary agriculture... ends up having its deepest roots in meat production: monocropping, excessive applications of nitrogen fertilizer, addiction to insecticides, rain-forest depletion, land degradation, topsoil runoff, declining water supplies, even global warming — all these problems would be considerably less severe” if people consumed meat “rarely, if ever” (McWilliams 2010). The animal agriculture industry within the US has become one of the most prominent source of various types of pollution, even outweighing the impacts of car use (Brousseau & Pickering 2018, 2). According to a report given by the World Preservation Foundation, eating a vegan diet is seven times more effective at reducing carbon emissions than eating a meat diet:

“A global vegan diet (of conventional crops) would reduce dietary emissions by 87 percent, compared to a token 8 percent for “sustainable meat and dairy.” In light of the fact that the overall environmental impact of livestock is greater than that of burning coal, natural gas, and crude oil, this 87 percent cut (94 percent if the plants were grown organically)” (McWilliams 2011).

Commented [FL11]: Just Food: Where Locavores Get It Wrong and How We Can Truly Eat Responsibly

Commented [FL12]: Cite this

Commented [FL13R12]:

The argument here holds that plant based dieting is the most clear-cut solution to mitigating the damages of environmental harm. Recent reports such as this one have stressed the abundance of meat-eaters putting pressure on ecological systems is fueled by growing consumption patterns that have been trending upward since the 1950's (Brousseau & Pickering 2018). The resulting proposition has been to target psychological mechanisms that influence this upward trend, and shifting behavioral change of the public away from meat consumption to subsequently dissolve the meat industry (Brousseau & Pickering 2018, 3). Message framing and perception altering through culturally significant constructs have been hypothesized to encourage pro-environmental behavior, which may extend to reducing meat consumption (Brousseau & Pickering 2018, 3-4).

Commented [FL14]: Beef up this paragraph

According to an interview with Agricultural Economics Professor Jayson Lusk of Purdue University, the US is “the king of meat eaters... so, compared to almost any other country in the world, we eat more meat per capita”—for some perspective, that translates roughly to an average American eating 200 pounds of meat per year (Dubner 2019). Lusk emphasized the positive correlation to increase in GDP and diets consisting of higher protein, leading to an increase in meat consumption (Dubner 2019). Additionally, the efficacy of meat production has been manipulated by humans to be exceedingly more productive with the use of selective breeding and technological influences (Dubner 2019). And, as a foundational rule of economics, when productivity increases prices decline:

“So prices of almost all of our meat products have declined pretty considerably over the last 60 to 100 years. And the reason is that we have become so much more productive at producing meat...and you look at poultry production, broiler production: the amount of meat that's produced per broiler has risen

dramatically — almost doubled, say — over the last 50 to 100 years, while also consuming slightly less feed...We get a lot more meat per animal, for example, on a smaller amount of land” (Dubner 2019).

Technological advances in meat production don’t account for the depreciating productivity of animal agriculture, nor the ecological impacts. Lusk continues this reasoning by illustrating a historical comparison to sheep, or mutton, a meat staple in the American diet until WWII (Dubner 2019). Sheep are “multi-product species valuable not just for their meat but also for their wool” (Dubner 2019). New technology began to erase the need for sheep wool, however, because market entrants such as synthetic fabrics began to replace the once-preferred wool (Dubner 2019). This in turn, made mutton eventually lose all popularity as an American staple because of a new technology in a completely different market-- anything that affects the demand for wool is also going to affect the underlying market for the rest of the underlying animal” (Dubner 2019). The shift in technological advances within the synthetic fabric market thus influence people’s demand for mutton, because as the value of wool depreciated, so did the value of the animal. The shift away from eating mutton due to new product substitutes in the adjacent textile industry demonstrates what a profound impact technology can have on the meat we consume, and how it can in fact alter the social representations surrounding meat consumption: “if you ask a room full of meat-eaters to name their favorite meat, I doubt one of them will say “mutton.”” (Dubner 2019). Mutton is a significant example for this analysis because it proves the perception and consequentially the preference of a specific meat can be altered based on its economic productivity at the time. This case study of mutton does not indict any evidence against meat preference shift as an

object of cultural or social change, but demonstrates the ability of a significant historical diet-choice shift in the United States being possible.

The post World War II era generated a similar traditional perception of meat due to its convenience and accessibility from fast food locations and diners. This gave birth to burgers, the ultimate cheap meat, being a traditional staple that “transformed the American consumer institutions” (Hurley 1997, 1283). The burger then became a culturally significant object, solidifying its importance in American cuisine. Beef and burgers would subsequently take on “additional associations...charged with a culture’s dominant, often unspoken beliefs of values” in growing Americanization of the time due to the US’s hegemonic global role after the war<sup>1</sup>(O’Brien & Szeman 2018, 72). This period marks a significant turning point in American consumer culture from a “localized, social fragmented culture of consumption to a more homogenized mass culture dominated by national and multinational corporations”<sup>2</sup> (Hurley 1997, 1284). The role of meat as a central necessity in American cuisine was solidified by this shift in consumer culture.

**Commented [FL15]:** Hurley, A. (1997). From Hash House to Family Restaurant: The Transformation of the Diner and Post-World War II Consumer Culture. *The Journal of American History*, 83(4), 1282- 1308. doi:10.2307/2952903

<sup>1</sup> After the second World War, the United States took on the role of global hegemon and thus the cultural impacts of this shift led to a growing “Americanization” of international cultures as the spread of US influence, power, and growth shaped the era. This was ultimately rooted in the shift of American consumer culture due to new rhythms of daily life, social function, and white-collar domesticity. (Hurley 1997, 1284).

<sup>2</sup> This passage continues on to describe the culture as “working-class, male oriented culture,” demonstrating the homogenization of post WWII American culture to be consistent with themes that will be discussed in subsequent parts of this thesis (Hurley 1997, 1287).

## Psychology of Meat Consumption

Meat centrality in American diet was perpetuated due to psychological and sociological cultural concepts that keep meat integrated in American values. To understand the sociological underpinnings of meat consumption, the psychology of meat consumption is critical for foundational understandings of omnivorous diets. Meat eaters represent the majority in terms of meat vs. non-meat diet preferences in the US (Loughnan et. al., 2014). Meat, of course, originates from animal. However, humans are inclined to feel sympathetic for consuming animals, and thus we strategically come up with psychological justifications to avoid moral tension (Loughnan et. al., 2014).. This is known as “the meat paradox,” a dichotomy between human’s compassion towards animals and repulsion at seeing animals harmed, contradicted human’s desire to eat meat and participate in a diet that causes animal harm (Loughnan et. al. 2014, 104). Surprisingly, this moral obligation for animal sympathy doesn’t motivate any significant shifts in diet choice—but rather encourages people to rationalize their meat eating through various assumptions, such as meat-animals being specifically raised to be eaten (Loughnan et. al. 2014, 105). The hypothesis that moralism influences diet preference reveals weaknesses in supporting meat consumption popularity.

