Traditional Masculinity, Identity and Male Preference for Meat

Paul Naughton
Edinburgh Napier University
Ashleigh Logan-McFarlane
Edinburgh Napier University

Cite as:
Naughton Paul, Logan-McFarlane Ashleigh (2022), Traditional Masculinity, Identity and Male Preference for Meat. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 51st, (107598)

Paper from the 51st Annual EMAC Conference, Budapest, May 24-27, 2022

Traditional Masculinity, Identity and Male Preference for Meat

Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine if traditional masculinity norms are antecedents of pro-meat consumption attitudes and meat consumption self-identity, and act as a barrier to meat consumption reduction. The study sample consisted of 276 male adults living in the UK. Traditional views of masculinity were positively associated with pro-meat attitudes and meat consumption self-identity. Self-identity mediated the negative relationship between endorsement of traditional masculinity norms and willingness to reduce meat consumption. Men who had a university degree were less likely to endorse traditional masculinity norms. It appears that some men eat meat to bolster their male identity, and this may partly explain the relative unwillingness of men to reduce their meat consumption. Challenging the archaic 'men eat meat' stereotypes that continue to pervade discourse around food will be important for marketing campaigns promoting meat consumption reduction and plant-based meat alternatives.

Keywords: Meat Consumption, Identity, Masculinity

Track: Consumer Behaviour

1. Introduction

It is estimated that 5% of adults in Great Britain follow a vegetarian diet and 13% of adults identify as flexitarians, meaning they only occasionally eat meat (Dabhade, 2021). According to recent YouGov data, 37% of UK adults are trying to reduce their meat consumption (YouGov, 2021). This is reflected in the proliferation of new plant-based food products, which accounted for a quarter of all new food product launches in 2019 (Mintel, 2020). However, the increasing popularity of meat-free or meat-less diets is not universal, with significant differences observed by gender (Neuman et al., 2020). It is well known that men consume meat more frequently, and in larger portions, and they are less likely to follow vegetarian or vegan diets (Rosenfeld, 2018). While many studies have examined gender variance with respect to meat preference and consumption, few have addressed the underlying reasons beyond dietary beliefs and attitudes. An examination of socio-cultural issues may shed light on the male-meat link and provide useful insights for campaigns promoting meat consumption reduction and plant-based meat alternative products targeted at men.

The aim of this study is to examine if traditional masculinity norms are antecedents of pro-meat consumption attitudes and meat consumption self-identity, and act as a barrier to meat consumption reduction. The association between normative beliefs about masculinity and male preference for meat has been investigated in three seminal studies. Schösler et al. (2015) looked at meat-related gender differences between three ethnic groups understood to have divergent gender role beliefs. The largest gender differences and strongest male-meat link (e.g. preference for large meat portions and unwillingness to reduce meat consumption) was observed in the Turkish group, where framings of masculinity are considered more traditional. In contrast, the Dutch group showed the smallest gender differences and the weakest male-meat link. This corresponds with the study from Rothgerber (2013), who found that endorsement of traditional masculinity norms (e.g. the belief that men should avoid femininity and conceal their emotions) accounted for differences in meat consumption attitudes between men and women. In their study, men who endorsed traditional masculinity norms were more inclined to deny animal suffering, provide religious and health justification for consuming animals, believe that animals are lower in a hierarchy and that it was human destiny to eat meat. However, this study does not examine the effect of traditional masculinity norms on meat consumption self-identity and willingness to reduce meat

consumption. Most recently, De Backer et al. (2020) found that endorsement of non-traditional masculinity, which questions male role norms, is negatively associated with pro-meat attitudes and positively related to willingness to reduce meat consumption. Therefore, by examining traditional masculinity norms with respect to self-identity, this study builds on previous research addressing the question 'if and how different norms of masculinity can predict willingness to reduce meat'.

