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Human Geography MA (Hons) 2021

**Meating the Mainstream:**

**A Critical Analysis of Meat Substitute Advertising in the American Fast-Food Industry.**

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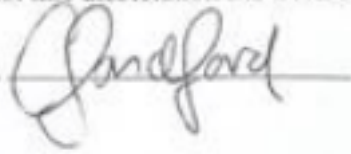


*Still taken from 'Malibu Yoga' (Carl's Jr., 2019a). Source: see [here](#) (Appendix B).*

**Declaration of Originality**

I hereby declare that this dissertation has been composed by me and is based on my own

work' Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sandford", written over a horizontal line.

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## **Abstract**

**Background:** Meat holds a special place in Western society, valued as a social commodity and a food integral to the modern meal. However, in response to a growing awareness of its ethical and environmental implications, meat substitutes are becoming an increasingly popular alternative, transitioning from the periphery to the mainstream of the American foodscape. As such, they are undergoing a process of transformation, navigating not only a new market but new forms of representation that could challenge, reinforce or re-imagine their cultural identities. Through a critical analysis of American fast-food advertisements published between 2018 and 2020, this dissertation aims to explore how the act of mainstreaming has altered the cultural identity of the meat substitute and its consumer, providing an insight into the social geographies of the American fast-foodscape. **Methods:** This dissertation has utilised a mixed-method approach in its analysis. This focused predominantly on qualitative media analysis, triangulating semiotic, categorical, intersectional and ecofeminist methodologies. Simple quantitative calculations were then integrated to support discussions of representational (in)equalities of the gendered, and racialized human body.

**Conclusion:** The transition of the meat substitute to the mainstream has fundamentally altered the identity of both product and consumer. This research found a discourse of plasticity to eradicate the product's ethical, alternative nature, now representing a form of commodity veg\*ism embedded firmly within the corporate food regime. The identity of its

consumer was also transformed from an ethical veg\*an to a flexitarian meat reducer. Secondly, it found discourses of body, voice and bite to challenge the meat substitute's previous femininity, framing it as a masculine product while revealing the identity of its master consumer to be a man. Finally, through an exploration of space this research identified a racialized discourse that more specifically defined the meat substitute's consumer as a *white* man, maintaining the racial exclusivity of veg\* while continuing to challenge its feminisation. Viewed in conjunction with themes of plasticity and masculinity this reveals the meat substitute to be implicit in a system of racialized, patriarchal oppression which distances it yet further from its ethical, alternative origins.

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## **1.0 Introduction**

This dissertation aims to explore, analyse and critically understand how American fast-food restaurants advertise their meat substitute products. By applying a critical semiotic analysis to visual, audio and text-based codes within their advertisements, this research aims first to identify the discursive strategies used to motivate product purchase. Drawing additionally upon category analysis and critical ecofeminist and intersectional lenses, it then seeks to explore how these strategies challenge, reinforce or re-imagine the cultural identity of the meat substitute and its consumer as it transitions to the mainstream. Providing an insight into the social geographies of the American fast-foodscape, this will be accomplished through a deconstruction of how represented objects contribute to cultural 'sense-making' through mediated interpretation.

## **1.1 Why is this research important?**

The ‘Meatification of Diets’ (Weis, 2013) represents one of the most significant challenges of our time (Tucker, 2014). Defined as the increasing demand for meat on the global scale, the average American adult consumed over 100 kilograms of meat in 2019 alone (OECD, 2020), representing a figure almost double what it was only two generations ago (Weis, 2013). This increase is attributed largely to meat’s special status in Western society, framed as a commodity integral to the modern meal and whose consumption is inherent to human nature (Joy, 2010: 106; Adams, 2010). However, although demand for meat remains high, the American public are beginning to recognise the scope of its ethical and environmental ‘hoofprint’ (Weis, 2013), linking the livestock industry to processes of deforestation (Mertens et al., 2002), high carbon emissions (Santo et al., 2020), and the slaughter of almost ten

9 billion animals per year (AnimalClock, 2021). As a result, many are starting to change their consumptive practices, looking for new ways to replace meat in the modern meal.

## **1.2 The Meat Substitute**

The ‘meat substitute’ has emerged as one solution to this problem (Tucker, 2014). Also known as a meat analogue, these products seek to: “approximate the texture, flavour, and/or nutrient profiles of farmed meat using ingredients derived from pulses, grains, oils, and other plants and/or fungi.” (Santo et al., 2020). Representing a different way of ‘making meat’ (Boyd, 2003), meat analogues previously represented a niche in the global food market, limited to the periphery of the American foodscape (Sarmiento, 2017). However, this is no

longer the case. Expanding beyond their nascence, the meat substitute has emerged into the mainstream, with their market expected to exceed \$85 billion (USD) by 2030 (Santo et al., 2020). As such, they are undergoing a process of transformation, navigating not only a new market but new forms of representation that could reinforce, or reinvent their cultural identities.

### **1.3 The Problem**

A growing body of literature has raised concern about the transition of substitute products to the mainstream (Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017), arguing their large-scale commodification could make them implicit in the very systems they aim to challenge (Fegitz & Pirani, 2018; Sarmiento, 2017). This led me to question what the act of mainstreaming meant for the meat substitute, and the people who consume it. Did they remain part of an alternative project that sought to challenge meatification, and its consequences? Or, inspired by this growing body of

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critique, did the transition of the alternative to the mainstream fundamentally alter its social identity?

#### **1.3.1 Why Fast-Food?**

Although there is no singular definition of a fast-food restaurant, within this dissertation it will be understood as a: “food service outlet[] quickly serving inexpensive foods with minimal preparation and table service” (Fleischhacker et al., 2011: 461). Within the American context, this understanding is often brand-specific, and thus will be further defined as a ‘chain restaurant’ which is inherently corporate in nature (Block et al., 2004; Theimann

& Roman-Alacá, 2019).

Both spatially and economically dominant in the American foodscape (Mason et al., 2018: 176), fast-food represents a key example of a ‘mainstream’ industry (Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017). It is also an industry that is actively adopting the meat substitute into its food practice, with more than 12 brands currently serving meat substitutes as part of their permanent menu (Appendix A). Therefore, fast-food represents a suitable site through which to explore the cultural identity of the mainstream meat substitute in America.

### 1.3.2 Why Advertising?

As posited by Domzal & Kernan (1992: 49): “consumers use advertising to learn new meanings, and to confirm/reinforce those they already know.” As a result, representing a form of direct communication between fast-food restaurant and consumer, advertising provides a suitable site through which to explore how the identity of the meat substitute and its consumer have been altered in its transition to the mainstream.

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### **1.4 Key Research Questions:**

- 1) How is the meat substitute represented within American fast-food advertising?
- 2) How have these representations changed its identity as a product?
- 3) How have these representations changed the identity of its consumer?
- 4) What are the implications of these constructions for the American foodscape, and those who inhabit it?

## **2.0 Conceptual Framework**

This chapter will outline the conceptual framework that forms the foundation of this research. Defined as a “network of...linked concepts” which structure an “interpretative approach to social reality” (Jabareen, 2009: 51) food will first be positioned within a socio-geographical lens (Del Casino, 2015), acknowledging its role in the creation of meaning and identity in

contemporary society. Food systems theory (Tansey & Worsley, 2014) will then be used to situate the fast-food industry and its meat substitute product within the American foodscape, identifying key actors and outlining previous studies. Critical ecofeminist and intersectional lenses will then be explored in relation to these systems of power, concluding with the specific role of advertising in the creation of social meaning.

## **2.1 The Social Geographies of Food**

“Food can tell us about anything and everything. It’s simultaneously molecular, bodily, social, economic, cultural, global, political, environmental, physical and human geography”

(Probyn, 1999; Crewe, 2001; Stassart & Whatmore, 2003 cited in Cook et al., 2006: 656).

The study of food has a long history within the school of geography. Focused predominantly on the systems involved in its production, explorations to date have generally understood food as a material commodity (Del Casino, 2015), situated within discourses of development (Smith et al., 2000), environment (Weis, 2013) and health (Bell & Valentine, 1997: 3).

Inspired by Cook et al.’s pivotal series on ‘following food’ (2006, 2008, 2011), this dissertation diverges from this dominant body of literature, grounded instead within an emerging discipline known as the ‘social geographies of food’ (Del Casino, 2015).

Integrating previously divorced schools of geography, sociology and anthropology (Bell &

Valentine, 1997; Cook et al., 2006), this approach bridges the gap between production and consumption, understanding food as a complex social phenomenon (Fiddes, 1994;

Appadurai, 1988) which both produces and is produced by its cultural context (Counihan & van Esterik, 2012). Viewed through this lens, food represents a site through which the researcher can delve deeply into the workings of the contemporary world (Cook et al., 2006:

656; Del Casino, 2015; Griggs, 1995; Goodman, 2016), thus framing the meat substitute as a suitable focus of geographic enquiry.

### 2.1.1 Food Identities

Central to the socio-geographic approach is an understanding that “we are where we eat” (Bell & Valentine, 1997: 1). Unpacking this statement reveals the existence of two ideologies, both of which will underpin explorations of the meat substitute within this dissertation. The first is that performances of food are active in the creation of identity, shaping the way we see ourselves and the way we perceive others to be (Del Casino, 2015; Bourdieu, 1984: 487; Tucker, 2014). Drawing on the work of Mary Douglas (1975), this understands the meat substitute to be a cultural symbol that conveys meaning through a series of social codes (Yan, 2012). It also understands performances of cooking, buying and eating to be inherently political (Bell & Valentine, 1997; Sarmiento, 2017), representing a medium through which identities of race, gender and sexuality are performed and contested (Del Casino, 2015; Adams, 2010; hooks, 1992; Beverland, 2014; Guthman & DuPuis, 2006). The second is that these perceptions are context-specific, situated within a particular temporal and spatial moment (Grigg, 1995: 339; Millstone & Lang, 2009). This ‘moment’ reveals the centrality of geography to the symbolic exploration of food as identities cannot be divorced from the places and spaces in which they are constructed (Cook et al., 2006).

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### 2.1.2 Food Embodiments

Through its specific focus on performance (Cook et al., 2006; Adams, 2010; Butler, 1988), the social geographies of food also understand food to be an embodied experience (Guthman & DuPuis, 2006). Placing the human body at the heart of its exploration (Rose, 1995), this

dissertation will use the idea of embodiment to read how the meat substitute is performed within advertising discourse. This will include a specific focus on how consumption shapes the identity of the product and the body that consumes it.

## **2.2 The American Food System**

### 2.2.1 Food Systems Theory

As outlined by Tansey & Worsley (2014; Marion, 1986; Harris, 2009) food systems theory understands cultural conceptions of food to be shaped by a complex network of actors, each imbued with varying degrees of power and control (Cook et al., 2006: 658; Allievi et al., 2015). Operating at both the local and global scale (Conradson, 2005 cited in Cummins et al., 2007) this network of actors works together to create ‘regimes’ of food (Friedmann, 2005; MacDonald, 2013; McMichael, 2005) each imbued with its own meanings, definitions and expectations. These regimes are not fixed but rather are constantly negotiated across space and time (Hudson, 2004; Schösler et al., 2012; Miles, 2000), the balance of which inherently shapes the foodscape of a particular context.

### 2.2.2 Fast-Food and the Corporate Food Regime

Through an examination of contemporary literature, two food regimes were found to operate within the American foodscape. As explored by McMichael (2005) the first and most

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pervasive is the ‘corporate food regime’. A system defined by its neoliberal, capitalist nature, within this regime a few corporate ‘actors’ hold the majority of the system’s power, controlling processes of food production and consumption (McMichael, 2005; 2009). As such, it is a regime characterised by socio-economic inequality, linked by David Harvey to



processes of dispossession that disadvantage less affluent, minority populations (2003). Both spatially and economically dominant in the American foodscape (Mason et al., 2018: 176), the fast-food restaurant represents in many ways the ultimate corporate actor (Theimann & Roman-Alacá, 2019; Schlosser, 2001: 7) and a key example of a ‘mainstream’ industry (Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017).

### *The All-American Meal*

A phenomenon Rizter (1993) terms the ‘McDonalidization of Society’, the dominance of this corporate fast-food regime has revolutionised the way the American consumer thinks about their food – and in particular, their meat (Schlosser, 2001; Pollan, 2011). Taking the ‘hamburger’ as one particularly poignant example, as explored by Schlosser the fast-food industry has constructed an ideal of the burger as the “quintessential American meal” (2001: 6), valued for its standardised format, convenience and crucially its beef patty (Keefe, 2018). Building on an established history of its social value (Fiddes, 1994; Joy, 2010) this perpetuates the idea that meat is integral to the American meal structure (Buerkle, 2009; Greenebaum, 2012 cited in Jallinjoa et al., 2019), making fast-food complicit in the ethical and environmental degradation that stems from meatification (Weis, 2013).