Meat is viewed as “dominant” and “masculine,” and is generally associated with these labels as well as a “central role and special status” (Graca 2015, 81). These descriptions of meat connote that its psychological perception is highly dominant and central in its status as a traditional diet choice. This psychological perception of meat not only adds to the social representation of meat, but also highlights the significance of meat from a semiotic approach (Grant 2020, 10). The very shapes, textures, or dishes that meat comes in can alter perceptions

of the food, which is important to notice when comparing meat versus plant-based substitutes (Gvion-Rosenberg 1990, 70). The appearance of substitutes can hold symbolic meaning of what the food is associated with, which upholds the traditional representations and perceptions of meat dishes and avoids too much change in substitute products by keeping “main dishes dressed and textured to be as similar as possible to familiar meat dishes, such as the meatless hamburger” (Gvion-Rosenberg 1990, 70). Mimicking meat products is a key selling point for consumer interested in switching to meat replacements, because they will perceive the replacement as having just as familiar of a role as meat has in a given dish, so it doesn’t really feel like a substitution or sacrifice to the consumer. The replication of traditional meat products is a key selling feature of plant based substitutes to recreate the familiarity of meat that consumers do not wish to sacrifice despite the merits of plant based proteins.

Commented [FL16]: Gvion-Rosenberg, L. (1990). Why do vegetarian restaurants serve hamburgers? Toward an understanding of a cuisine. *Semiotica*, 61-79. 10.1515/semi.1990.80.1-2.61.

### Role in American Culture

In order to analyze the role of meat in American culture, its important to identify the defining aspects of American social structure and American values that can be connected to meat consumption preferences. American culture is highly individualistic, and holds personal liberty and freedom as the highest priority (Wilde 2019, 421). Because of the belief in personal freedom, Americans are resistant to any threats to this right. Second, American culture is patriarchal, meaning its controlled predominantly by men (Adams 2002). This gendered hierarchy is important for determining the connections between meat and masculinity that are present in mass media and thus influence social perceptions. Third, American culture is

Commented [FL17]: Cite

Commented [FL18]: Cite

organized under a capitalist economy, an economic structure that fosters excess consumption patterns and embraces positional goods and the social status that comes along with them (Hernandez 2017, 19).

Commented [FL19]: cite

### *Individualism*

Individualistic American culture holds personal freedoms and beliefs in high esteem. Consumption of meat, an individual choice and an individual freedom, is often a direct source of pleasure for people. In a sense, it is a demonstration of liberty to eat whatever we want to eat, a value that has been deeply ingrained in US culture (Wilde 2019, 422). Thus, being told not to eat meat is seen as an infringement on this freedom—a value environmentalists and corporations alike do not wish to be party to (Weill 2018). One could assume that this discrepancy of effort towards pollution sources of animal agriculture byproducts and carbon emissions is not because coal or carbon is drastically more harmful than meat consumption, “but because cows mean meat, and meat, however wrongly, means freedom to pursue happiness” (McWilliams 2011). McWilliams goes on to state that Americans have a “deep-seated belief that we can eat whatever we damn well shove into our mouths” that will prove an impressive psychological hurdle to overcome in terms of its social representation within US society (McWilliams 2011).

Commented [FL20]: cite

Individualism relates to identity building, and identity building can emphasize ideological reasoning for particular food choices (Lindman & Stark 1999, 143). Food choices, like other ideologies, have antecedents and functions that the vital function of identity construction and

buffer the anxiety that results from uncertainty by assigning the world more meaning, order, stability and justice (Lindman & Stark 1999, 143). It appears that individuals are inclined to incorporate food choices into their identities, making them important to social representations and personal perspectives (Lindman & Stark 1999, 142). This is an important aspect of American culture to observe in relationship to the meat industry for its basis in identity building and connections between food choices and individualization.

### *Patriarchalism*

American social structure is organized in a hierarchical system that is highly gendered. This organization has associated men with being the stronger sex, and has paralleled meat and men with themes dating back to prehistoric hunter-gatherer labor division (Peace 2008, 5). To this day, traces of these themes are still perpetuated through meat consumption:

“According to Carol J. Adams in *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, meat eating is connected to power. There are dietary hierarchies in society that differentiate, not only in terms of class, but also gender. As “a symbol of male dominance,” meat consumption can be an essential act in defining masculinity and the place of women in patriarchal cultures” (Filho 2014, 56).

Meat is thus an underlying motif in patriarchal cultures that signifies “manliness” and “manhood” and connects to how it is portrayed in the media (Timeo & Suitner). In this perspective, a secondary comparison between patriarchal themes and meat falls in the comparison between women and meat. Adams presents her critique of masculinity and meat consumption by devoting her reasoning to “the ways in which the objectification and redefinition of women and animals as consumable commodities are interlinked” (Lockie 2002,

Commented [FL21]: Cite—Laura Pulido

Commented [FL22]: Finish this section

Commented [FL23]: Should this maybe be a footnote?

362). It is stated that the representation of women in popular culture through objectification is similar to “cuts of meat” and assumes that these objectifications “are what women, perhaps secretly, really desire” (Lockie 2002, 362). This comparison of women to meat in the same way each is represented through systematic male dominance, violence, and the frequent parallels between the statuses of women and of animals emphasize underlying structural views that uphold the importance of meat in society (Lockie 2002, 363). “In the end, the domination of animals is as basic to the practice of patriarchy in the West as the domination of women and sexual minorities” (Lockie 2002, 362). This is an important aspect of American culture to connect back to meat consumption because it meat is symbolic of patriarchal values that have permeated through society and enforced norms about masculine superiority and dominance.