Traditional masculinity typically refers to the normative beliefs of male toughness, emotional restraint, the avoidance of femininity, and the pursuit of status (Thompson Jr & Bennett, 2015). These socially prescribed norms are common features of hegemonic masculinity, which is a socially dominant gender construction that subordinates' femininities (Courtenay, 2000). In this discourse of masculinity, social behaviours are clearly categorised as being either masculine or non-masculine. A social behaviour deviant from the hegemonic form is immediately characterised as non-masculine. De Visser et al. (2009) identified physical prowess, heterosexuality, lack of vanity and alcohol consumption as symbols of hegemonic masculinity. Considering the attribution of gender to foods in society (Rozin et al., 2012; Sobal, 2005), meat consumption can also be considered a tangible totem of hegemonic masculinity (Nath, 2011). Vartanian (2015), in a systematic review of research into consumption stereotypes and impression management, found that some men use meat consumption to bolster their masculine identity; for example, choose meat options in public settings or situations where they feel that their masculinity is under threat. This is perhaps not surprising considering that in western societies people who follow vegetarian or vegan diets are typically perceived as being less masculine than people who consume meat (Ruby & Heine, 2011). Such stereotypes are reinforced by the advertisements of well-known food outlets that symbolically link meat with masculinity by focusing on the theme 'real men eat meat' (Rogers, 2008).

It is therefore reasonable to assume that if men endorse traditional norms of masculinity, it may affect how they think about food as part their identity and this may act as a barrier to meat consumption reduction. In examining this phenomenon, this study will address the following hypotheses:

H1: Endorsement of traditional masculinity is positively associated with pro-meat attitudes

H2: Endorsement of traditional masculinity is positively associated with meat consumption self-identity

H3: Endorsement of traditional masculinity is negatively associated with willingness to reduce meat consumption, either directly or indirectly via meat consumption attitudes and meat consumption self-identity

2. Methodology

2.1 Sample and procedure

The study sample consisted of 276 male adults living in the UK, recruited using the consumer panel database Prolific. A screening question ensured that all participants who took part in the study consumed meat as part of their diet. Participants were aged between 18 and 78 years old (M = 36.58, SD = 13.89), and almost half (48.8%) had a first or higher degree.

2.2 Measures

Pro-meat consumption attitude was measured using 3 items on 7-point semantic differential scales. The three items were bad-good, unpleasant – pleasant, negative – positive. The scale had high reliability (α= .88). Meat Consumption Self-identity was measured by 3 items on 7-point agreement Likert scales, adapted from Sparks and Shepherd (1992) and Hagger and Chatzisarantis (2006). For example, '*Eating meat is an important part of who I am'*. The scale had moderate internal consistency (α= .70). Finally, participants were asked to indicate their willingness to reduce meat consumption on three items, from 1 = very unwilling to 7 = very willing. The validated scaled was adapted from Graça et al. (2015) and had high reliability (α= .86).

Traditional Masculinity was assessed with a condensed version of the Male Role Norms Scale (MRNS, Thompson Jr and Pleck (1986)), an approach adopted by Thompson Jr and Barnes (2013). MRNS identified three norms that underpin traditional masculinity ideology: the importance of achieving status and respect from others (Status norms), the importance of being mentally and physically tough (Toughness norms), and the importance of avoiding stereotypical feminine practices (Anti-Femininity norms) (Thompson Jr & Pleck, 1986). The truncated MRNS consisted of four items with the strongest factor loadings from each of the three original subscales, assessed using a 7-point disagree-agree Likert format. To test the dimensionality of this 12-item scale, exploratory factor analysis using principal components and orthogonal rotation (varimax) was conducted. Three factors had eigenvalues