### *The Meat-Masculinity Nexus*

Within the corporate food regime, Buerkle (2009: 79) and Craig (1992) have also explored meat as a symbol through which ‘man’ can assert his masculinity. Termed by DeLessio

Parson as the “meat masculinity nexus” (2017: 1730), this association is built on normative, Western understandings of ‘masculine’ as strong, virile and powerful (Adams, 2010), which are then projected onto the meat product. As explored by Stănescu (2017) in relation to Burger King’s Whopper, this rhetoric was used previously within the fast food industry to appeal to the masculine consumer, with particular emphasis on the consumption of meat as a way to fulfil man’s “sexual appetite” (Buerkle, 2009: 79).

### *Culinary Nationalism*

“Fast food is not just a form of consumerism; it is a way of life, permeating all strata of American society” (Schlosser, 2001: 4).

As documented by Schlosser in his pioneering ‘Fast Food Nation’, fast-food is now deeply embedded within the American foodscape. As a result, it has been transformed into a form of ‘culinary nationalism’ (Ferguson, 2004; Schlosser, 2001: 2) in which its food identity is tied inherently to the American nation. This is a phenomenon explored by Fantasia (1995), who found that fast-food outlets outside the American context maintained their nature as an “American place” (: 228). Therefore, this dissertation understands the value of meat and its masculinity to be a distinctly American phenomenon, tied inherently to its national foodscape.

### *Wider Literature*

It must be noted that these cultural understandings of fast-food were among the minority

within socio-geographic literature. The majority of studies focused on its relationship with obesity (Fleischhacker, 2011; Fraser et al., 2010) with a particular emphasis on how this adversely affects low income, ethnic minority populations (see Block et al.'s (2004) New Orleans study as one example). This again highlights the crucial need for research in this area, reinforcing the motivations for this dissertation while also revealing the corporate regime to be implicit in the production of socio-economic inequality.

### 2.2.3 The Alternative Food Regime

Defined centrally by its rejection of the corporate, the second regime found to operate within the American foodscape is the 'alternative' (Sarmiento, 2017; Harris, 2009; Whatmore & Thorne, 1997; Freidmann, 2005). An area of particular focus within recent geographic study, this regime seeks to combat the negative effects of mass production and consumption systems, representing a form of resistance (Fegitz & Pirani, 2018; Holloway et al., 2010) against neoliberal dispossession (Harvey, 2003).

#### *Alternative Veg\*ism*

As meat and its livestock industry are central to the corporate food system, an active site of alternative resistance is the exclusion of meat from the modern diet. Rosenfeld & Burrow (2017), Plante et al. (2019), Fox & Ward (2008) and Rosenfeld et al., (2020) found this alternative practice of not eating meat to divide consumer identities between:

1. Veg\* - comprising vegetarians who do not eat meat, and vegans who do not eat any form of animal by-product (Fegitz & Pirani, 2018; Rosenfeld, 2019; Rothgerber,

2013; Ruby, 2012).

2. and Omnivores – individuals who eat meat.

### *Gender, Race & Veg\*ism*

Viewed through the “meat masculinity nexus” (De-Lessio Parson, 2017: 1730), the opposition of meat vs veg\* has been further dichotomised within American society. As explored by Adams (2010) and Buerkle (2009), through the embodied act of meat consumption the omnivorous body has become inscribed with masculine characteristics of power, while veg\*ans embody feminised characteristics of passivity and weakness. As a result, Rosenfeld (2020) found women more likely to define themselves as veg\*, and advocate for veg\* practice amongst others. The veg\* identity has also been strongly associated with the white body, with Carter (2016) and Bailey (2007) both finding high cost and its incompatibility with ‘soul food’ meal structures excluded the black community from veg\* practice (Slocum, 2010).

### *Alternative vs Corporate*

As a product that seeks fundamentally to replace meat within the modern meal, the meat substitute can thus be positioned within the white, feminine realm of alternative veg\*. On the other hand, the omnivore is framed as a diverse, masculine identity that exists within the corporate fast-food regime. The situation of the meat substitute and the fast-food industry within opposing regimes highlights the importance of analysing the meat substitute at the critical juncture of its mainstreaming, recognising that this change of context may fundamentally alter its identity within the American foodscape.

## **2.3 The Meat Substitute**

### 2.3.1 Previous Studies

Due to its recent emergence onto the national marketplace, no studies to date have explored the meat substitute within the realm of American fast-food. Rödl (2018) was the only found to engage with meat substitutes in terms of their cultural representation, revealing their British advertisements to reinforce the myth of meat as central to society. In a grounded theory study, Nath & Prideaux (2011) explored the meat substitute as a social commodity, which they found allowed Australian veg\*ans to participate in spaces of eating. All other studies focused on consumer acceptance, outlining the motivations for meat substitute consumption, and its primary barriers. These explored how the meat substitute could be taken up on a wider scale, positioned distinctly before its transition to the mainstream.

### 2.3.2 Motivations

Reflecting on its situation within the alternative veg\* regime, motivations for meat substitute consumption were found to stem predominantly from an ethical imperative, either to reduce the ecological hoofprint (Weis, 2013) of meat production or avoid the necessity of animal slaughter (Hoek et al., 2011; Ruby, 2012; Szejda et al., 2020). Several studies also found health to be a factor in its consumption, with the meat substitute often perceived as ‘healthier’ or ‘lighter’ than meat products (Elzerman et al., 2011; Apostilodis & McLeay, 2016; Szejda et al., 2020; Hoek et al., 2011).

Schösler et al. (2012) and Fuentes & Fuentes (2017) were the only scholars to explore motivations outside the veg\* realm, both finding that substitute products were more likely to

be accepted if they became ‘plastic’ (Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017), meaning they fit into existing consumption patterns.

### 2.3.3 Barriers

#### *Sensory Inferiority*

Meat has long held a central place within Western society (Joy, 2011). It represents a crucial part of the contemporary meal structure, and a key aspect of meal satisfaction within the mainstream fast-foodscape (Schlosser, 2001; Keefe, 2018). As a result, many consumers remained reluctant to purchase meat substitutes as they expected them to be inferior in terms of taste, texture and sensory experience (Hoek et al., 2011). Schösler et al. (2012) found this to be particularly true of meals whose central aspect was meat, and thus a significant barrier within a fast-food context in which the dominant meal structure is the beef burger (Schlosser, 2001).

#### *Neophobia*

Hoek et al. (2011) and Schösler et al. (2012) found many consumers were reluctant to try meat substitutes as they seemed scary, unfamiliar or ‘other’ (see also Ruby, 2012; Cook et al., 2011). This is a phenomenon Pliner & Hobden call ‘neophobia’ (1992: 105), meaning fear of the new. Cox & Evans (2008) also found consumers experienced technophobia, meaning they feared the advancing technologies that enable the meat substitute to mimic meat.

### *Exclusivity*

Due to the rigidity of the veg\* identity, the meat substitute has also been perceived as a product reserved for consumption by the veg\* body (Sarmiento, 2017), excluding the flexitarian<sup>1</sup> and omnivorous consumer from its practice. Carter (2016) also found meat substitutes to be racially exclusive, unable to replace the central place of meat in ‘soul food’ for black Americans.

### *Threat to Masculinity*

As previously discussed in relation to the corporate food regime, there exists a widespread conception within contemporary America that “real men eat meat” (De Backer et al., 2020: 1; Adams, 2010). For the normative American man, the feminization of the meat substitute thus represents a threat to his masculine identity, and a significant barrier to its consumption (De Backer et al., 2020). However, Beckett (2013 cited in Rödl, 2018) found this did not act as a barrier to feminine consumption, revealing women overall to be more inclined to purchase meat substitutes.

### 2.3.4 Tensions

Although not specific to the meat substitute, a growing body of literature is exploring the consequences of the commodification of ‘alternative’ products. Fegitz & Pirani (2018) argue

that the popularity of veg\*ism has made it cool and sexy, whilst eradicating its political nature. Sarmiento (2017: 492) also recognises the inherent tension between competing alternative and mainstream identities, while Kennedy posits that the “marriage of profit with

<sup>1</sup> Flexitarian refers to an individual reducing their meat intake, while not strictly veg\*.

principle is an uneasy one” (2004: 41). Conversely, Fuentes & Fuentes’ (2017) exploration of milk substitute marketing found that although this transition does involve a form of appropriation, it does not inherently de-politicise the nature of the alternative product. Therefore, more research is needed as this phenomenon progresses, reinforcing the necessity of this study.

## **2.4 Critical Lenses**

This conceptual framework has framed the meat substitute as a commodity central to the expression of identity, whose understandings, motivations and barriers are tied inherently to the power of actors within the food system. As a result, analysing how the meat substitute and its consumer are represented within advertising discourse requires the use of two critical lenses.

### **2.4.1 The Critical Intersectional Lens**

Drawn foundationally from the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), the critical intersectional lens understands that systems of oppression do not operate in isolation. Rather, it acknowledges that multiple lines of power operate at once, meaning identity categories of race, gender, class and sexuality work together to shape the material realities of the individual



within a particular space (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Cooper, 2016). No research to date has explored the meat substitute in relation to these lines of power. However, in the context of fast-food, bell hooks' idea of 'eating the other' (1992) is of particular interest. This idea understands the mainstreaming of racialized foods to be a form of appropriation whereby "ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture" (hooks, 1992: 21). In the case of fast-food, the only study found to engage with this

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idea was Bost's (2003) exploration of Taco Bell's advertisements, which she found to commodify Mexican cultural identities.

#### 2.4.2 The Critical Ecofeminist Lens

A sub-set of feminist theory, the ecofeminist lens goes beyond an exploration of how representations perpetuate or challenge the oppression of women (Muller, 2020; Rogers, 2008). Instead, it integrates a 'more-than-human' approach (Whatmore, 2018), valuing the life world of the animal as equal to that of the human (Emel & Urbanik, 2005). Within this school, this review found no literature to engage with the meat substitute specifically.

However, a plethora exists which explore the oppressive systems involved in meat practice, of which Carol Adam's work on the sexual politics of meat has been particularly influential.

Situated within a contemporary Western context, she argues that practices of meat are bound to the gendered body, with performances of cooking and serving belonging to the feminine realm, while practices of consumption are reserved for the masculine (Adams, 2010).

DeLessio-Parson (2017) found similar gender framing to occur in Argentina, whose "culture of meat" (:1736) was defined by women serving and men eating. As explored by Muller (2020) veg\*ism is thus a distinctly ecofeminist practice as it challenges systems of gendered meat oppression, contextualising why for so long the veg\* diet was performed predominantly

by the feminine body.

Adams also understands the oppression of women and animals to be inherently linked through the common association between women and nature (2010; see also Rogers, 2008), both of whom are dominated by the man. Her work on the ‘Pornography of Meat’ (2004) is of particular note, exploring how advertising makes the practice of eating meat a sexual experience by transforming the feminine body into the eaten animal (Figure 2.1), or even into

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the ‘Patriarchal Burger’ (Adams, 2010; Figure 2.2). These frame the practice of consuming meat as a means of consuming women (Buerkle, 2009) – an idea that will be used to explore how the meat substitute engages with gendered oppression.



Figure 2.1 – An Image of Woman as Meat from ‘The Sexual Politics of Meat.’ Source: Adams (1990).

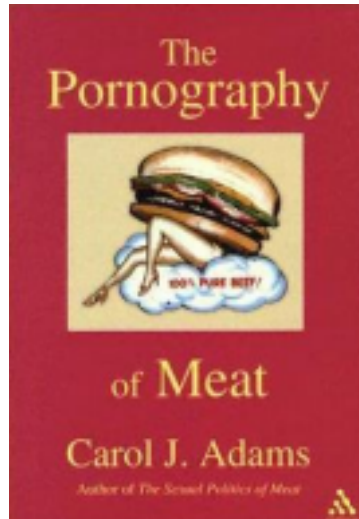


Figure 2.2 – An Image of Woman as Burger from ‘The Pornography of Meat’. Source: Adams (2004).

## 2.5 Advertising

Drawing again from the work of Cook et al. (2008), advertisements are understood as more than just a means of selling product (:821). Rather, advertisements “are formed by culture and...help to form the culture” (Solik, 2014: 213), representing a powerful medium through which actors attempt to alter food meanings within our society. Although they construct an imagined reality, their portrayals reflect existing social norms, meaning and ideologies while simultaneously re-framing them as part of a persuasive function (Solik, 2014; Reisiigl & Wodak, 2009). As a result, they are tied inherently to the production of social identity, shaping our conceptions of gender, race and sexuality (Adams, 1990; 2004; Vokey et al., 2013). In the case of the fast-food restaurant, now understood to be a powerful actor within the American foodscape, these constructions are likely to have significant reach and thus are of particular note to the researcher. Therefore, fast-food advertisements represent a suitable site through which to examine how the identity of the meat substitute and its consumer are

being presented within the mainstream.

Furthermore, as posited by Postero: “while such processes of construction are discursive and symbolic, they have important material and symbolic repercussions in the real world.” (2013: 108). Therefore, examined through the ecofeminist and intersectional lenses the study of advertising allows the researcher to explore how lines of representational power shape the experiences of the individual within the American fast-foodscape.

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### **3.0 Methodology**

Now situated within its conceptual framework, this chapter will describe and justify the methods used to collect, analyse and understand advertising data within this dissertation. The limitations of this approach and my positionality as the researcher will then be discussed with particular reference to its impact on semiotic interpretation.