### *Capitalism*

The role of capitalism in American culture is a key point of analysis to determine the perpetuation of power within meat industries and the advancement of other interrelated industries which rely on animal agriculture to increase capital. Capitalism is an economic system that must assume limitless growth in order to remain stable—any stagnant or decreasing growth could result in the implosion of the entire structure (MAHB 2017). Capitalism generates capitalist ideology, a system of beliefs to define and justify the system’s existence and its superiority, which can only be maintained through societal norms (Hernandez 2017, 28). “Capitalist ideology is maintained and reproduced if needed; it permeates society’s institutions and people, ensuring the reproduction and development of capitalism” (Hernandez 2017, 28). Thus, in a capitalist society, capitalist ideologies persist in the industries operating under this

structure, and can be observed in the corporations that influence public perception (Grant 2020, 50). Corporations who employ capitalist ideologies will act in whatever manner best serves their accumulation of capital (Hernandez 2017, 28).

The meat corporations and their correlated industries, including the most dangerous ally, the pharmaceutical industry, employ capitalist agendas by fostering consumerism and efficiency of production (Parr 2018, 338). The most poignant example of this is producing antibiotics to treat livestock and prevent meat borne diseases, which has brought huge profits to pharmaceutical companies. A 2015 FDA report states that 34.34 billion pounds of antibiotics had been used on food producing animals in the US, generating unthinkable capital for the pharmaceutical sector completely contingent on livestock production (Parr 2018, 344). In the same report, it was additionally noted that 62% of all domestic antibiotic sales were administered to food-producing animals, with an estimation that 80% of all antibiotics ever produced in the US have gone to food-producing animals (Parr 2018, 344). The farm conditions present in confined animal feeding operations, or CAFOs, result in animal epidemics from superbug bacteria that come from unsanitary farm conditions (Brousseau & Pickering 2018, 2). Without the animal agriculture industry, the antibiotic producing pharmaceutical companies may be subject to devastating losses, making them a dedicated proponent to keeping animal agriculture prosperous despite the human health and ecological ramifications<sup>3</sup>. To address the issues within animal agriculture and antibiotic use, the FDA recommended certain regulations

---

<sup>3</sup> The human health and ecological repercussions of antibiotic use are usually due to the runoff of antibiotics which pollute waterways and land. Additionally, excess antibiotic use has led to the creation of superbugs; antibiotic resistant bacteria that leads to diseases that can't be treated with antibiotics and other health hazards (Parr 2018, 344)

for the industry for using antibiotics through Guidance for Industry (GFI) No. 209, under the principles that they (1) should limit antibiotic use and administer only when necessary for the animals health, and (2) the administration of antibiotics should be limited to when they require veterinary oversight or consultation (Parr 2018, 347). The regulations that the FDA provided under GFI No. 209 were clarified in a follow up recommendation, GFI No. 213, where modifications to these recommendations included veterinary discretion on antibiotic administration (Parr 2018, 347). Interestingly enough, this discretionary clause listed numerous factors that “constituted judicious use,” and may result in susceptibility of animals to bacterial disease. These included:

“...environmental factors (such as temperature extremes or inadequate ventilation), host factors (such as age, nutrition, genetics, immune status) and other factors (such as stress of animal transport)” (Parr 2018, 348).

Of course, all these factors are present on every CAFO in the US. The exceptions to the GFI No. 213 demonstrated that the rule did not attempt to reduce antibiotic use within the industry, but rather reframe the conditions under which it was acceptable (Parr 2018, 348). The flexibility and range of exceptions proved that the FDA merely modified the justifications for its usage to be applicable to all risks inherently present on factory farms, thus the new regulation did little to amend the consequences of antibiotic use and mitigate its effects (Parr 2018, 348). Moreover, this regulation provides no incentive to the industry to improve living conditions for animals, which would have the most significant positive correlation with decreased antibiotic use, for lack of need (Parr 2018, 348).

This becomes an important part of the analysis on capitalism's role in the meat industry because the agency responsible for creating safety regulations has released regulations that leave extensive room for flexibility (Parr 2018). The FDA's website lists a variety of their responsibilities, including their oversight of 78% of the US food supply-- this includes everything we consume "except for meat, poultry, and some egg products" (FDA Basics). However, the FDA is still regulating animal drugs and feed, which fall under their regulatory jurisdiction (FDA Basics). Animal drugs and feed, including antibiotics, make up roughly 4% of the FDA's budget, and a quarter of these regulatory activities are funded by the industry (FDA Basics). The pharmaceutical industry funding the regulatory agency that writes the regulations on pharmaceutical use in animal productions raises questions about how money and capital gains influenced these regulations. In addition, the FDA guidance listed has no legally binding power; they are stated as "nonbinding recommendations" and the obligations are "voluntary" (Parr 2018, 349). Thus, the weak regulations from the FDA are not really enforced at all. This line of analysis on interrelated industries and their interest in perpetuating their own capital interests through the meat industry is reason to be suspicious of the FDA's guidance (Parr 2018, 349). In the publication from the Food and Drug Law Institute, this is referred to as agency capture—"the phenomenon in where regulated interests exert such an influence over their regulators that they essentially control the agencies, at the expense of the intended beneficiaries of the regulatory system"<sup>4</sup> (Parr 2018, 350). The control that the pharmaceutical industry holds over

---

<sup>4</sup> Another explanation offered in the *Food and Drug Law Journal* was that the agency is often at the mercy of the industry its trying to regulate to avoid their regulations becoming major political issues. The FDA chose to implement this particular rule as a voluntary recommendation rather than an obligatory legal regulation because of their primary concern with regulatory impacts on private interests such as, "veterinarians, the animal feed industry, and animal producers, rather than the public good". It is a reasonable conclusion to make from this series

Commented [FL24]: Add summary of role in American culture section here

FDA regulations makes clear that governing agencies that are in place for public welfare have been converted to serve private gains in capital and loosen standards for their benefit. Capital gains, then, are the underlying motivator behind the ecologically devastating CAFOs that cause significant climate damage.

The prominent themes of individualism, patriarchalism, and capitalism in American culture correlate to meat consumption and its relevance as a cultural symbol. These aspects are not only salient features of US culture but serve as a framework to construct theories of industry influence through economic institutions such as advertising and marketing.

---

of regulatory choices that “this pattern of inaction or inadequate action with respect to administration of antibiotics to farm animals will continue as a result of agency capture” (Parr 2018, 351).

## Part Three: Industry Influence

This section examines the tools used by companies within the meat industry and the meat industry wholistically to determine what makes the public image of meat so culturally prominent. Industry influence can be observed primarily through advertising and marketing and the use of significant cultural values embraced by the industry to enforce predetermined societal norms about meat consumption.