over Kaiser's criterion of 1 and in combination explained 63.82% of the data variance. The items that clustered on the factors were broadly consistent with the original MRN scale. However, three items had cross-loadings of > 0.3, and were therefore removed from further analysis. A second-order Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was run on the remaining 9 items representing the three first-order factors. The fit indices indicated acceptable model fit (CFI= 0.95; RMSEA = 0.07; SRMR = 0.07). All measured items significantly loaded on their first order factors ($p < 0.001$). Status was made up of three items, including '*A man owes it to his family to work at the best paying job he can get*'. Toughness was made up of 3 items, including '*Fists are sometimes the only way to get out of a bad situation*'. Anti-femininity was made up of three items, including '*If I heard about a man who was a hairdresser or nurse, I might wonder how masculine he was'*. The standardized factor loadings associated with the second-order factors were significant ($p < 0.001$), with Anti-Femininity having the highest factor loading on MRNS ($\beta = 0.88$), followed by Toughness ($\beta = 0.54$) and Status ($\beta = 0.46$). The reliability of the final scale was $\alpha = 0.78$.

2.3 Analysis

All statistical analysis was performed using IBM SPSS 26 and AMOS 26. Firstly, descriptive statistics and bivariate correlation analyses were run to examine self-reported consumption of meat, fish and plant-based meat alternatives and the relationship between consumption and traditional masculinity. Then, structural equation modelling (SEM) with maximum likelihood was used to test the three hypotheses.

3. Findings

3.1 Traditional Masculinity and Consumption of Meat, Fish, and Meat Substitutes.

Study participants were asked to report their monthly consumption of beef, chicken, pork, fish, and plant-based meat substitutes on frequency scales from 1 = 'never' to 6 = '4 times or more per week'. Descriptive statistics show that the average participant in this study consumed Chicken frequently ($M = 4.30$, SD = 1.09; approx. twice per week), consumed beef ($M = 2.99$, SD = 1.08) Pork ($M = 2.91$, SD = 1.16) and Fish ($M = 2.80$, SD = 1.01) weekly, and rarely consumed plant-based meat alternatives ($M = 1.62$, SD = 0.98). There was a weak but positive association between Traditional Masculinity and beef consumption ($r = 0.121$, $p < 0.05$) and chicken consumption ($r = 0.125$, $p < 0.05$), but not Pork and Fish

consumption. There was a significant negative correlation between Traditional Masculinity and consumption of plant-based meat alternatives (r = -0.15, p <0.05).

3.2 Traditional Masculinity & Willingness to Reduce Meat Consumption

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for the model variables are presented in Table 1. The mean scores on the dependent variables show that participants were pro-meat and considered meat an important part of their identity. Willingness to Reduce Meat Consumption (WRMC) was moderate to weak. There were significant positive correlations between Traditional Masculinity, Pro-Meat Attitudes and Meat Self-identity and these three variables were negatively correlated with WRMC.

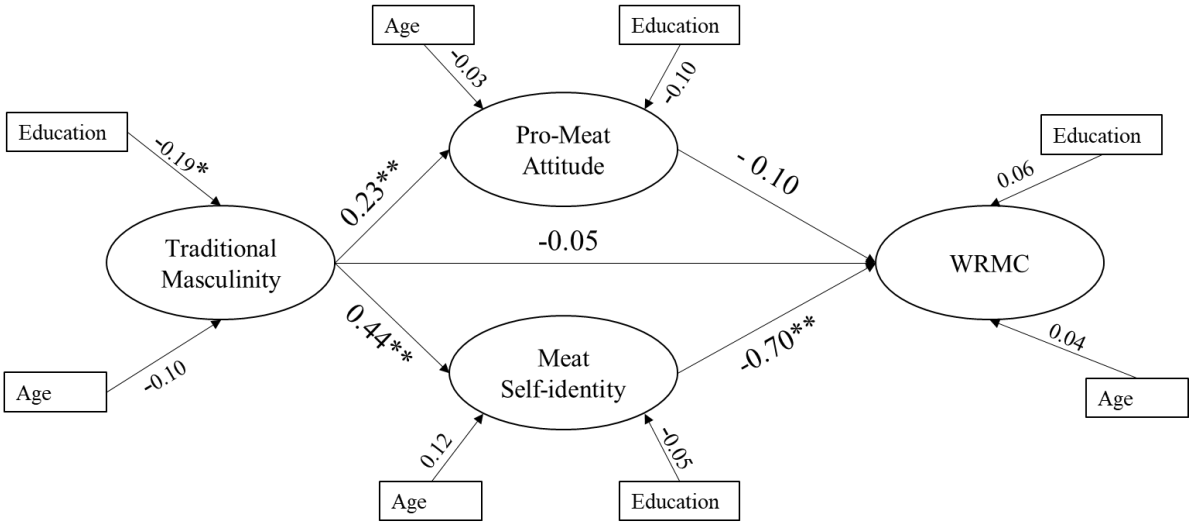
Variable		Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4
1	Traditional Masculinity	3.41 (0.94)	1.000	0.192**	0.311**	-0.285**
2	Pro-Meat Attitude	5.20 (1.31)	0.192**	1.000	0.617**	-0.586**
3	Meat Self-identity	5.33 (1.13)	0.311**	0.617**	1.000	-0.659**
4	WRMC	3.31 (1.45)	-0.285**	-0.586**	-0.659**	1.000