#### **3.1 Data Collection**

Data in the case of this dissertation refers to meat substitute advertisements produced and distributed by American fast-food companies. Ranging from graphic video commercials to the text and imagery present on the products themselves, these media are both physically and virtually pervasive within the American space (Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017; Schlosser, 2001),

revealing data supply to be extensive, and potentially overwhelming. To reduce its volume, while complying with the travel limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, this dissertation focuses solely on secondary, naturally occurring data<sup>2</sup>sourced from the internet. An imagined space defined by its expansive, complex and ever-changing nature, data collection methodologies were structured around rigid search criteria formulated to navigate its tumultuous topography (Best & Krueger, 2004; Hox & Boeije, 2004).

The first stage of data collection was to identify which fast-food restaurants in America served plant-based products. Using online fast-food databases, a list of general brands names was first compiled, then verified against the established definition of a ‘fast-food restaurant’<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Data which would exist regardless of the researcher’s presence (Lynch, 2002)

<sup>3</sup> See Introduction, p. 11.

The product range of each was then investigated through an exploration of their American websites and through keyword searches of ‘[brand]’ and ‘meat substitute’ in the Google search engine. This was later expanded to include the terms ‘plant-based’ (common product labelling within the fast-food industry), ‘Impossible’ and ‘Beyond’ (the two major meat analogue suppliers for the US fast-food industry), whose significance emerged during the research process.

To align with the core aims of this dissertation, inclusion criteria were further limited at this stage. This restricted data to adverts published between 2018 and 2020, providing a ‘cultural window’ that would ensure the knowledges produced were temporally and socially located (Postero, 2013). To represent a more specific example of mainstreaming, criteria was also limited to brands that operated over 200 locations, and whose meat substitute products were

permanent additions to their menu. Suppliers and their corresponding product names were then compiled into a database (Appendix A), noting the year of release and the status of its current availability.

From this list, I framed a targeted keyword search around the following phrase combination: '[brand]' AND '[corresponding product]' AND ('advertisement' OR 'commercial' OR 'advert'). This was then entered back into the Google search engine, and advertising database iSpot, supplemented by an additional manual search of fast-food websites and their social media platforms. A total of 67 advertisements were then saved into a collective database through screen recordings or image downloads. Of these, I have chosen 18 videos and 2 photographic adverts as a representative sample for deeper analysis (Appendix B). It is this sample that will be discussed within the analysis chapter, referred to as the 'collective sample' or 'sample body'.

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### **3.2 Mixed-Methods Approach**

To comprehensively explore the social geographies of the meat substitute product within the American fast-foodscape, this dissertation has utilised a mixed-method approach in its analysis. This focused predominantly on qualitative media analysis, triangulating (Heale & Forbes, 2013) semiotic, categorical, intersectional and ecofeminist methodologies to facilitate a "close, richly contextualised analysis" (Burgess & Green, 2018: 9) of the collective sample. Simple quantitative methodologies were then integrated as a secondary form of analysis, used to support discussions of representational (in)equalities of the gendered, and racialised human body.

#### **3.2.1 Critical Semiotic Analysis**

Although triangulated between multiple methodologies, analysis has been grounded primarily in a critical semiotic approach (Solík, 2014; Bianchi, 2011). Defined as “the study of signs and symbols” (Veg-Sala & Roux, 2018: 437), semiotic analysis examines how represented ‘objects’ (images, text and sound) communicate meaning through interpretation by the reader. Reflecting on Douglas’ (1975) conception of food as symbolic, and Solik’s (2014) understanding of advertising as a form of cultural communication, semiotic analysis was thus identified as a means through which the socio-cultural constructions of meat substitute products could be understood within this investigation (Bianchi, 2011).

### *Semiotic Frameworks*

Critical semiotic analysis was organised around two interlocking application frameworks. The first, and most crucial is borrowed from the early work of Zakia & Nadin (1987: 9). Grounded in a Peircean understanding of semiosis, this is defined foundationally by an understanding of meaning as communicated between:

- 1) the object (physical or imagined)
- 2) the representamen (sign, which refers to the object)
- 3) the interpretant (referring in this case to myself as the reader, who interprets the sign)

(Zakia & Nadin, 1987: 8).

Building on this definition, Zakia & Nadin developed a practical methodology in which signs and symbols are analysed using an interpretant matrix. Shown in Figure 3.1, this matrix is structured around key themes, or ‘meanings’, which are critically identified from an initial reading of the advertising data (Rödl, 2018: 337; Zakia & Nadin, 1987). Following this, for each emergent meaning its iconic, indexical and symbolic objects (Figure 3.1) are separated in order to understand if, and how, this meaning is conveyed (Zakia & Nadin, 1987). As such, it operates as a means to prove thematic hypotheses within advertising discourse.

This interpretant matrix was applied to the 20 advertisements that make up the sample body. These matrices were then condensed to form Appendix C, which identifies the key semiotic aspects operating throughout the sample body, specifying instances where they are particularly poignant as well as examples of opposition.



Interpretant Matrix			
Object of Advertisement	Meaning 1	Meaning 2	Meaning 3
<b>Iconic</b> <i>Signs that signify by resemblance e.g. a burger stands for a burger.</i>			
<b>Indexic</b> <i>Signs that signify through implication e.g. smoke implies the presence of fire.</i>			
<b>Symbolic</b> <i>Signs that signify through meanings which are learned e.g. the letters F-I-R-E stand for the concept of fire.</i>			

Figure 3.1– A Blank Interpretant Matrix. Source: Nadin & Ockerse (cited in Zakia & Nadin, 1987). Definitions supplemented by Mick & Oswald (2006)

Brand contracts	Brand narratives	Examples
Delimitation contract	Time	Foundation of the brand: date; origin of sector development
	Place	Country, city, street, evocative places, direction
Determination contract	State and life stage	Age groups (adult, childhood), gender (male, female), transition (beautiful to ugly) or other states (travel, feelings)
	Character	Characters (Marlboro cowboy), female or male archetypes, celebrities
Mastery contract	Know-how	Real know-how (quality of products, services or knowledge)
	Material	Natural and technological materials, trade of the brand or sale of a component (natural or technological)

Figure 3.2 – Brand Narratives and Contracts. Source: Remaury, 2004 (in Veg-Sala & Roux, 2018: 437)<sup>4</sup>

Drawing on the pioneering work of Umberto Eco (1989 cited in Solik, 2014), the second centres around the acknowledgement of the *intentio operis*<sup>5</sup> as persuasion, with advertisement involving the active subversion of negative perceptions, and the amplification of desirability.

<sup>4</sup> Veg-Sala & Roux is cited as Remaury's original is written in French, therefore I was unable to access it.

<sup>5</sup> The text's purpose (Solik, 2014)

chapter, Remaury's framework of brand narratives and contracts was then used to identify and interpret persuasive strategies within the advertising sample (Figure 3.2), guiding the application of the interpretant matrix and structuring analysis in the proceeding chapters.

### 3.2.2 Intersectionality and the Ecofeminist Lens

As outlined within the conceptual framework, this dissertation will use critical intersectional and ecofeminist lenses to underpin semiotic analysis. These enable the reader to understand how lines of power and oppression operate within advertising discourse, exploring how their interaction communicates social understandings that alter lived realities within these spaces (Crenshaw, 1989). It also allows the researcher to limit the variations in interpretive understanding which stem from reader positionality, facilitating the 'critical' nature of this semiotic approach (Solik, 2014).

### 3.2.3 Category Analysis

The final qualitative method utilised within this dissertation is Harvey Sacks' (1992) Category Analysis (CA). A means of exploring how identities are constructed, contested and performed (Oldrup & Carstensen, 2012: 223), this will be used to examine how iconic and symbolic objects place meat substitute products and the people who consume them into social categories, each of which are accompanied by expected behaviours, characteristics and meanings (Hester & Eglin, 1997).

### 3.2.4 Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative methodologies were limited to basic numerical calculations of the ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ body and voice, as well as ‘white’ vs ‘racialized’ figures (Appendix D, E). These were used to support discussions of representational (in)equalities which emerged through a categorical-semiotic analysis.

### 3.3 Positionality

Imperative to a critical semiotic approach is an acknowledgement of my positionality as the reader and researcher (Solík, 2014; Rose, 1995). An act of self-reflexivity (Bourke, 2014; Kobayashi, 2003), this recognises the process of symbolic interpretation to be far from neutral (Haraway, 1988). Rather, although tempered by its ‘critical’ nature, knowledges produced within this dissertation are mediated through my worldview (Kezar, 2002: 96) as a white, middle-class, vegetarian, English woman. Positioning me as ‘other’ to the American context, and ‘within’ the feminine veg\* identity category from which the meat substitute originated, these overlapping identities (Kezar, 2002: 96) foundationally influence my interpretation of the text (Haraway, 1988), introducing positive bias towards the product while limiting my cultural understanding of the USA. It must also be noted that although informed by the literature, it is from this Western worldview that I interpret signs of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’, and ‘white’ and ‘racialized’ within the advertising foodscape.

In outlining my positionality, I must also acknowledge the fact that “discourse creates its discursive subject” (Harris, 2009, 60; Wylie, 2006: 303). As a result, discussions of race and

gender within this dissertation must be conscious of their impact on wider society, reinforcing the need for a critical approach.

### **3.4 Limitations**

Arguably, the most significant limitation to this investigation was its restriction to the remote. COVID-19 meant I was unable to situate this research in the physical spaces of American fast-food restaurants, where it would have been possible to see interactions between advertisement, product and consumer operate in-situ. Reflecting on the nature of semiotic analysis, although informed by an academic and cultural context, an acknowledgement of positionality does not negate the subjective nature of media interpretation. Therefore, this dissertation is also limited by its use of a single textual reader (myself), leaving room for future explorations which might provide a more diverse perspective.

#### **4.0 Analysis**

This chapter will analyse three discursive strategies found to operate within the American fast-foodscape. Structured around Remaury's narratives framework (Figure 4.1), this will begin with an exploration of the 'mastery contract' as it relates to ideas of plasticity, identity and (de-)politicisation. The 'determination contract' will then be examined, deconstructing how presented bodies and characters engage with myths of gender and sexuality. Finally, the 'delimitation contract' will be discussed in relation to the myth of race, exploring how these narratives situate the meat substitute within the American space.

Brand contracts	Brand narratives	Examples
Delimitation contract	Time	Foundation of the brand: date; origin of sector development
	Place	Country, city, street, evocative places, direction
Determination contract	State and life stage	Age groups (adult, childhood), gender (male, female), transition (beautiful to ugly) or other states (travel, feelings)
	Character	Characters (Marlboro cowboy), female or male archetypes, celebrities
Mastery contract	Know-how	Real know-how (quality of products, services or knowledge)
	Material	Natural and technological materials, trade of the brand or sale of a component (natural or technological)

Figure 4.1 – Brand Narratives and Contracts. Source: Remaury, 2004 (cited in Veg-Sala & Roux, 2018: 437)

#### 4.1 Plasticity, Identity and De-Politicisation

As outlined within the conceptual framework, understandings of ‘food’ are not constructed in the abstract. Rather, they are the product of food systems categorised by interlocking regimes, each imbued with its own meanings, definitions and expectations (Friedmann., 2005; MacDonald, 2013: 101; McMichael, 2005). In the case of the meat substitute product, although previously restricted to the periphery of the American foodscape, its transition to the mainstream has rendered its identity ambiguous (Chiles, 2013), embodying an oxymoronic

middle ground between ‘alternative’ and ‘corporate’.

To understand how American fast-food brands are navigating these opposing food regimes, this chapter centres around the ‘mastery contract’ (Remaury, 2004 cited in Veg-Sala & Roux, 2018). Examining how advertisements mobilise discourses of quality, knowledge and brand identity, critical semiotic and categorical analysis will be organised around two concepts. Inspired by the work of Fuentes & Fuentes (2017), the first is the idea of ‘plasticity’. A concept rooted firmly within the corporate food regime, this is a strategy through which ‘alternative’ products conform to existing food practices rather than creating new ones (Hoek et al., 2011). The second is ‘ethical alternativism’ – an umbrella term formulated to describe strategies that mobilise ethical discourses of animal rights and environmental justice, as outlined within the conceptual framework (Hoek et al., 2011; Ruby, 2012; Whatmore & Thorne, 1997). By exploring if, and how these discursive strategies operate, this chapter aims to understand how the act of ‘mainstreaming’ has shaped the identity of the meat substitute product and its consumer within the American fast-foodscape.

#### 4.1.1 Mirroring

Examining first the presentation of the product itself, throughout the sample body all brands were found to deploy strategies of linguistic, and visual mirroring (Appendix C). A central example of plasticity, these emphasise the ‘substitutive’ aspect of the meat analogue by presenting it in a way that mimics that of an existing meat product.