### American Culture, Advertising, and the Media

Advertising of meat is most likely to be successful in the US if it includes the aforementioned themes of individualism, patriarchy, and capitalism<sup>5</sup>. Appealing to cultural norms and values sells product, and since these three are ubiquitous values in American society, they contribute to the role of meat representation. Examples of meat being advertised under these norms can be found as part of advertising campaigns from large-scale meat corporations to target specific consumer demographics. In this section I will be analyzing cases in which these values helped reinforce meat's social representation in the media to support my claim that these representations impact perceptions around meat consumption.

---

<sup>5</sup> Operating within this set of values makes advertising campaigns likely to be successful because these are the most predictable and unchanging motifs present in American culture that define social norms and conformance to these norms (Rees et. al. 2018, 2).

*Vegetarian and Omnivore Individualism*

Values of individualism and self-reliance define American social structure by demonstrating independence and freedom of choice. This liberty is expressed through diet preferences, which bear weight in a person's self-determined identity (Loughan et. al. 2014, 105). The psychology between diet differentiation can signify a person's belief in their place in the social hierarchy<sup>6</sup>. Belief in male dominance can contribute to increased meat consumption and the identification of meat as "male," while vegetarians are perceived as less masculine (Loughan et. al. 2014, 105). It has also been connected to preferred social organization, stemming from meat consumption and relationship to authoritarianism and social dominance orientation (Loughan et. al. 2014, 105). These ideologies influence beliefs on societal construction and order, with studies claiming that "omnivores that value inequality and hierarchy eat more red meat than those who do not" (Loughan et. al. 2014, 105). In contrast, not eating meat can shape an individual's identity as well. Vegetarians in India have been observed to value their like-minded communities more and respect authority more than omnivorous Indians—this could be indicative of the rejection of meat as a tie to a social or cultural group and an endorsement of group values, building a sense of community around meat rejection (Loughan et. al. 2014, 105). This may play a role in what motivates people to eat meat, and how the sense of connection people have to their food relates back to the construction of their social groups. Vegetarians on the other hand are more likely to hold

---

<sup>6</sup> Ecofeminist author Greta Gaard argues livestock animals fit into this hierarchy as an example of an "absent referent", when living animals are made into meat and the language used contributes to the animal's absence, converting "animals" into "meat" make it into something with "no individuality" (Gaard 2002, 134). Distinctive individuality of animals is revoked when they become meat, keeping them intentionally low on the social hierarchy to increase human supremacy and dominance over animals while turning them into a commodity to erase the "burden of inflicting pain on food" (Gaard 2002, 134).

universal values such as concern about environmental issues and gender equity than nonvegetarians (Lea & Worsley 2003). Determining what motivations people have behind meat consumption could uncover what conscious intentions people make to continue these choices regardless of information pointing to the shortcomings of meat eating and production.

Freedom of choice regarding diet preferences has swept the media as the issue of meat consumption becomes divided along party lines in the US. "Amid a liberal-driven call for vegetarianism, a wave of conservative media personalities are promoting all-meat diets. Meat is poised to be the next proxy battleground in a left-right culture war" (Weill, 2018). A notable response to this call for vegetarianism is the infamous image of Senator Ted Cruz of Texas cooking bacon around the barrel of a gun. Author Marta Zaraska of *Meathooked: The History and Science of Our 2.5-Million-Year Obsession With Meat*, states in an interview, "There does exist a connection between exposure to vegetarian or vegan viewpoints and a desire to ascertain a 'right' to meat" (Weill, 2018). Fear of these rights being infringed motivates radical reactions to the proposed limit of meat in diets, resulting in groups promoting all-meat diets to oppose rising popularity among vegan dieting:

"Meat-lovers have found support in conservative-leaning communities for people who want to subsist on all-meat diets... it has seen a surge in popularity on the right, after it circulated in conservative-leaning podcasts and Reddit threads" (Weill 2018).

Meat has become another highly politicized and polarizing issue that has distinctly cut through party lines. Aside from this polarization, meat eating is still a choice, and people have the freedom to make the choice whether to eat meat or to abstain from it. It creates questions surrounding first amendment rights and the extent to which government can control individual

Commented [FL25]: Put image in here

Commented [FL26]: Finish this section

choices (Wilde 2019, 440). This overarching belief in rights maintaining supremacy in the protection of the individual means that policy attempts to limit meat consumption signify a violation of the constitutional rights of Americans.

### *JBS: Friboi and Patriarchal Themes*

JBS is the largest beef producer in Brazil, providing 50% of the countries cow meat and exporting the remainder to meet the needs of the US meat demand and other beef-consuming countries (Filho 2014, 58). Its subsidiary, Friboi, ran a notable campaign in 2013 that based brand imaging around patriarchal advertising and marketing (Filho 2014). These advertisements targeted male demographics by portraying images of men in steakhouses and barbecues, butcher shops and supermarkets, all with a central male figure who is in charge of finding the best meat (in this case, Friboi meat), and the man trying to educate his female counterpart on how to select the best meat or to always ask for Friboi (Filho 2014, 56). They are expected to receive male authority and approval of their actions. This is demonstrative of women being expected to take a submissive position and be portrayed as foolish or uneducated in their advertisements. This ad and others in the Friboi 2013 campaign “stands out as sharp examples for this type of gendered interaction in advertising, but also for the particular masculinity attributed to meat consumption” (Filho 2014, 56). It signifies the definition of a woman’s place in patriarchal societies and uses meat as a symbol in the media perpetuating gendered interactions. “In patriarchal cultures, meat matters, especially to male consumption behavior” (Filho 2014, 58). Studies surrounding meat and sexuality have revealed similar findings about red meat as a symbol of masculinity and male sexuality (Gaard 2002, 117). Subjective norms

Commented [FL27]: Include an advertisement image?

about masculinity are tied to meat from its origins in society as a product of hunting, typically a role assigned to men in ancient subsistence responsibilities and hierarchy structures (Peace 2008, 7). These subjective norms exist today through perceived social pressure from relevant others to perform the behavior<sup>7</sup> (Rees 2018, 3). This is consistent with rationalized beliefs that meat eating is necessary for health and “strength” (Brousseau & Pickering 2018, 11). Meat consumption and masculinity are inherently tied in examples of advertising and perceptions around what social representations define masculinity in American culture.