Note: **< 0.01

Table 1. Means, Correlations and Standard Deviations

Using structural equation modelling (SEM) with maximum likelihood, a mediation analysis was carried out to test if traditional masculinity negatively effects WRMC via Pro-Meat consumption Attitudes and Meat consumption Self-identity (H1 – H3). Controlling for age and education, a bootstrap procedure (5000 replications) was used to test the model fit and produce bias-corrected regression coefficients for the direct and indirect paths. An examination of the collinearity diagnostic factors indicated that multicollinearity was not an issue in the model (all tolerance statistics were > 0.58 and VIFs were < 1.7). The fit indices indicate that the model had adequate fit for the data (CFI= 0.93; RMSEA = 0.06; SRMR = 0.07). The model explained 66% variance in Willingness to Reduce Meat Consumption (R2= 0.662). Figure 1 shows the standardised direct effects. Traditional Masculinity was significantly and positively related to Pro-Meat Attitudes (β=0.23, p < 0.01) and Meat Self-identity (β=0.44, p< 0.01), but had no direct association with WRMC (β= -0.05, p = 0.51). Meat Self-identity had a significant negative effect on WRMC (β= -0.70, p < 0.01), but the effect of Pro-meat Attitudes was non-significant (β= -0.10, p = 0.31). Finally, the effect of

Traditional Masculinity on WRMC was fully mediated by Meat Self-identity (β= - 0.33, p < 0.01). Therefore, the analysis provides support for all the study hypotheses. Traditional Masculinity is positively associated with Pro-Meat consumption Attitudes (H1) and Meat consumption Self-identity (H2) and has a negative relationship with WRMC through Meat consumption Self-identity (H3). This means that men who endorse traditional views of masculinity, hold meat consumption has an important part of their identity and are therefore less willing to reduce their consumption of meat. Age had no effect in the model, but education was negatively associated with Traditional Masculinity (β= -0.19, p = 0.02), indicating that men who hold a first or higher degree are less likely to endorse traditional masculinity norms than men who do not.



Note: WRMC = Willingness to Reduce Meat Consumption. **< 0.01, *< 0.05

Figure 1 Standardized regression coefficients for the structural model

4. Discussion

Male preference for meat is well documented and research has tended to focus on gender discrepancies with respect to instrumental beliefs (e.g. nutritional beliefs) and affective beliefs (e.g. hedonic ratings) about consuming meat (Love & Sulikowski, 2018). There has been less focus on the social, cultural, and institutional contexts that underlie dietary preferences. Notable exceptions include studies by Rothgerber (2013) and Schösler et al. (2015), which have shown that the endorsement of traditional masculinity norms is associated with favourable attitudes towards meat consumption. De Backer et al. (2020) found that identification with non-traditional forms of masculinity tempers the male-meat link. The current study builds on this research by demonstrating the mediating effect of meat

consumption self-identity on the relationship between traditional views of masculinity and willingness to reduce meat consumption.