Figure 4.2 – Side by side comparison of the Original ‘Whopper’ (Burger King, 2020c) and the ‘Impossible Whopper’ (Burger King, 2019i) Sources: see [here](#) and [here](#) (Appendix B)

Best explained through an exploration of Burger King’s ‘Impossible Whopper’, strategic mirroring was identified most powerfully in the case of product labelling (Szejda et al., 2020). As evident through an examination of Figure 4.2, both products are clearly defined by the category of ‘Whopper’. A term used originally to symbolise Burger King’s most famous beef burger, the ‘Whopper’ is a concept already familiar to the fast-food consumer, imbued with positive associations of taste, quality and satisfaction (Beef2Live, 2021). By extending the application of this category to the Impossible Whopper, the meat substitute is framed as a

variant of its meat predecessor (Wansink, 2002 cited in Schösler et al., 2012) rather than a product defined as new, scary or other (Hoek et al., 2011). Informed by an understanding of uptake barriers as outlined within the conceptual framework (Szejda et al., 2020) this represents an attempt to overcome feelings of neophobia (fear of the new) by defining the plant-based substitute in meat-based terms (Elzerman et al., 2013), and thus a central example of plasticity within advertising discourse.



Considering next the presence of iconic objects, the Impossible Whopper is also presented as visually similar to the Original Whopper. Featuring distinctive layering of lettuce, tomato, onion, pickle, ‘patty’ and a sesame bun (Figure 4.2) this iconic mirroring means both products are not only recognisable as ‘Whoppers’ but are categorised foundationally as ‘burgers.’ A meal structure central to the American fast-foodscape (Schlosser, 2001), this allows the consumer to purchase the meat substitute “without having to radically reconfigure their food practices” (Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017: 549), revealing the nature of this meat substitute to be inherently plastic.

#### 4.1.2 No Beef

However, these strategies of mirroring centre fundamentally around categorical *variation*, defining the meat substitute by both its similarity to, and its difference from conventional meat products. Returning to Figure 4.2, although its name and appearance mirror the Original Whopper, the Impossible Whopper is made distinct through an emphasis on its meat-less nature. Identified using contextual knowledge of the industry, this is firstly through the additional label of “Impossible” – one of the most popular meat substitute brands within the fast-food industry. This is then reinforced through the assertion: “100% Whopper, 0% Beef”

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(Figure 4.2). This communicates clearly to even the contextually naïve reader that the product belongs within the category of ‘Whopper’ while remaining outside the category of “beef”, thus differentiating it from the Whopper’s original iteration.

Representing the first (and indeed, only) glimpse of ethical alternativism within the collective

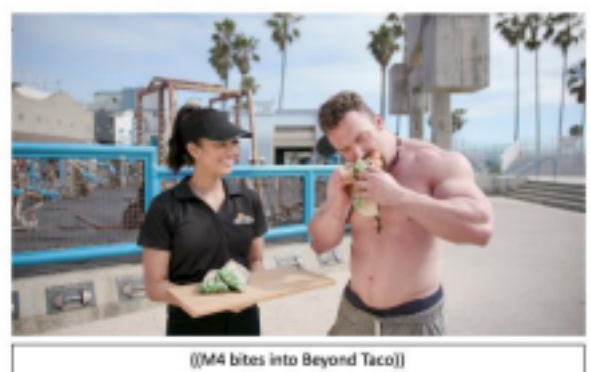
sample, this ‘no beef’ assertion implies the absence of animal slaughter, alluding to an ethical imperative in terms of animal justice (Hoek et al., 2011; Ruby, 2012). However, lacking explicit mentions of the animal or the ethical implications of the livestock industry, this rhetoric could be easily missed by the more casual lay reader. Furthermore, viewed through an ecofeminist lens the use of the term ‘beef’ represents a form of continued socio-spatial disassociation (Gillespie, 2011; Rotherberger, 2014) which renders the animal origins of the product invisible from the consumer (Miele & Evans, 2010). A phenomenon Adam’s calls the ‘absent referent’ (2010), this perpetuates a reality where the ‘burger’ exists symbolically as a construct divorced from the idea of ‘cow’, obscuring the consequences of the corporate regime of production. Therefore, representative of the collective sample (Appendix C) the Impossible Whopper was not situated within the alternative sphere but rather was embedded within the corporate food regime that has historically defined the American fast-foodscape.

#### 4.1.3 The Taste Test

Now established as a variation within an existing product category, performances of the ‘Taste Test’ emerged as the second discursive strategy under the theme of plasticity. Referring to demonstrations of consumers ‘trying’ the meat substitute product, these advertisements emphasise the hedonistic aspects (Verbeke & Vackier, 2004; Jallinjoa et al., 2017: 15) of the consumptive experience, motivating purchase based on its taste similarity

rather than ethical difference. Although likewise found to operate in the case of Burger King’s Impossible Whopper, and Dunkin’s Beyond Sausage Sandwich (Appendix C) their symbolic impact is best explained through an examination of Del Taco’s ‘Meat Lover’ (Figure 4.3).





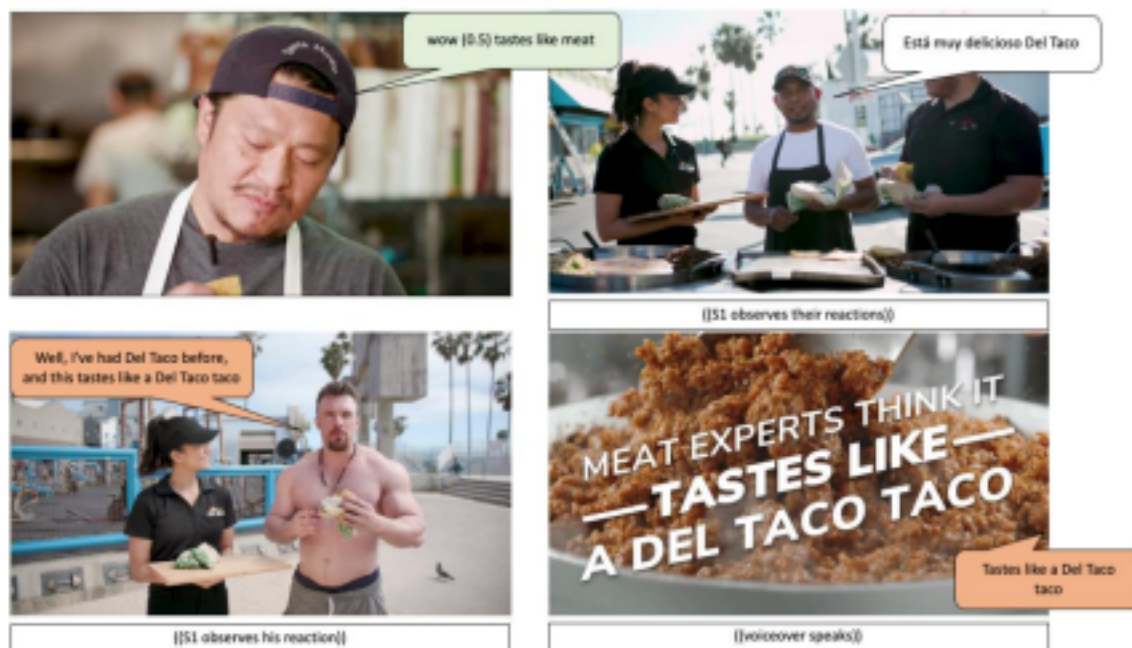


Figure 4.3 – Graphic depicting ‘Meat Lovers’ (Del Taco, 2019b). Source: see [here](#) (Appendix

B)

From the outset, the clip’s purpose is clearly identified as establishing if a “meat lover” could “love Del Taco’s new plant-based tacos” (Figure 4.3). This immediately signifies to the reader that a taste-test is about to occur, defining the product in question as the “plant-based taco” and the tester as the “meat lover”. Situating product and consumer within oppositional realms of veg\* and meat, the authority of the “meat lover” is then defined by three primary knowledges – knowledge of the taco, knowledge of Del Taco, and knowledge of meat – each of which is used to establish the Beyond Taco’s taste quality in relation to existing meat categories.



Figure 4.4 – Stills 3 and 4 of ‘Meat Lovers’ (Del Taco, 2019b). Source: see [here](#) (Appendix B)

Beginning first with knowledges of the taco, these are associated with characters M2 and M3. Shown to be wearing aprons, standing next to an industrial griddle with rice, beans and tortillas (common ingredients of the taco), these characters present symbolically as ‘taco vendors’ (Figure 4.4). A category imbued with practical knowledges of its taste and composition, when presented with the Beyond Taco both appear initially sceptical of its quality, with M2 stating he expects it to “taste like paper” (Figure 4.4). However, after they consume the product M3 speaks into the camera and states: “está muy delicioso” (Spanish for “it is very delicious”) (Figure 4.4). This direct appeal to the consumer assures them of its ‘deliciousness’, motivating product purchase based on taste while indicating its likeness to the taco (Jallinjoa et al., 2019: 15). As the fast-food taco is a product defined by its hybrid American-Mexican identity (Bost, 2003), the use of Spanish vernacular makes this assertion particularly powerful, symbolising a dual authority stemming both from his role as a ‘vendor’ and from his situation within the taco’s cultural realm. However, viewed through the

intersectional lens it must be noted that reminiscent of Taco Bell’s “Yo quiero Taco Bell”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Spanish for “I want Taco Bell.”

(Bost, 2003: 494), this use of the Spanish vernacular represents an example of corporate commodification (Bost, 2003) and a clear instance of hooks’ ‘eating the other’<sup>7</sup>(1992: 21).



Figure 4.5 – Stills 6 and 11 of ‘Meat Lovers’ (Del Taco, 2019b). Source: see [here](#) (Appendix B)

Focusing now on knowledge of Del Taco, this is communicated clearly through M4’s statement: “I’ve had Del Taco before” (Figure 4.5). Establishing previous product experience, this places him within the category of ‘Del Taco Consumer’, thus able to compare the Beyond Taco with their previous meat-based products. Armed with this knowledge of Del Taco, M4 is then shown to try the meat substitute, following which he states it: “tastes like a Del Taco taco” (Figure 4.5). Symbolising product acceptance by the ‘Del Taco Consumer’, this validates strategies of visual and linguistic mirroring as outlined previously within this chapter, assuring the consumer that the product resembles not only *a* taco but *the* Del Taco taco.

<sup>7</sup>As explained in the conceptual framework, page 24.

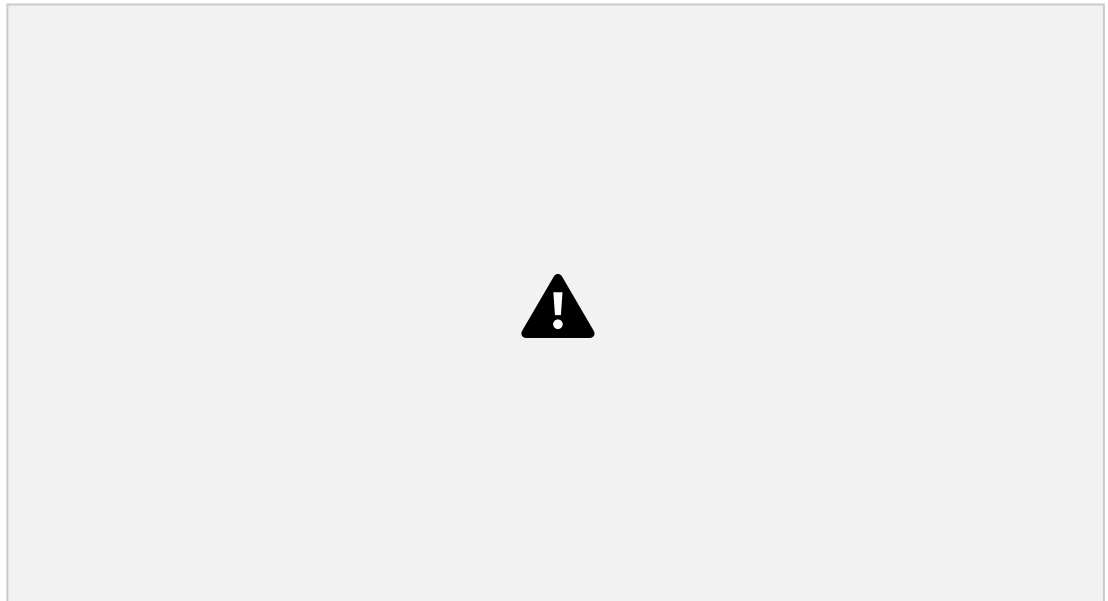


Figure 4.6 – Still 2 of ‘Meat Lovers’ (Del Taco, 2019b). Source: see [here](#) (Appendix B)

The third and arguably most powerful form of knowledge present within this advertisement is ‘meat knowledge’, associated with the character of the ‘butcher’ (M1). A role defined by its meat-centrism, M1 is shown to immediately question the belonging of the meat substitute within his space, asking the server: “you know you’re in a butcher shop, right?” (Figure 4.6).

He then uses his authority of ‘knowing’ to reinforce his scepticism about the Beyond Taco’s similarity to meat, hypothesising: “this is gonna taste like tofu I know it” (Figure 4.6).

However, as activities of butchery continue behind him, the viewer then sees M1 consume the product, following which he states: “wow (0.5) tastes like meat” (Figure 4.6). Asserted by an individual whose identity is defined by its proximity to meat, this communicates clearly to the reader that the meat substitute is viscerally equivalent to farmed meat (Stephens et al.,



2018 cited in Santo et al., 2020), emphasising its ‘substitutive’ capabilities.