#### *Capitalistic Value of the Meat Industry*

Consideration of the capitalist system is critical to assigning value to the meat industry in contrast to plant-based alternatives. The Plant Based Foods Administration (PBFA) has concluded that the market for plant based products has increased by 11% with a market value of about \$4.5 billion dollars since 2018 (PBFA, 2020). Meat substitutes specifically have grown upwards of 10% since 2018 with an estimated net worth of over \$800 million dollars (PBFA 2020). The meat industry, by comparison, has increased in market value by only 2% during the same time, which may indicate a decline in conventional meat preference (PBFA, 2020). Despite this fractional increase, the meat industry is valued at over \$9.4 billion dollars—thus this seemingly marginal increase still provides significant capital power to the meat industry that towers over that of the plant-based meat industry (PBFA, 2020). Profits from the meat industry

---

<sup>7</sup> In this definition, “others” is defined as people represented in media—whether that be through television, social media, print, or other forms of mass media that people identify with and see themselves reflected in, modeling an understanding of social behavior (Rees 2018, 3).

permeate throughout fast-food restaurants like White Castle and McDonald's that earned billions of dollars satisfying the American hunger for burgers (Grant 2020, 31). Producing and selling meat is such a massive global industry that meat itself almost begins to take form as its own institution. However, plant-based protein companies, specifically Beyond Beef, have been revolutionizing the meat substitute market and challenging the meat industry to up their game. It has been the recipient of many economic and financial victories, while becoming culturally significant and massively successful (Grant 2020, 40). The battle for plant-based meat to be accepted as culturally normative is ongoing in a society that embraces the expansive meat empire and dominant values associated with meat consumption.

### Meat Advertising under Capitalism

Advertising is defined as an ideology that "is not only an economic institution...but an ideological institution that supports and negates certain ways of thinking" (Bettig & Hall 2012, 145). Advertising is a way of using the media to manipulate consumer choices and influence buying patterns or preferences. It analyzes how the public perceive and interact with advertisements to interpret what appeals to consumers. However, the way that companies advertise meat has led to growing influence that these meat companies have over the governance of meat's social representations in society. Messaging surrounding meat may be more positively perceived if preexisting beliefs support the message exposure provided in advertisements or media (Brousseau & Pickering 2018, 12).

**Commented [FL28]:** Bettig, R., & Hall, J. (2012). *Big media, big money: Cultural texts and political economics*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield.

### *Advertising Methodology and Significance*

In order to understand what consumers want from their food, it's important to understand why they make the dietary choices they do in the first place. Now that it's clear what meat represents in diet from an American perspective, we can analyze what aspect of meat consumers perceive or do not perceive to be offered by alternative means, and we can thus understand hesitation of motivation to make the shift to plant-based meat substitutes (Clark & Bogdan 2019, 2535). This is highly dependent on social representations and factors present in the media that dictate consumer preferences through targeted messaging.

According to research conducted by (Clark and Bogdan in 2019), it is stated that the strongest obstacle to embracing plant-based products is due to the general lack of knowledge about the nutritional aspects of the product made available or widely advertised (Clark & Bogdan 2019, 2540). In contrast, research by (Hoek et. al. in 2012) concluded that the unpopularity of meat substitutes was attributed to people's lack of familiarity with the product, thus lack of acceptance to integrate it as a substitute (Hoek et. al. 2012, 255). The former analysis continues to state that general awareness surrounding meat production is sufficient enough for the public to draw adequate conclusions about the impact of their meat consumption choices. One of the tactics used by corporations' advertising campaigns can be observed through the use of culturally significant signs, signals, or statements that convey meaning and are easily recognized by consumers (O'Brien & Szeman 2018, 70). These may suggest cultural rules, subconscious systems of interpretation, or underlying practices that dictate perceptions. In relationship to meat advertising, analysis of the given attributes of meat's role as a semiotic in American culture as significant to its value as an advertisable

**Commented [FL29]:** Clark, Lisa F. and A. Bogdan. "Plant-based foods in Canada: information, trust and closing the commercialization gap." *British Food Journal* 121 (2019): 2535-2550.

**Commented [FL30]:** Hoek, A., Elzerman, J., Hageman, R., Kok, F., Luning, P., & Graaf, C. (2012). Are meat substitutes liked better over time? A repeated in-home use test with meat substitutes of meat in meals, *Food Quality and Preference*, 28(1), 253-263. Retrieved from: [https://ucalgaryprimo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/f/1p0s7n7/TN\\_elsevier\\_sdoi\\_10\\_1016\\_j\\_food\\_qual\\_2012\\_07\\_002](https://ucalgaryprimo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/f/1p0s7n7/TN_elsevier_sdoi_10_1016_j_food_qual_2012_07_002).

**Commented [FL31]:** O'Brien, S., & Szeman, I. (2018). *Popular culture: A user's guide* (4th ed). Toronto, ON: Nelson Education.

product. Everything used in an advertisement is specifically chosen to convey meaning to the interpreter or denote a specific relationship (O'Brien & Szeman 2018, 70). Advertising meat products is rooted in this chain of interpretation that signifies a collective identity surrounding a given object or product (O'Brien & Szeman 2018, 72). It defines the "dominant values of a culture in a particular historical moment" to highlight its significance to meet a need to socially conform (O'Brien & Szeman 2018, 72). Meat is seen a product that is required as part of the American diet. This is a critical recognition because it establishes the transformation of meat's social representation within mainstream media and the relationship between social positioning and social reproductions that contribute to and perpetuate these beliefs (Moscovici 1988, 240).

#### *Plant Based Branding: Beyond Beef and Impossible*

Pat Brown, a former biomedical researcher at Stanford University and CEO of Impossible Foods, states "the cow didn't evolve to be meat. The cow evolved to be a cow and make more cows and not to be eaten by humans. And it's not very good at making meat" (Dubner 2019). It takes huge amounts of water, feed, antibiotics, and a plethora of other resources to produce even one hamburger— Brown states, "The most environmentally destructive technology on earth: using animals in food production. Nothing else even comes close" (Dubner 2019). Because meat production is so resource intensive, it has serious implications for our climate and environmental challenges. With meat production on the rise due to the increase in demand, these issues can only be exacerbated. Brown's company, Impossible Foods, seeks to end the use of animals as food production technology by creating synthetic meat replicating taste, characteristics, and nutrition of meat.

Commented [FL32]: O'Brien, S., & Szeman, I. (2018). Popular culture: A user's guide (4thed). Toronto, ON: Nelson Education.