Self-identity can be defined as "*relatively enduring characteristics that people ascribe to themselves, which take the form of (or incorporate) socially given linguistic categorisations*"(Sparks & Guthrie, 1998). Conceptually, self-identity has been shown to be a useful predictor of intentions and behaviour, independent of the effects of attitudes (Hagger & Chatzisarantis, 2006; Sparks & Guthrie, 1998). According to Sparks and Shepherd (1992) if a person's self-identity is important to him or her, then they are likely to create, affirm or bolster this identity through their actions. Graça et al. (2015) found that identification as a meat eater was strongly associated with meat attachment, which refers to meat consumption hedonism, affinity, entitlement, and dependence. The findings from the current study indicate that meat consumption self-identity is grounded in traditional beliefs about masculinity. The qualitative study by Kildal and Syse (2017) provides support for the notion that men who identify strongly with meat consumption endorse traditional norms of masculinity. In exploring the attitudes of Norwegian soldiers towards reducing meat consumption, the researchers found that stereotypical masculine values, such as men's dominance over nature, were regularly used to justify the need for meat.

It is therefore important that marketing campaigns promoting meat consumption reduction among men address the societal perceptions of 'what it means to be a man' This will require challenging the archaic stereotypes associated with meat consumption and vegetarianism/veganism (Rosenfeld, 2018). Greenebaum and Dexter (2017) showed that vegan men appear no less engaged by strength, power and athleticism, traits associated with hegemonic masculinity, but strongly challenge the idea that animal protein is required to obtain optimal health and physical fitness. The authors refer to this as hybrid masculinity, a process of modifying values associated with plant-based diets to align with traditional masculine standards. In a similar study, Delessio-Parson (2017) found that vegetarian men uphold their masculinity, and in so doing disassociate meat and gender, by making rationality-based claims and demonstrating strength. In this context, Kleeman & Schmidt (2016) highlight the importance of promoting new social and cultural norms by using vegan or vegetarian opinion leaders. Greenebaum and Dexter (2017) showed that plant-based

proteins endorsed by vegan athletes was a source of decreasing stigma towards vegan men. It may be the case that 'overtly' male competencies moderate attitudes and intentions towards reducing meat consumption in favour of more plant-based diets. de Visser *et al.* (2009) refer to the idea of compensating for the lack of one socially perceived masculine competency (e.g. meat consumption) by promoting other "manly" competencies (e.g. athleticism) as masculine capital. The potential of food to create a particular impression on others based on shared consumption stereotypes appears to partially explain the relative unwillingness of men to reduce their meat consumption. Given that 'meat is masculine' stereotypes continue to be peddled by food brands and in general food discourse (Hart, 2018; Rogers, 2008), addressing these tropes is the starting point in promoting meat consumption reduction among men.

References

Courtenay, W. H. (2000). Constructions of masculinity and their influence on men's well-being: a theory of gender and health. *Social Science & Medicine*, *50*(10), 1385-1401. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536(99)00390-1

Dabhade, A. (2021). *What is making flexitarians in the US and UK shift towards a meatless diet?* YouGov. Retrieved May 31 from https://yougov.co.uk/topics/food/articles-reports/2021/05/31/what-making-flexitarians-us-and-uk-shift-towards-m

De Backer, C., Erreygers, S., De Cort, C., Vandermoere, F., Dhoest, A., Vrinten, J., & Van Bauwel, S. (2020). Meat and masculinities. Can differences in masculinity predict meat consumption, intentions to reduce meat and attitudes towards vegetarians? *Appetite*, *147*, 104559. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2019.104559

De Visser, R. O., Smith, J. A., & McDonnell, E. J. (2009). 'That's not masculine' Masculine Capital and Health-related Behaviour. *Journal of health psychology*, *14*(7), 1047-1058. http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1359105309342299

Graça, J., Calheiros, M. M., & Oliveira, A. (2015). Attached to meat? (Un)Willingness and intentions to adopt a more plant-based diet. *Appetite*, *95*, 113-125. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2015.06.024