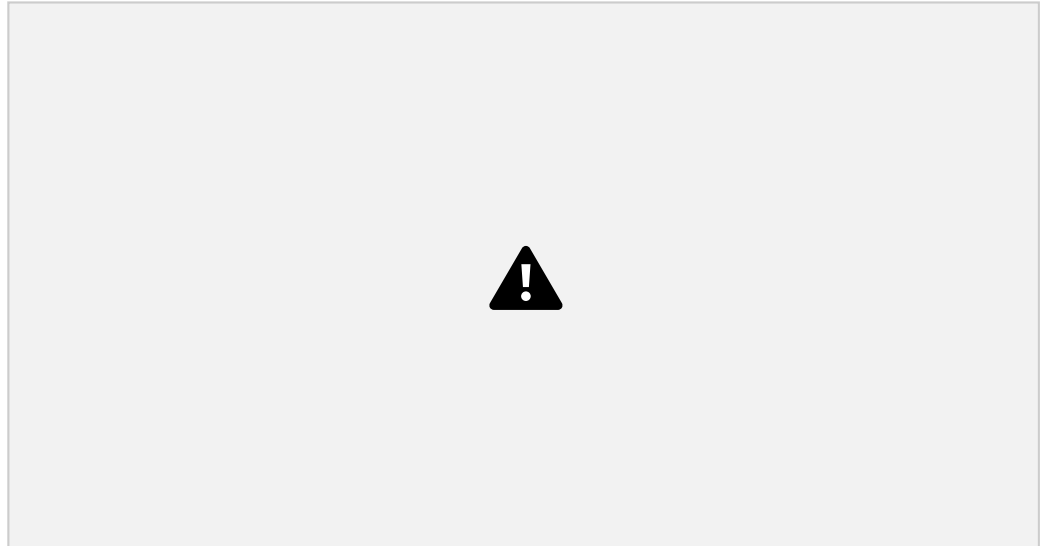


Figure 4.7 – Still 12 from ‘Meat Lovers’ (Del Taco, 2019b). Source: see [here](#) (Appendix B).

Concluding with the assertion: “meat experts think it tastes like a Del Taco taco” (Figure 4.7), this taste-test powerfully reinforces the effects of mirroring by establishing product identity in relation to pre-existing meat categories. At the same time, by emphasising the centrality of taste to experiences of eating (Levenstein, 1993: 12 cited in Dixon, 2009) these render invisible the ethical imperatives which define the alternative project, distancing the meat substitute once again from its veg\* origins.

#### 4.1.4 Defining the Consumer

Building on ideas of the ‘taste test’, by mobilising discourses that rely on ‘meat knowledge(s)’ these advertisements create a specific ideal of the target consumer.

Categorised both as a ‘meat lover’ and a ‘meat substitute enthusiast’, this consumer embodies a new flexitarian dietary identity (Rosenfeld & Rotherberger, 2020) which disrupts the rigid

dichotomy between meat and veg\*. Informed by an understanding of uptake barriers as outlined within the conceptual framework, this seeks to challenge the previous restriction of

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the meat substitute to the veg\* body, framing it as a way to reduce meat rather than eradicate it from consumptive practice altogether.

#### 4.1.5 Summary - Plasticity, De-Politicisation & Power

Reflecting on the strategies outlined within this chapter, plasticity clearly emerges as the dominant discourse, with ethical veg\*ism rendered almost invisible within the mastery contract. Given the centrality of meat to the American fast-foodscape, this is hardly surprising, as revealing the ethical implications of mass meat production could alienate consumers on a wider scale. However, by removing the ‘moral charge’ between product and consumer (Cook et al., 2006), the alternative veg\* identity of the meat substitute seems to have been symbolically eradicated. Instead, the fast-food meat substitute represents a form of ‘commodity veg\*ism’ (Muller, 2020) – a ‘parasitic discourse’ (Cook, 2001 cited in Solík, 2014) in which the alternative has been consumed by the corporate (Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017; Fegitz & Pirani, 2018; Theimann & Roman-Alacá, 2019). Therefore, the act of mainstreaming seems to have fundamentally altered the identity of the meat substitute and its consumer, situating both firmly within the corporate food regime.

## 4.2 The Myth of Masculinity

Contemporary society is saturated with mythology. Far from the fables of a modern fairy tale, cultural understandings of the ‘myth’ refer to the naturalisation of social assumptions through acts of performance, repetition and reinforcement (Craig, 1992; Butler, 1988; Barthes, 1972). Concealing the constructed nature of their existence, myths of gender, race and sexuality pervade our collective consciousness, manifesting in inequalities of power and the expectation of certain normative behaviours and characteristics (Craig, 1992; Butler, 1993; Barthes, 1972). Within a “culture whose dominant focus is consumption” (Sherry, 1986 cited in Zakia & Nadin, 1987: 6), advertising represents one of the most active mediums of cultural communication (Craig, 1992; Gaines, 2001) and a central player in the perpetuation of these constructions (Barthes, 1972; Zakia & Nadin, 1987).



Figure 4.8 – Brand Narratives and Contracts. Source: Remaury, 2004 (cited in Veg-Sala & Roux, 2018: 437)

Drawing again on the conceptual framework inspired by Remaury (Figure 4.8) this chapter will shift in focus from the ‘mastery contract’ to the ‘determination contract’. Building on previous discourses of plasticity, this involves a critical exploration of represented bodies and characters with the aim of deconstructing cultural ‘myth making’ within fast-food meat substitute advertising (Adams, 1990; 2004; 2010). Reflecting on the centrality of the “meat masculinity nexus” (De-Lessio Parson, 2017: 1730) as outlined within the conceptual framework, this will focus predominantly on how strategic gender framings within this sample engage with meat and the ‘myth of masculinity’ (Craig, 1992; Schösler et al., 2015). As critical semiotic reading is centrally informed by an understanding of social context (Zakia & Nadin, 1987), these discussions will draw additionally on category analysis and the ecofeminist lens to enhance discussions of masculine representations, particularly in the case of the symbolic.

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#### 4.2.1 Body

Examining first the presence of iconic objects, the sample body reveals the existence of two

binary gender identities within this plant-based fast-foodscape (Appendix C). Restricted to the categories of ‘man’ and ‘woman’, this positions advertising discourse from the outset within a normative gender framework (Butler, 1988), rendering ‘queer’ and trans bodies indexically invisible through their exclusion from this virtual space. Focusing specifically on the identity categories which *are* present within marketing content, masculine and feminine presenting bodies do not appear with equal frequency. Considering the gendered distribution of ‘active’ characters in particular (meaning those centrally involved within the story sequence through speech or action) masculine bodies are visually dominant, representing 61% of the collective whole (Appendix D). Differentiated by brand, these inequalities become increasingly stark, with Hardee’s and Carl’s Jr.’s active characters presenting *only* as men (Appendix D). Conversely, Dunkin’ was the only brand to include a greater proportion of woman within their advertisements, with the average percentage of ‘masculine’ figures representation rising to 74% across the sample body if their data is excluded (Appendix D).

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Through this iconic representation, these advertisements frame the masculine body as one that belongs within the product space. Considering again the “meat masculinity nexus” (De Lessio Parson, 2017: 1730), this framing thus seems to operate in a persuasive function (Craig, 1992), shaping a discursive strategy that seeks to alleviate concerns of ‘effeminisation’ which threaten fragile heteronormative masculinity (Rogers, 2008; Ruby, 2012) by associating plant-based ‘meat’ with ‘men’. However, although challenging previous restrictions of the meat substitute to the feminine realm (Ruby, 2012; Hoek et al., 2011), the inequality of this representation reinforces the gendered power imbalances which stratify contemporary society. Examined through an ecofeminist lens (Muller, 2020), the relative invisibility of the feminine body is particularly interesting given its normative association of

‘woman’ with ‘nature’. Reminiscent of Adam’s conception of animals as the absent referent<sup>8</sup> (2010; Rogers, 2008), the active erasure of ‘woman’ and ‘animal’ from advertising discourse further distances these products from the alternative, feminist movement from which they originated (Fegitz & Pirani, 2018; Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017; Muller, 2020), revealing patriarchal speciesism and sexism to be deeply entwined within the American fast-foodscape.

#### 4.2.2 Voice

Examining now the performance of the ‘active character’, the symbolic dominance of the masculine voice emerges as a secondary theme within the strategic discourse of masculinisation. Echoing previous discussions of ‘Body’, dialogue within these adverts is spoken predominantly by men, whose deep, normative tones represent 66% of voiceover and embodied speech (Appendix E). Reinforcing the association between the masculine figure and plant-based ‘meat’, these exclusions continue to operate as a form of active silencing for

<sup>8</sup>As previously discussed on page 39.

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feminine and trans personas (Adams, 2010) while legitimising the existence of the masculine being within this space.

However, the impact of the ‘masculine voice’ is not limited to the simple fact of its existence. Rather, the ‘masculine voice’ represents the predominant authority in establishing product desirability, linking directly to the strategic discourse of plasticity outlined within the previous chapter. Best exemplified in the case of Burger King’s ‘He’s Into It’ (Figure 4.9), fast-food meat substitute advertisements construct a narrative that seeks to challenge the embedded perception that ‘real men eat meat’ (Ruby, 2012; Buerkle, 2009) through taste-test

reinforcement.

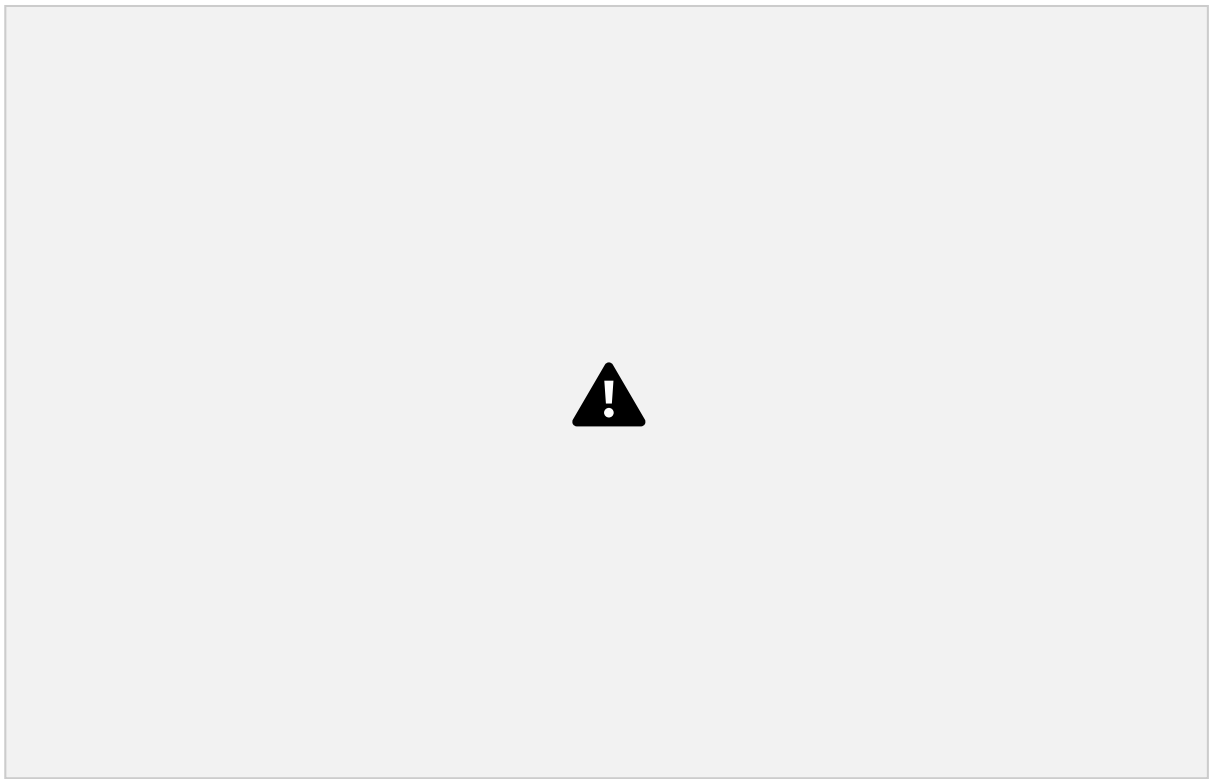


Figure 4.9 – ‘He’s Into It’ (Burger King, 2019d). Source: see [here](#) (Appendix B)

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The story arc of this advertisement centres around a woman named Sahara (S) convincing a man named Olu (O) to “try the Impossible Whopper” (Figure 4.9). From the outset, Olu’s scepticism is made clear through an appeal to a third character behind the camera. Assumed to likewise present as masculine through the symbolic use of the word “man”, Olu opens the scene with:

“This Impossible stuff it’s (0.5) I don’t know about it man” (Figure 4.9)

Expanding on the element of scepticism, the assertion “I don’t know about it” (Figure 4.9) conveys to the reader a lack of product experience, placing Olu outside the categorical knowledge of the ‘Impossible Whopper.’ In contrast, Sahara’s familiarity with the Impossible

Burger is evident. This is both through the symbolic act of ‘convincing’, which implies advocacy based on experience, and particularly through the knowledge authority conveyed in the assertion “I think you’ll be surprised” (Figure 4.9).