Commented [FL33]: Evidence

Environmental skepticism is a strong barrier that evidently plays a role in people's meat consumption choices. This skepticism is theorized to maintain or even increase the frequency of red meat consumption when exposed to pro-environmental messaging (Brousseau & Pickering 2018, 12). Conversely, those who already are predisposed to pro-environmentalist attitudes are more likely to be receptive towards pro-environmental messaging and offer behavioral changes as a result of message exposure (Brousseau & Pickering 2018, 12). Attitudes surrounding climate change and environmentalism have proven to be determinants in the public reception of promotions around plant based protein or reduced meat eating (Brousseau & Pickering 2018, 12). This finding is an important factor to consider when branding and advertising meat substitutes. Beyond Beef moves their targeted advertising away from the demographic that is more likely to be receptive towards plant based alternatives—the pro-environmentalists—and instead seeks to convert omnivores through specified product placement. One way they achieve this is by placing their product directly under the noses of meat eaters while making product selections at grocery stores (Grant 2020, 40). The company has “requested that the product be sold in the meat case at grocery retailers where meat-loving consumers are accustomed to shopping for center of plate proteins” as a promotional tool to make viable substitute options equitable to meat options (Grant 2020, 40).

In order to encourage the shift to a more plant based diet, it's critical to understand the general willingness or preparedness to shift away from meat diet preferences as well as aims to promote plant based dieting. In order to achieve this, it's critical that companies are able to e “design tailored initiatives when encouraging a shift towards a more plant-based diet” (Graca et al 2015, 87). Current Beyond Beef CEO Ethan Brown has integrated knowledge about

**Commented [FL34]:** Graça, J., Oliveira, A. and Calheiros, M.M. (2015). Meat, beyond the plate. data-driven hypotheses for understanding consumer willingness to adopt a more plant-based diet, *Appetite*, 80-90. Retrieved from: [https://ucalgaryprimo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/f/1p0s7n7/TN\\_elsevier\\_sdoi\\_10\\_1016\\_j\\_appe\\_t\\_2015\\_02\\_037](https://ucalgaryprimo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/f/1p0s7n7/TN_elsevier_sdoi_10_1016_j_appe_t_2015_02_037)

conventional meat preferences with the “halo effect” meat substitutes offer. This effect highlights the positive health related affects offered by product, and consumers recognize this to be nutritionally superior than conventional products (Beckwith et. al. 1978, 466). The halo effect of meat substitutes is generated through branding and labeling that establishes the perceptions of these products as positively associated with health benefits. The company utilizes advertisements that link the semiotics of the various halo effects associated with meat substitutes, portraying repetition of the use of the word “plant” and the color green in their media presence. The use of these specific symbols invokes a perception of the product being eco-friendly and healthy, and links it to environmentalist branding (Allan 2009, 633). The purpose of this advertising tactic is to elicit meaning from preconceived social representations of what it means for a product to be “green” or “plant-based,” where intentional promotional tools of greenwashing products are used. “This common association with this color creates a connection between Beyond Meat burgers and a sense of newness, and goodness in comparison to traditional meat burgers” (Grant 2020, 48).

## Part Four: Social Phenomena and Ecofeminist Patterns

This section provides a final examination of the significance of findings thus far from the development of ideas surrounding meat consumption and its role in sociocultural representations. The overarching repetition of masculinity throughout research on meat eating provides insight to the most observed factor driving meat consumption and surprising ties to gender roles. Observations of meat as a social value and as a commodity interwoven with gender roles makes its representation subject to ecofeminist critique patterns and clear parallels to oppressive patriarchal ideologies (Gaard 2002, 132).

### Leitmotif of Masculinity

One of the most prominent pieces of evidence gathered from this research was the recurring theme of masculinity being inherently tied to meat consumption, through the media and through social representations. Masculinity and themes of masculine identity building were identified as a glaring theme in advertisements and marketing, and sought to appeal to these target demographics by portraying male dominance and social hierarchy. This motif of masculinity was uncovered in both the aspects of individualism and capitalism roles in American culture, as cultural norms of male superiority influence both of these societal values (Lockie 2002, 362).

Commented [FL35]: cite

## Ecofeminist Perspective Applied to Meat Consumption

Ecofeminism is an ideology that theorizes damage to the environment is rooted deeply in male domination of the environment and earth's resources, and this domination is a reflection of male treatment toward women (Lockie 2002, 360). Ecofeminism is conceptualized as an analysis that critiques value-hierarchical thought, the logic of domination, and normative dualisms (Gaard 2002, 130). Meat-eaters value hierarchy and inequality more so than vegetarians as discussed in the analysis of advertising/ marketing and meat; this concept as well as domination logic is demonstrated in the section on meat's symbolism in patriarchal societies (Gaard 2002, 132). Normative dualisms are present in the psychology of meat consumption, and the moral perception of eating animals (Loughnan 2014, 107). Meat as a social representation can thus be understood from an ecofeminist perspective.

This perception of meat and masculinity is not wholly perpetuated in society through men—women contribute to its consumption too. In a 2018 study observing conformity to gender norms and attractiveness, three investigations took place to determine relationship to meat and perception of attractiveness (Timeo & Suitner, 2018). The first analyzed female dating preferences and discovered that women preferred omnivorous men and rated them more attractive than vegetarians<sup>8</sup> (Timeo & Suitner, 2018). The second analyzed why women preferred omnivorous men to vegetarians and based this finding on the notion that “the attribution of masculinity mediated this relationship, such that vegetarian men were

---

<sup>8</sup> An additional finding concluded from the first study was that women “felt more positive” about omnivores than they did vegetarians, and attributed this “positivity” to gender norms in diet preference, i.e., male meat preference (Timeo & Suitner, 2018).

Commented [FL36]: Add footnote expanding on this

Commented [FL37]: cite

Commented [FL38]: cite and write this part

considered less attractive because they were perceived as less masculine” (Timeo & Suitner, 2018). The third and final study analyzed the expectations of meat preferences based on perception of meat as masculine, and found that “men who perceived vegetarianism as feminine preferred meat-based dishes for themselves and expected their female partners to choose vegetarian dishes” (Timeo & Suitner, 2018). These studies conclude that the enforcement of gender norms in diet preferences is not limited to a single gender, but is within a greater context of societal gender roles maintained through meat consumption. This is seen in the hyper-masculine marketing of meat products and the association with meat to masculinity comprising a great deal of social representations surrounding meat.

## Future Research

This research on social representations and meat consumption has yielded specific needs for alternative means of communication to influence perceptions of meat consumption as the dominant center of meal preferences and diet choices in the US. Narratives presented in mainstream media that were most effective at influencing consumer behavior to reduce meat consumption appeared to be when meat reduction correlated positively to health benefits (Graca 2015, 85). More study is needed to determine how advantageous environmental frames are in addition to known frames that yield the most potent responses. Framing environmental consequences of meat consumption may be more effective when used in tandem with frames of moralism or health benefits to combat preexisting cultural beliefs and status quo social representations. It is clear that the influence of social representations in US meat consumption bridges the discrepancies in education of the subject matter and targeted behavioral changes-- cognitive dissonance between knowing the environmental damages of meat and behavioral adjustments to adapt to this knowledge are complex and variably based.