Hagger, M. S., & Chatzisarantis, N. L. D. (2006). Self-identity and the theory of planned behaviour: Between- and within-participants analyses. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *45*(4), 731-757. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1348/014466605X85654

Hart, D. (2018). Faux-meat and masculinity: The gendering of food on three vegan blogs. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue canadienne des études sur l'alimentation*, *5*(1), 133-155. https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v5i1.233

Kildal, C. L., & Syse, K. L. (2017). Meat and masculinity in the Norwegian Armed Forces. *Appetite*, *112*, 69-77. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2016.12.032

Love, H. J., & Sulikowski, D. (2018). Of meat and men: Sex differences in implicit and explicit attitudes toward meat. *Frontiers in psychology*, *9*, 559. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5920154/pdf/fpsyg-09-00559.pdf

Mintel. (2020). *PLANT-BASED PUSH: UK SALES OF MEAT-FREE FOODS SHOOT UP 40% BETWEEN 2014-19*. Mintel. Retrieved January 17th from

https://www.mintel.com/press-centre/food-and-drink/plant-based-push-uk-sales-of-meat-free-foods-shoot-up-40-between-2014-19
Nath, J. (2011). Gendered fare? A qualitative investigation of alternative food and masculinities. *Journal of Sociology*, *47*(3), 261-278.
Neuman, N., Mylan, J., & Paddock, J. (2020). Exploring (non-)meat eating and "translated cuisines" out of home: Evidence from three English cities. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, *44*(1), 25-32. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12542
Rogers, R. A. (2008). Beasts, Burgers, and Hummers: Meat and the Crisis of Masculinity in Contemporary Television Advertisements. *Environmental Communication*, *2*(3), 281-301. https://doi.org/10.1080/17524030802390250
Rosenfeld, D. L. (2018). The psychology of vegetarianism: Recent advances and future directions. *Appetite*, *131*, 125-138. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2018.09.011
Rothgerber, H. (2013). Real men don't eat (vegetable) quiche: Masculinity and the justification of meat consumption. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, *14*(4), 363-375.
Rozin, P., Hormes, J. M., Faith, M. S., & Wansink, B. (2012). Is meat male? A quantitative multimethod framework to establish metaphoric relationships. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *39*(3), 629-643.
Ruby, M. B., & Heine, S. J. (2011). Meat, morals, and masculinity. *Appetite*, *56*(2), 447-450. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2011.01.018
Schösler, H., de Boer, J., Boersema, J. J., & Aiking, H. (2015). Meat and masculinity among young Chinese, Turkish and Dutch adults in the Netherlands. *Appetite*, *89*, 152-159. https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2015.02.013
Sobal, J. (2005). Men, meat, and marriage: Models of masculinity. *Food and Foodways*, *13*(1-2), 135-158.
Sparks, P., & Guthrie, C. A. (1998). Self-Identity and the Theory of Planned Behavior: A Useful Addition or an Unhelpful Artifice? *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *28*(15), 1393-1410.
Sparks, P., & Shepherd, R. (1992). Self-Identity and the Theory of Planned Behavior: Assesing the Role of Identification with "Green Consumerism". *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *55*(4), 388-399. https://doi.org/10.2307/2786955
Thompson Jr, E. H., & Barnes, K. (2013). Meaning of sexual performance among men with and without erectile dysfunction. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, *14*(3), 271-280. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029104
Thompson Jr, E. H., & Bennett, K. M. (2015). Measurement of masculinity ideologies: A (critical) review. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, *16*(2), 115.
Thompson Jr, E. H., & Pleck, J. H. (1986). The structure of male role norms. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *29*(5), 531-543.
Vartanian, L. R. (2015). Impression management and food intake. Current directions in research. *Appetite*, *86*, 74-80. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2014.08.021
YouGov. (2021). *Are Brits reducing their consumption of meat?* YouGov. Retrieved October 31 from https://yougov.co.uk/topics/science/trackers/are-brits-reducing-their-consumption-of-meat