However, through a central focus on Olu’s persuasion, the structure of this narrative presents Sahara’s knowledge as inadequate to motivate consumer purchase. This constructs a positioned categorical pairing with Olu’s product perception “This is good” (Figure 4.9) valued above that of Sahara, creating a gendered hierarchy in which patriarchal dominance is reinforced through a presentation of masculine opinion as the ultimate. This reveals the existence of a commercial rhetoric that values positive masculine product experience as central to consumer desirability, while defining the ‘master identity’ of the ideal consumer as the ‘man’. (Plumwood, 1993; Rogers & Schutten, 2004 cited in Rogers, 2008). Similar themes can be seen echoed throughout the ‘taste test’ discourses outlined in the previous chapter, as ‘this tastes like meat’ assertions stem largely from the masculine voice.





Figure 4.10 – Graphic Depicting Instances of Men and Women ‘Biting’ Throughout the Sample Body. Sources: Burger King, [2019a](#); [2019b](#); [2019c](#); [2019d](#); [2019e](#); [2019f](#); [2019h](#); [2020a](#); [2020b](#); Carl’s Jr., [2019a](#); [2019b](#); Del Taco, [2019a](#); [2019b](#); Dunkin’, [2019a](#). (see Appendix B).

Building on this idea of the ‘master identity’, the dominance of the masculine persona is also reinforced through the symbolic act of product consumption (Dixon, 2009: 328). Reflecting on the advertising sample as a whole, a collective framing of plant-based ‘meat’ consumption as an activity reserved for the masculine body can be strongly identified (Buerkle, 2009). As visually demonstrated in Figure 4.10, this is accomplished through depictions of the masculine bite, with 88% of all consumptive actions within the sample shown to be taken by men. Viewed through an ecofeminist lens, this imbalance in presentation reinforces pre-existing social conceptions of eating (meat in particular) as belonging within the masculine realm (Buerkle, 2009; Adams, 2010), revealing the meat-masculinity nexus to remain deeply entrenched within the American fast-foodscape (Adams, 2010: 243; Schlosser, 2001).

Drawing from Adam’s work on the ‘Pornography of Meat’ (2004), existing associations between meat and the feminine body also introduce an innate sexualisation to the consumptive experience – and indeed, by proxy, a sexualisation of plant-based ‘meat’. This sexual element operates as a demonstration of power, representing the symbolic consumption of woman *as* nature, and thus her domination (Buerkle, 2009: 84; Adams, 2010). Echoing the findings of the previous chapter, this reinforces a discourse of mirroring in which plant-based products cloak themselves in cultural meat rhetoric (Adams, 2010; Rödl, 2018), reinscribing patriarchal structures while situating the fast-food meat substitute firmly within a normative gender framework.



Figure 4.11 – Still 8 of ‘Meat Lovers’ (Del Taco, 2019b). Source: see [here](#) (Appendix B)

Isolating one still taken from Del Taco’s ‘Meat Lovers’ (2019b), this rhetoric is particularly powerful in the case of the feminine ‘server’ (Figure 4.11). Drawing on Goffman’s conception of function ranking<sup>9</sup>(1978 cited in Signoretti, 2017; Bell & Milic, 2002), the act of serving creates positioned categories that frame the feminine ‘server’ as below the masculine bodies who defines her function. Drawing on Adam’s conception of women as meat, S1’s serving of plant-based meat *to* men then makes the feminine body implicit in its own domination (Adams, 2010: 312; Buerkle, 2009), powerfully reinforcing the strength of the patriarchal hierarchy which defines this foodscape, and indeed its consumer.

<sup>9</sup>The idea that men should take the ‘executive role’ over a woman (Goffman, 1978 cited in Signoretti, 2017)

Extending the application of the ecofeminist lens, the existence of gendered “social types” (Klapp, 1962 cited in Craig, 1992: 2) emerged as the fourth and final discourse of masculinity within this sample. Identified through an examination of symbolic objects, these ‘characters’ embody gendered stereotypes (Kanahara, 2006) which articulate codified understandings of ‘man’ distinct to the American context (Solik, 2014). Revealing a categorical reductionism typical of patriarchal discourse (Craig, 1992), these were found to amplify discursive strategies of body, voice and bite through the mobilisation of two dichotomous ideals of masculinity.

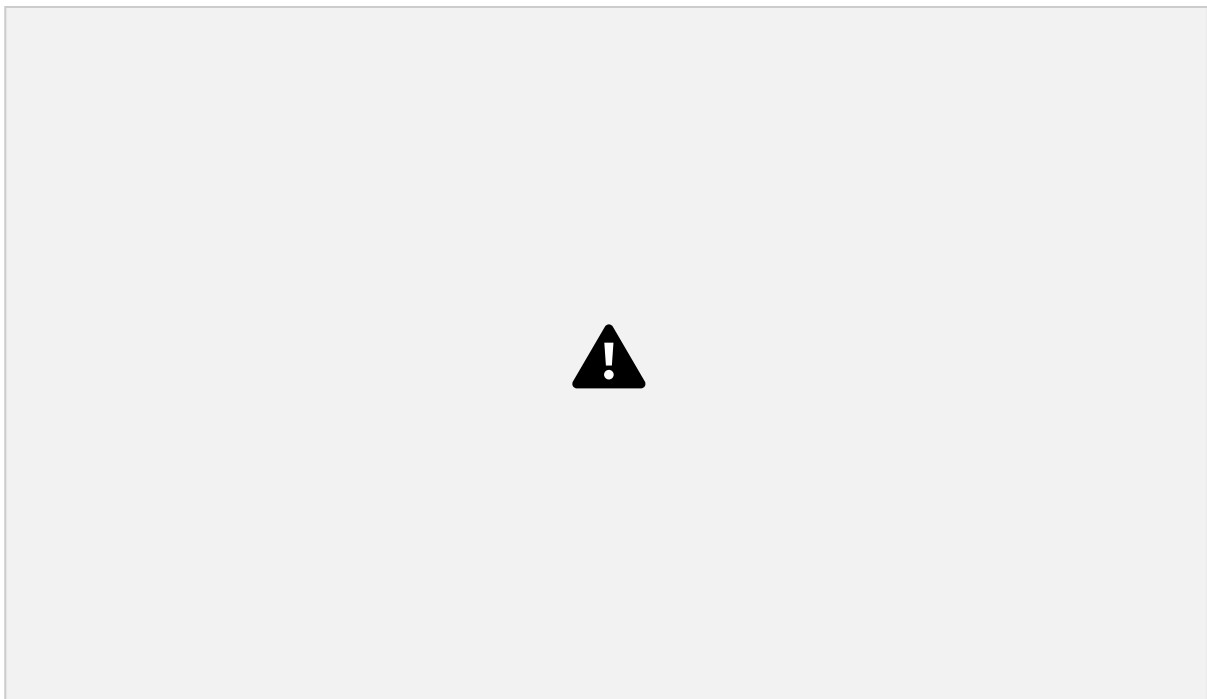


Figure 4.12 – Opening Sequence of ‘Meat Heads’ (Del Taco, 2019a). Source: see [here](#)

(Appendix B)

Best exemplified through an examination of Del Taco’s ‘bodybuilder’, the first is the ‘hypermasculine’. Defined centrally by a rejection of the feminine, this form of exaggerated masculinity is commonly characterised by extreme performances of strength, virility and power (see Brown, 1988; Rosenberg & Oswin, 2015; Vokey et al., 2013), embodying the paradigm of hegemonic<sup>10</sup> masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). As evident through an examination of Figure 4.12, the bodybuilder represents a character who simultaneously signifies and is identified *by* his hypermasculinity, communicated through the symbolic act of weightlifting and iconic objects of the muscular body.

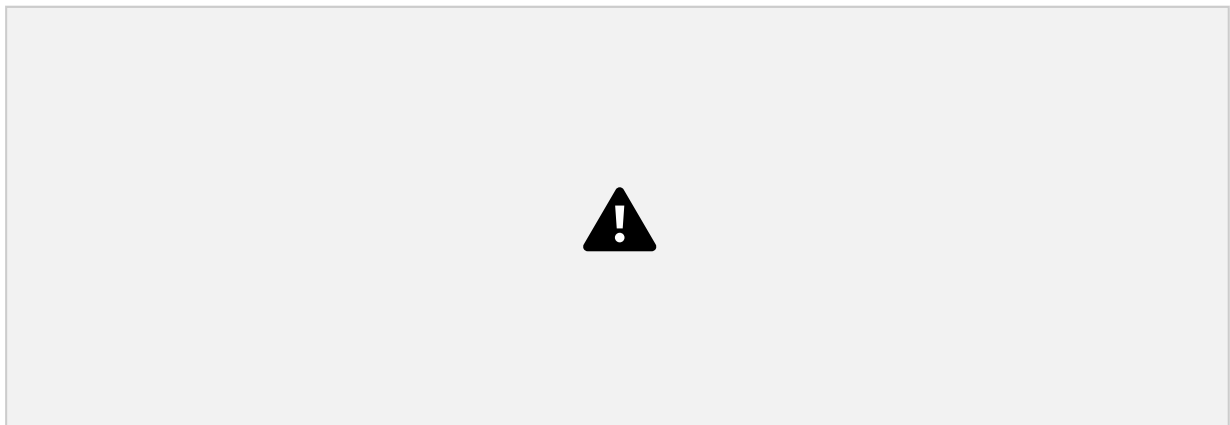


Figure 4.13 – Stills 6 and 11 of ‘Meat Lovers’ (Del Taco, 2019b). Source: see [here](#)  
(Appendix B)

Shown not only to exist within Del Taco’s fast-foodscape, but to then actively engage with performances of consumption and taste-test assurance (see Figure 4.13 as one example), these characters powerfully challenge the previous ‘feminisation’ of the meat substitute

<sup>10</sup> Hegemonic Masculinity is defined as: “the pattern of practice.. that allowed men’s dominance over women to continue” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 832)

space, constructing a reality in which meat substitutes are not only accepted by ‘man’, but by his heteronormative ‘ideal’ form.



Figure 4.14 – Graphic Depicting M1’s Story Sequence Over Time in ‘Meat Heads’ (Del Taco, 2019a). Source: see [here](#) (Appendix B).

Isolating the story sequence of M1 in ‘Meat Heads (Del Taco, 2019a) the meat substitute is then transformed from a product accepted by the ‘bodybuilder’ to a product active in his creation. As shown in Figure 4.14, product consumption is explicitly linked to the growth of muscle through the sequence of:

consumption  “I think my bicep just grew” (Figure 4.14).

This is then reinforced through symbolic acts of flexing, and the simultaneous vocalisation of ‘errrrrrrrrrghhhh’ (Figure 4.14) – a sound whose inherent aggression asserts the strengthening impacts of the Beyond Taco. Framing the meat substitute as part of the hypermasculine body (Bourdieu, 1984: 487; Tucker, 2014), this sequence challenges previous discourses of inadequacy associated with plant-based “chick food” (meaning feminised food that does not satisfy the insatiable masculine hunger for meat) (Rogers, 2008: 294), while symbolically challenging the ‘feminisation’ of the meat substitute space through

its exaggerated masculinity. However, this character seems simultaneously to “revitalise hegemonic masculinity” (Rogers, 2008: 282), making these advertisements complicit in the continuation of the patriarchal regime.

### *The New Age Man*



Figure 4.15 – Graphic depicting ‘Malibu Yoga’ (Carl’s Jr., 2019a). Source: see [here](#) (Appendix B).

Existent only within the imagined world of Carl’s Jr., the second and arguably most fascinating masculine character is the ‘Yoga Cowboy’. Understood through an examination of ‘Malibu Yoga’ (Figure 4.15), its central character is positioned immediately within the category of ‘cowboy’, communicated symbolically through his character uniform (cowboy boots and hat), weathered skin, southern-American accent and mention of the “West” (Figure 4.15; Freedman, 1985). A character embodying for many the pinnacle of the American ‘man’ (Craig, 1992; Rogers, 2008), this figure is not shown to perform normative categorical behaviours of riding, or ranching (DeLessio-Parson, 2017). Rather, he is shown participating in the largely feminised activity of yoga, while consuming a meat substitute burger (Figure 4.15). This constructs a narrative in which the masculine character maintains his costume, and thus his symbolic masculinity, but is allowed to digress past the cultural boundary of masculine/feminine. As symbolised through his inversion in the sixth frame (Figure 4.15), this essentially overturns the conception that the meat substitute is incompatible with the masculine identity, instead revealing the existence of a ‘new age man’ who asserts their



masculine identity through their dietary veg\* practice (De Backer et al., 2020: 1). Therefore, the ‘Yoga Cowboy’ challenges hegemonic masculinity by embodying a masculine character defined not by his rigidity, but rather by his ability to change.