## Conclusion

The role of social representations of in American culture permeates throughout different levels of US social structure and influences beliefs surrounding the meat industry. Social norms that dictate behavioral changes have varied historically as shifting consumer preferences demonstrate fluctuating perceptions surrounding the importance of meat and its relevance as a cultural symbol. Individualism, patriarchy, and capitalism are all aspects of American culture that play into the perpetuation of the meat industry's power and societal aversion to future meat consumption reduction. Contemporary environmental themes such as ecofeminism and vegetarianism make complex connections through their analyses of the role of meat consumption in society but fail to highlight the contextual externalities associated with environmental damage. The role of patriarchal themes was the most consistent pattern within the social perceptions of meat in American cultural norms as well as in advertising, where descriptions following masculine motifs were used in marketing campaigns as well as observed in people's perceptions of food choices. It's critical to include the environmental aspects of meat production and consumption in these narratives of social representations to draw attention to the broader scale of impact meat has on society as well as global ecology.

It is my conclusion that the link between plant based dieting is a prevalent motivator for people's desire to switch away from meat consumption, but the link between meat consumption and environmentalism is somewhat weak. It is clear that the connection can be made between meat consumption and climate change as well as other environmental harms, but the challenge lies in creating clear communication methods to engage citizens in pro-environmental

behaviors (Brousseau & Pickering 2018, 14). It is necessary to design messaging and public communications, particularly through advertising and the promotion of plant based products, that encourages a reduction in meat consumption (Brousseau & Pickering 2018, 14). It must be considered that the efficacy of this messaging is contingent on predetermined levels of education, systems of beliefs, and societal factors that may influence acceptance or skepticism of messaging exposure (Brousseau & Pickering 2018, 13). The phenomenon of social representations is adequately demonstrated in US meat consumption and is a meaningful tool to manipulate patterns of consumption while establishing collective assumptions and norms embedded in cultural memory. Meat as a social representation influences diet in US culture through the institutional and economic frameworks of social organization and media power.

## References

- Allan, K. (2009). The connotations of English colour terms: Colour-based X-phemisms. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 41(3), 626-637.
- Agnostic Carnivores and Global Warming: Why Enviros Go After Coal and Not Cows - Freakonomics Freakonomics*. <http://freakonomics.com/2011/11/16/agnostic-carnivores-and-global-warming-why-enviros-go-after-coal-and-not-cows/>. Accessed 8 June 2021.
- Bettig, R., & Hall, J. (2012). *Big media, big money: Cultural texts and political economics*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Brousseau, Samantha, and Gary Pickering. "Optimizing Messaging to Reduce Red Meat Consumption." *Environmental Communication*, vol. 13, Jan. 2018, pp. 1–16. *ResearchGate*, doi:10.1080/17524032.2017.1412994.
- Clark, Lisa F. and A. Bogdan. "Plant-based foods in Canada: information, trust and closing the commercialization gap." *British Food Journal* 121 (2019): 2535-2550.
- Coles, Benjamin. "The Shocking Materialities and Temporalities of Agri Capitalism." *Gastronomica*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2016, pp. 5–12. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/26362368](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26362368). Accessed 25 May 2021.
- Commissioner, Office of the. "Fact Sheet: FDA at a Glance." *FDA*, FDA, Nov. 2020. [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov), <https://www.fda.gov/about-fda/fda-basics/fact-sheet-fda-glance>.
- Filho, Ricardo gomes costa. "Meat Masculinity." *Contexts*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2014, pp. 56–58. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/24710553](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24710553). Accessed 9 Feb. 2021.

- Gaard, Greta. "Vegetarian Ecofeminism: A Review Essay." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 23, no. 3, 2002, pp. 117–146. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/3347337](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3347337). Accessed 23 May 2021.
- Graça, J., Oliveira, A. and Calheiros, M.M. (2015). Meat, beyond the plate. data-driven hypotheses for understanding consumer willingness to adopt a more plant-based diet, *Appetite*, 80-90. Retrieved from: [https://ucalgaryprimo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/f/1p0s7n7/TN\\_elsevier\\_sdoi\\_10\\_1016\\_j\\_appet\\_2015\\_02\\_037](https://ucalgaryprimo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/f/1p0s7n7/TN_elsevier_sdoi_10_1016_j_appet_2015_02_037)
- Grant, Nora Belle. *Going Beyond the Beyond Meat Burger: A Political Economic and Comparative Semiotic Analysis of Online Advertisements*. p. 74.
- "Growing Greenhouse Gas Emissions Due to Meat Production." *UNEP Sioux Falls* [https://na.unep.net/geas/getUNEPPageWithArticleIDScript.php?article\\_id=92](https://na.unep.net/geas/getUNEPPageWithArticleIDScript.php?article_id=92). Accessed 8 June 2021.
- Gvion-Rosenberg, L. (1990). Why do vegetarian restaurants serve hamburgers? Toward an understanding of a cuisine. *Semiotica*, 61-79. 10.1515/semi.1990.80.1-2.61.
- Hernández, Ramona. "Capitalism." *Keywords for Latina/o Studies*, edited by Deborah R. Vargas et al., NYU Press, New York, 2017, pp. 28–31. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1pwtbj.12](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1pwtbj.12). Accessed 25 May 2021.
- Hoek, A., Elzerman, J., Hageman, R., Kok, F., Luning, P., & Graaf, C. (2012). Are meat substitutes liked better over time? A repeated in-home use test with meat substitutes of meat in meals, *Food Quality and Preference*, 28(1), 253-263. Retrieved from:

[https://ucalgaryprimo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/f/1p0s7n7/TN\\_elsevier\\_sdoi\\_10\\_1016\\_j\\_food\\_qual\\_2012\\_07\\_002](https://ucalgaryprimo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/f/1p0s7n7/TN_elsevier_sdoi_10_1016_j_food_qual_2012_07_002).

Huang, Su-hsin. "The Authenticity of Fake Meats." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2012, pp. 719–731.,  
[www.jstor.org/stable/44087165](http://www.jstor.org/stable/44087165). Accessed 9 Feb. 2021.