Viewing the hypermasculine and the ‘new age man’ in tandem, both identities assure concerns of effeminization associated with the meat substitute through the utilisation of exaggerated stereotypes, which again define the master identity of the consumer to be masculine. However, their strategic deployment is vastly different. The former reinforces

rigid, hegemonic understandings of masculinity which restrict its performance to a strict set of existing criteria. On the other hand, Carl’s Jr.’s Yoga Cowboy challenges this ‘status quo’, reinforcing the existence of a masculine ideal while re-defining his characteristics.

#### 4.2.5 Summary

Operating together as part of a persuasive discourse of masculinity, this chapter has found strategic discourses of body, voice and bite to codify the meat substitute as a masculine product (Rogers, 2008) and the identity of the master consumer as a ‘man’. Perpetuating the myth of masculinity, this powerfully reinforces De-Lessio Parson’s “meat masculinity nexus” (2017: 1730), and by proxy the centrality of meat within the American fast-foodscape (Rödl, 2018) while simultaneously re-defining conceptions of ‘meat’ to include plant-based substitutes. However, while challenging the previous feminisation of the meat substitute, by positioning ‘man’ as the ultimate consumer the meat substitute been embedded within a patriarchal hierarchy which renders feminine, queer and trans bodies indexically invisible. As a result, informed by an understanding of plasticity as outlined in the previous chapter, this

process of mainstreaming has fundamentally altered the ecofeminist veg\* identity of the meat substitute, now embedded firmly within a corporate regime characterised by oppression.

### **4.3 Gender, Race and Space**

The previous chapter has viewed the sample body through an ecofeminist lens, used to interpret signs and the masculine categories they create within the American context.

However, the intersection of gender with the myth of ‘race’<sup>11</sup> cannot be neglected, necessitating a shift in focus in this third and final chapter. Introducing an intersectional lens which complements a critical semiotic approach, this chapter will delve deeper into how ‘whiteness’ engages with previously established discourses of masculinisation, shaping the identity of the meat substitute consumer. The inherent spatiality (Whatmore & Thorn, 1997) of racialized identities will then be examined through an exploration of Remaury’s ‘delimitation contract’ (Figure 4.16), with a specific focus on how advertisements locate spaces of whiteness and blackness (Shabazz, 2015).

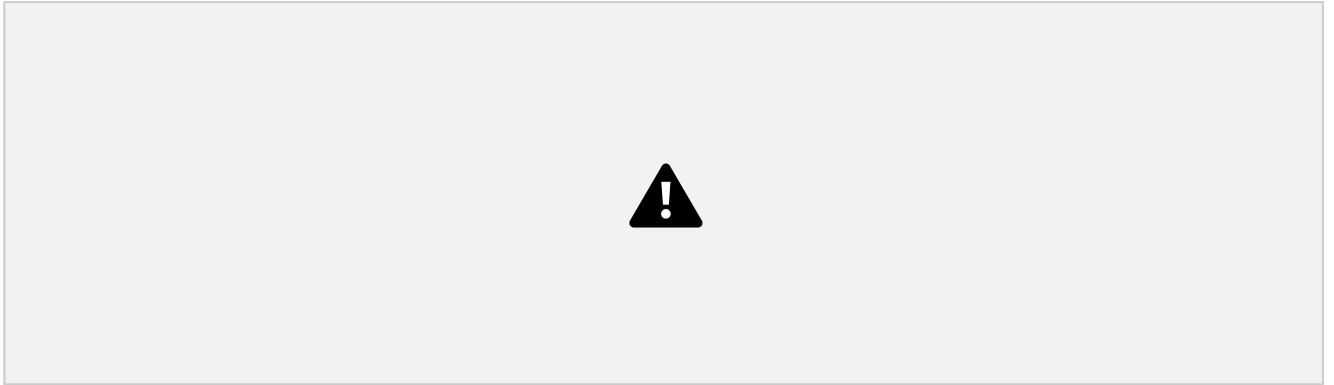


Figure 4.16 – Brand Narratives and Contracts. Source: Remaury, 2004 (cited in Veg-Sala & Roux, 2018: 437)

<sup>11</sup> ‘race’ ‘white’ and ‘black’ have been phrased in commas in their first instance to acknowledge the mythical nature of their existence.

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#### 4.3.1 American Whiteness

Examining first the presence of iconic objects, the white body was found to dominate the collective sample, representing 82% of all masculine and 64% of all feminine active characters<sup>12</sup> throughout (Appendix D). Reflecting on the inequalities in gendered representation established within the sub-chapter of ‘Body’<sup>13</sup>, this reveals a powerful intersection between masculinity and whiteness, the impact of which is best understood through an examination of Carl’s Jr’s ‘SoCal’ (Figure 4.17).



Figure 4.17 – Graphic transcript of ‘SoCal’ (Carl’s Jr., 2019b). Source: see [here](#) (Appendix

B)

Presenting a looped image of a lone character who bites into the product again and again, ‘SoCal’ constructs a uniquely specific ideal of the master consumer. This is an individual who is simultaneously defined by his masculinity, and by a normative, white ‘neutrality’ symbolised through the plain, clean whiteness of his t-shirt, and reinforced through the neutral tones of the sea and sky (Figure 4.17). Echoing discourses of ‘Bite’ as outlined in the

<sup>12</sup> Active character is a figure central to the story sequence. See page 48.

<sup>13</sup> Masculine bodies represent 64% of the collective sample. See page 48.

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previous chapter, this constructs a racialized patriarchal hierarchy that prioritises white masculine consumption above all others, maintaining the racial exclusivity of the veg\* diet (Carter, 2016; Bailey, 2007) while challenging its previous feminisation.

However, this hierarchy does not exist in the virtual abstract. Rather, this advertisement is situated distinctly within the place of California, evident through the clip’s captioning of ‘Cal’ (referring to the Californian state) and reinforced through its rotating coastal

backgrounds (Figure 4.17). Returning to the idea of ‘culinary nationalism’ (Ferguson, 2004) as outlined within the conceptual framework, this use of place reinforces Schlosser’s conception of fast-food as an American “way of life” (2001: 4) while presenting the meat substitute as a product accepted by its American consumer. At the same time, it constructs an image of California as a space of ‘American whiteness’ from which the racialized body is actively excluded. Therefore, this advertisement not only shapes the identity of the meat substitute and its consumer, but the identity of the American foodscape, representing a powerful form of racialized oppression.

#### 4.3.2 The Wild West



Figure 4.18 – Stills of the Cowboy taken from ‘Malibu Yoga’ (Carl’s Jr., 2019a) and ‘No Beef’ (Burger King, 2019a). Source: see [here](#) and [here](#) (Appendix B)

Building on this idea of American whiteness, the use of the ‘cowboy’ represents a particularly poignant site of analysis. Discovered within the advertising worlds of Burger King and Carl’s Jr. (Figure 4.18), this dissertation has previously explored the cowboy as a symbol of American masculinity, central to the construction of the ‘new age man’. However, viewed now in relation to the delimitation contract, its association with the ‘Wild West’ (Yuliang, 2010: 30; Kasson, 2005) becomes inherently problematic. A term synonymous with the ‘American Frontier’, the Wild West is a space imbued with a deep history of

Indigenous dispossession (Bird, 2004) through which the racialized body was systemically eradicated during colonial expansion (Davis, 1999; Anderson et al., 2004). Although now a figure of fictitious tales, the cowboy was a character active in this process of colonisation, representing a powerful symbol of racial exclusion distinct to the Western context.

As a result, the use of the *white* cowboy (Figure 4.18) in persuasive discourses of body, voice and bite (Appendix C) not only defines the meat substitute by an American whiteness but embeds it within a corporate-colonial landscape (Martin, 2018) in which racialized bodies have and continue to be oppressed. This is particularly powerful within the context of fast food, whose growth has been explicitly linked by Schlosser to corporate expansionism in the West (Schlosser, 2001). Therefore, reminiscent of Carl's Jr.'s 'SoCal', the use of American place continues to represent a form of racial exclusion, distancing the meat substitute yet further from its ethical, alternative origins.

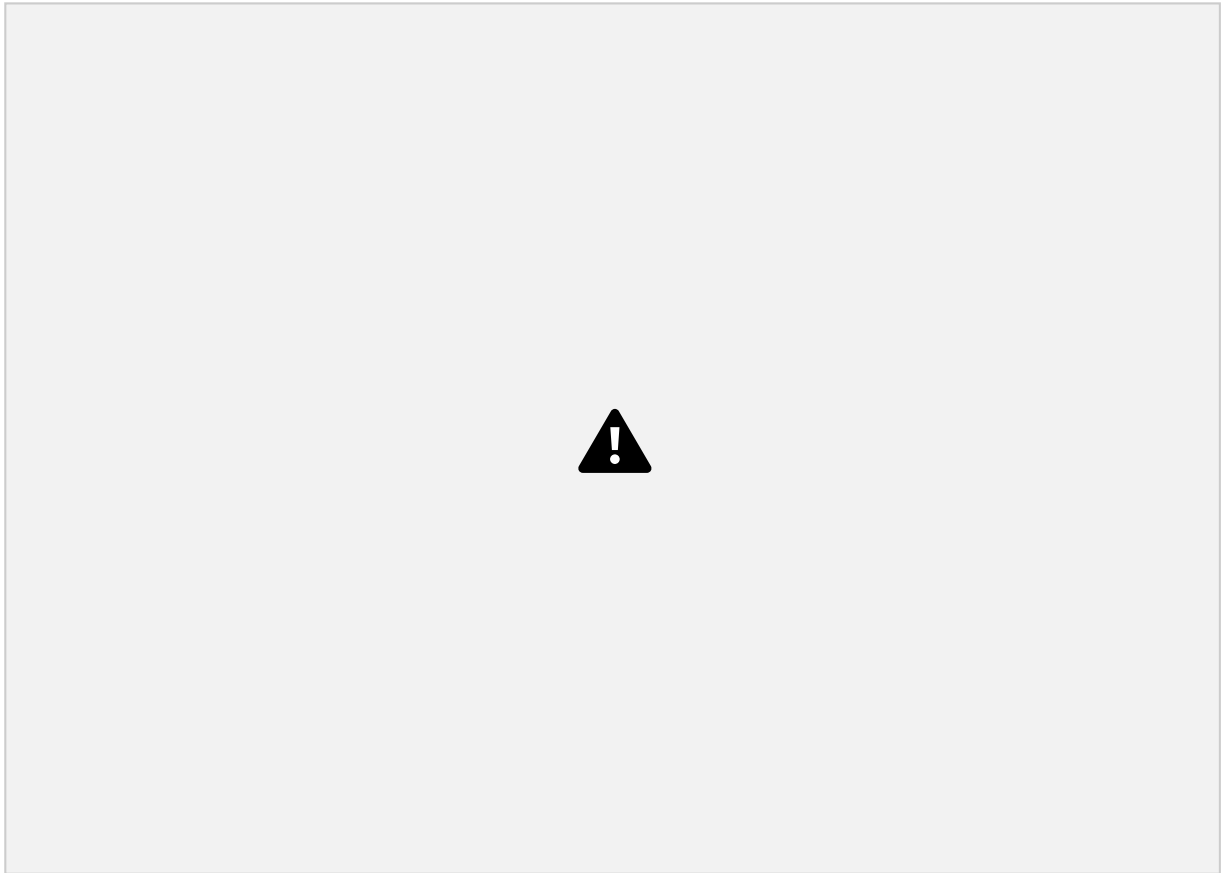


Figure 4.19 – Graphic Transcript of ‘Patty Made From Plants: DoorDash’ (Burger King, 2019e). Source: see [here](#) (Appendix B)

### *Spaces of ‘Blackness’*

Shifting focus towards the racialized body, its representational (in)equalities are best exemplified through an exploration of black and white space. Returning to discussions of the delimitation contract, Burger King’s ‘Patty Made From Plants: DoorDash’ (Figure 4.19) was the only advert found to construct a space of ‘blackness’ (Shabazz, 2015) in which the black body was either the dominant, or the only. Examining the embodied performances that occur within it, although discourses of body and voice continue to be dominated by the masculine figure, black and white men are shown to participate with equal frequency, revealing a form

of representational equality lacking in all other advertisements (Figure 4.19; Appendix C). 66

However, echoing constructions of the ‘SoCal’ man outlined previously within this chapter, even within this space of blackness the ‘bite’ continues to be an activity reserved for the white masculine body, with M1 the only figure shown to consume the product (Figure 4.19). This reveals a consumptive hierarchy in which the category of ‘white man’ is valued above ‘black woman’ and ‘black man’ and thus continues to define the meat substitute’s master consumer.

### *Framing*

Moving away from discourses of voice and bite, the spatiality of the black body within the frame is also of note. Reflective of the collective sample, as singular figures black and white bodies of both genders are presented centrally within the visual plane, with M1, M2 and F1 each taking up a large proportion of the frame when they appear (Figure 4.19). This spatiality signifies importance and authority, positioning each figure as equal focus of the viewers’ attention. Considering the wider sample, although black bodies were never found together, similar patterns were identified when multiple white bodies were shown together (Figure 4.20), with each embodying near-equal shares of the frame regardless of gender.