Hurley, A. (1997). From Hash House to Family Restaurant: The Transformation of the Diner and Post-World War II Consumer Culture. *The Journal of American History*, 83(4), 1282–1308. doi:10.2307/2952903

Jhally, Sut. *Advertising at the edge of the apocalypse*. Full Transcript.pdf. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. Accessed June 8, 2021.

Kashdan, Andrew, and Daniel B. Klein. "Assume the Positional: Comment on Robert Frank." *ECON JOURNAL WATCH*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2006, p. 23.

Kinnucan, Henry W., et al. "Effects of Health Information and Generic Advertising on U.S. Meat Demand." *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, vol. 79, no. 1, 1997, pp. 13–23. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/1243939](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1243939). Accessed 9 Feb. 2021.

Lea, Emma & Worsley, Anthony. *The factors associated with the belief that vegetarian diets provide health benefits*. *Asia Pacific journal of clinical nutrition*, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 296–303. 2003.

Lindeman, M., and K. Stark. "Pleasure, Pursuit of Health or Negotiation of Identity? Personality Correlates of Food Choice Motives Among Young and Middle-Aged Women." *Appetite*, vol. 33, no. 1, Aug. 1999, pp. 141–61. *ScienceDirect*, doi:10.1006/appe.1999.0241.

Lockie, S., Hayward, J. & Salem, N. (2002) Book Review: Carol J. Adams. *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, Tenth Anniversary Edition; Kathryn Paxton George. *Animal, Vegetable, or Woman? A Feminist Critique of Ethical Vegetarianism*; Michael Allen Fox.

Loughnan, Steve, et al. "The Psychology of Eating Animals." *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2014, pp. 104–108. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/44318731](http://www.jstor.org/stable/44318731). Accessed 9 Feb. 2021.

Marsh, John M., and Gary W. Brester. "Wholesale-Retail Marketing Margin Behavior in the Beef and Pork Industries." *Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2004, pp. 45–64. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/40987231](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40987231). Accessed 9 Feb. 2021.

McWilliams, James. "Just Food: Where Locavores Get It Wrong and How We Can Truly Eat Responsibly." *1st. ed Back Bay Publishing New York*. 2010.

Meat and conformity to gender norms: <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2017-26154-001> Timeo, S., & Suitner, C. (2018). Eating meat makes you sexy: Conformity to dietary gender norms and attractiveness. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 19(3), 418–429. <https://doi.org/10.1037/men0000119>

Monaco, Gregory & Guimelli, Christian. *Hegemonic and Polemical Beliefs: Culture and Consumption in the Social Representation of Wine*. *The Spanish Journal of Psychology*, vol. 14, pp. 237-250, 2011. Accessed June 8 2021.

Moscovici, Serge. (1988). Notes Towards a Description of Social Representations. *European Journal of Social Psychology*. 18. 211 - 250. [10.1002/ejsp.2420180303](https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2420180303). Accessed June 8 2021.

O'Brien, S., & Szeman, I. (2018). *Popular culture: A user's guide* (4th ed). Toronto, ON: Nelson Education.

Parr, Allison. "Agribusiness and Antibiotics: A Market-Based Solution." *Food and Drug Law Journal*, vol. 73, no. 2, 2018, pp. 338–360. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/26661180](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26661180). Accessed 8 June 2021.

Peace, Adrian. "Meat in the Genes." *Anthropology Today*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2008, pp. 5–10. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/20179917](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20179917). Accessed 9 Feb. 2021.

Piggott, Nicholas E., et al. "Demand Response to Advertising in the Australian Meat Industry." *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, vol. 78, no. 2, 1996, pp. 268–279. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/1243701](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1243701). Accessed 9 Feb. 2021.

Piggott, Roley R., et al. "Approximating Farm-Level Returns to Incremental Advertising Expenditure: Methods and an Application to the Australian Meat Industry." *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, vol. 77, no. 3, 1995, pp. 497–511. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/1243219](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1243219). Accessed 9 Feb. 2021.

Plant Based Foods Association. (2020). Retail Sales Data. Plant Based Foods Association. Retrieved from <https://plantbasedfoods.org/marketplace/retail-sales-data/>.

"Prosperity Without Growth: Economics for a Finite Planet." *MAHB*, <https://mahb.stanford.edu/library-item/prosperity-without-growth-economics-finite-planet/>. Accessed 26 May 2021.

Rees, Jonas, et al. "Breaking the Habit: On the Highly Habitualized Nature of Meat Consumption and Implementation Intentions as One Effective Way of Reducing It."

*Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, Apr. 2018, pp. 1–12. *ResearchGate*,  
doi:10.1080/01973533.2018.1449111.

Saltik and First, et. al. *Consumption, consumer culture and consumer society*. *Journal of Community Positive Practices*, 2013. 182-203.

Sewell, Christina. “REMOVING THE MEAT SUBSIDY: OUR COGNITIVE DISSONANCE AROUND ANIMAL AGRICULTURE.” *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 73, no. 1, 2019, pp. 307–318. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/26872805](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26872805) . Accessed 9 Feb. 2021.

Sexton, Alexandra. “Alternative Proteins and the (Non)Stuff of ‘Meat.’” *Gastronomica*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2016, pp. 66–78. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/26362374](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26362374) . Accessed 9 Feb. 2021.

*The Future of Meat (Ep. 367 Rebroadcast) - Freakonomics Freakonomics*.  
<http://freakonomics.com/podcast/meat-rebroadcast/>. Accessed 8 June 2021.

*Under the Influence: Robert Frank's Radical Idea - Vox*.  
<https://www.vox.com/podcasts/2020/5/26/21269556/robert-frank-under-the-influence-ezra-klein-show-coronavirus>. Accessed 8 June 2021.

Weill, Kelly. *Why Right Wingers Are Going Crazy About Meat*. *Politics--The Daily Beast*, 2018.  
<https://www.thedailybeast.com/why-right-wingers-are-going-crazy-about-meat> .  
Accessed 8 June 2021.

WILDE, PARKE, et al. “Legal Feasibility of US Government Policies to Reduce Cancer Risk by Reducing Intake of Processed Meat.” *The Milbank Quarterly*, vol. 97, no. 2, 2019, pp. 420-448. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/45171820](http://www.jstor.org/stable/45171820). Accessed 9 Feb. 2021.

Leonard 50

*You Eat What You Are, Part 2 (Ep. 78) - Freakonomics Freakonomics.*

<https://freakonomics.com/podcast/you-eat-what-you-are-pt-2-a-new-freakonomics-radio-podcast/>. Accessed 8 June 2021.