Figure 4.20 – Instances of Multiple White Bodies Throughout the Sample (Burger King, 2019b; Dunkin', 2019; Del Taco, 2019a). Source: see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) (Appendix B).

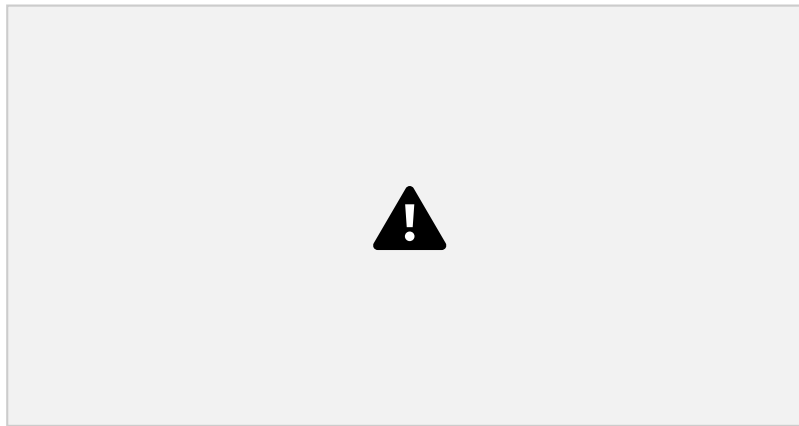


Figure 4.21 – Still from 'Impossible Whopper and Spicy Chicken' (Burger King, 2019h).

Source: see [here](#) (Appendix B).

However, when black and white bodies appeared together, the black body was spatially foregrounded by the white. Taking one particularly evocative image from Burger King's 'Impossible Whopper and Spicy Chicken' (Figure 4.21) the white, muscular man is shown to dominate the frame while the black woman is relegated to the background. This form of visual domination shifts viewer attention towards the masculine figure, who asserts his authority over this urban landscape and the black body behind him through his embodiment

of space. Echoing the symbolic consumption of the ‘SoCal’ man, his power is then reinforced through performances of the white masculine bite, which are particularly poignant given his proximity to the camera. As a result, this advert positions the category of ‘white man’ to be valued above the ‘black woman’, while continuing to define the meat substitute and its consumer by a white masculinity.

*The American Place*

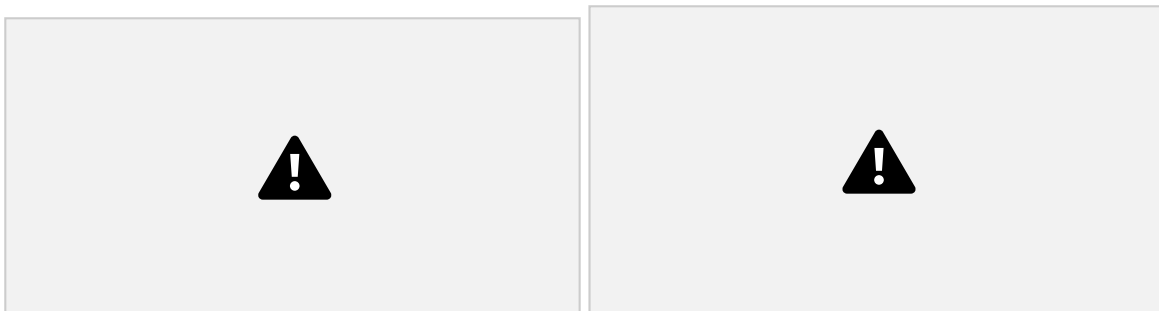


Figure 4.22 – Stills 3 and 5 of ‘Patty Made From Plants: DoorDash’ (Burger King, 2019e).

Source: see [here](#) (Appendix B)

Returning finally to the idea of the American place, unlike white spaces of California or the Wild West, the singular space of blackness found was notably devoid of specific locational context. Instead, it was generalised to the suburban fast-food outlet, identifiable through the concrete background structures and clear Burger King logo (Figure 4.22). Reflecting on the nature of the delimitation contract, the use of American place thus seems to be a strategy reserved for the white body alone, while spaces of blackness are situated in the virtual abstract.

#### 4.3.4 Summary

This chapter found the meat substitute consumer to exist as a category that is both gendered and racialized. Reflecting on discourses of body and bite outlined in the previous chapter, this racialized inequality more specifically articulates the identity of the master consumer as the white man, who reasserts his power through his ownership of two distinctly American spaces. Conversely, although spaces of blackness do exist, they are located in the virtual abstract, lacking delimitation strategies of place. This maintains the established whiteness of the veg\* diet (Carter, 2016; Bailey, 2007) while challenging its previous feminisation. Remembering the words of Nancy Postero: “while such processes of construction are discursive and symbolic, they have important material and symbolic repercussions in the real world.” (2013: 108). Therefore, the consequences of these constructions go beyond the framing of meat substitute itself, contributing to the perpetuation of oppressive systems which disadvantage black, feminine bodies in the everyday.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

This dissertation found three discursive strategies to operate within American fast-food meat substitute advertising. The first is a discourse of plasticity, through which advertisements presented the meat substitute as a variation of an existing meat category. These strategies motivated purchase based on visceral similarity to meat, challenging previous conceptions of the meat substitute as inferior and experiences of neophobia through increasing familiarity. However, in the process its ethical, alternative identity was symbolically eradicated, now representing a form of commodity veg\*ism through which the meat substitute has been consumed by the corporate food regime. The identity of its consumer was also transformed, now defined as a flexitarian meat reducer rather than an ethical veg\*an.

Secondly, discourses of body, voice and bite were found to challenge the previous femininity

of the meat substitute, framing it as a masculine product while revealing the identity of its master consumer to be a man. Informed by its conceptual framework, this dissertation understands these framings to reinforce the “meat masculinity nexus” (De-Lessio Parson, 2017: 1730) and the centrality of meat within the American fast-foodscape, while simultaneously re-defining conceptions of ‘meat’ to include plant-based substitutes. However, viewed through an ecofeminist lens, by positioning ‘man’ as the ultimate consumer the meat substitute has been embedded within a binary patriarchal hierarchy through which feminine, queer and trans bodies continue to be oppressed. Therefore, the process of mainstreaming has fundamentally altered the ecofeminist veg\* identity of the meat substitute, now revealed to be a form of the ‘Patriarchal Burger’ (Adams, 2010) which values men above women, and human above animal.

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Finally, this research identified a racialized discourse that more specifically defined the meat substitute consumer as a *white* man. A figure who dominates representations of body and bite, this white body asserted its power through its spatiality within the visual frame and its ownership of two distinctly American spaces – California and the Wild West. Examined through an intersectional lens, the Wild West proved to be particularly problematic, associated with a history of colonial expansion and Indigenous dispossession. As a result, advertisements were found to maintain the white exclusivity of the veg\* diet (Carter, 2016; Bailey, 2007) while challenging its previous feminisation. Viewed in conjunction with themes of plasticity and masculinity this reveals the meat substitute to be implicit in a system of racial and gender-based oppression (Singer, 1975; Adams, 2010) which distance it yet further from its ethical, alternative origins.

Therefore, this dissertation has found the transition of the meat substitute to the mainstream to fundamentally alter the identity of both product and consumer, transitioning from alternative to corporate, feminine to masculine, resistant to oppressive. This supports the work of Fegitz & Pirani (2018), revealing that the “marriage of profit with principle” continues to be an “uneasy one” (Kennedy, 2004: 41).

### 5.1 Food for Thought

Although currently limited by COVID-19, future research should seek to understand the spatial manifestations of these constructions by looking at adverts in situ (Sarmiento, 2017: 493). It should also seek to include multiple ‘readers’, which would provide a more diverse account of symbolic interpretation.

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### **Appendix A – Table of Fast-Food Restaurants Serving Meat Substitute Products 2018-2020, Corresponding Product Names and Availability.**

Fast Food Restaurant	Product Name(s)	Year of Release	Still Available Yes/No
Burger King	Impossible Whopper	2019	Y
Burger King	Impossible Croissan’wich	2020	Y
Del Taco	Beyond Taco	2019	Y
Del Taco	Beyond Avocado Taco	2019	Y
Del Taco	Epic Beyond Original Mex Burrito	2019	Y
Del Taco	Beyond 8 Layer Burrito	2019	Y
White Castle	Impossible Slider	2018	Y
White Castle	BBQ Impossible Slider	2019	Y

Dunkin’	Beyond Sausage Sandwich	2019	Y
Dunkin’	Beyond Sausage Wake-Up Wrap	2019	Y
Qdoba	Impossible Fajita Bowl	2019	Y
Qdoba	Impossible Taco	2019	Y
Qdoba	Impossible Burrito	2019	Y
Carl’s Jr	Beyond Famous Star	2018	Y
Carl’s Jr	Beyond Famous Star with Cheese	2019	Y
Carl’s Jr	Beyond Fiery Famous Star	2019	Y
Carl’s Jr	Beyond BBQ Cheeseburger	2019	Y
Carl’s Jr	Beyond Sausage Burrito	2019	N
Carl’s Jr	Beyond Sausage Egg and Cheese	2019	N
Hardee’s	Beyond Breakfast Sausage Biscuit	2019	Y
Hardee’s	Beyond Thick Burger	2019	Y
Subway	Beyond Meatball Marinara	2019	N
Cheesecake Factory	Cheesecake Factory Impossible Burger	2019	Y
Little Caesars	Impossible Supreme Pizza	2019	Y
Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC)	Beyond Fried Chicken	2020	Y

(Sources: EconoTimes, 2019; VegConomist, 2020; BusinessInsider, 2019; Newsweek, 2019a; 2019b; VegNews, 2019; BeyondMeat 2019a; 2019b; CNN, 2020; Carl’s Jr., 2020; Burger King, 2020c; Cheesecake Factory, 2020; see also all sources in Appendix B)


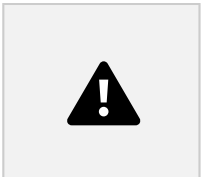
### **Appendix B – Table of Original Sources**

<b>ORIGINAL SOURCES</b>				
<b>Brand</b>	<b>Name (taken from source)</b>	<b>Reference</b>	<b>Date of Retrieval</b>	<b>Retrieved from:</b>

Burger King	'No Beef'	(Burger King, 2019a)	20/12/2020	<a href="https://www.ispot.tv/ad/o9zN/burger-king-impossible-whopper-no-beef">https://www.ispot.tv/ad/o9zN/burger-king-impossible-whopper-no-beef</a>
Burger King	'Impossible Taste Test'	(Burger King, 2019b)	20/12/2020	<a href="https://www.ispot.tv/ad/IJjn/burger-king-impossible-whopper-impossible-taste-test">https://www.ispot.tv/ad/IJjn/burger-king-impossible-whopper-impossible-taste-test</a>
Burger King	'Beef Lovers: Construction Workers'	(Burger King, 2019c)	20/12/2020	<a href="https://www.ispot.tv/ad/o9Xf/burger-king-impossible-whopper-beef-lovers-construction-workers">https://www.ispot.tv/ad/o9Xf/burger-king-impossible-whopper-beef-lovers-construction-workers</a>
Burger King	'He's Into It'	(Burger King, 2019d)	20/12/2020	<a href="https://www.ispot.tv/ad/Zevc/burger-king-impossible-whopper-hes-into-it">https://www.ispot.tv/ad/Zevc/burger-king-impossible-whopper-hes-into-it</a>
Burger King	'Patty Made From Plants: DoorDash'	(Burger King, 2019e)	20/12/2020	<a href="https://www.ispot.tv/ad/oHfO/burger-king-impossible-whopper-patty-made-from-plants-door-dash">https://www.ispot.tv/ad/oHfO/burger-king-impossible-whopper-patty-made-from-plants-door-dash</a>
Burger King	'Now With the Impossible Whopper'	(Burger King, 2019f)	20/12/2020	<a href="https://www.ispot.tv/ad/ZCbA/burger-king-2-for-6-mix-or-match-now-with-the-impossible-whopper">https://www.ispot.tv/ad/ZCbA/burger-king-2-for-6-mix-or-match-now-with-the-impossible-whopper</a>
Burger King	'You're Not Gonna Believe This'	(Burger King, 2019g)	20/12/2020	<a href="https://www.ispot.tv/ad/IJjp/burger-king-impossible-whopper-youre-not-gonna-believe-this">https://www.ispot.tv/ad/IJjp/burger-king-impossible-whopper-youre-not-gonna-believe-this</a>

Burger King	'Impossible Whopper and Spicy Chicken'	(Burger King, 2019h)	20/12/2020	<a href="https://www.ispot.tv/ad/ZCqv/burger-king-2-for-6-mix-or-match-impossible-whopper-and-spicy-chicken">https://www.ispot.tv/ad/ZCqv/burger-king-2-for-6-mix-or-match-impossible-whopper-and-spicy-chicken</a>
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Burger King	'Impossible Whopper' 	(Burger King, 2019i)	20/12/2020	<a href="#">Burger King Debuts 'Impossible Whopper' Veggie Burger (grubstreet.com)</a>
Burger King	'Now With the Impossible Whopper'	(Burger King, 2020a)	20/12/2020	<a href="https://www.ispot.tv/ad/ZCbA/burger-king-2-for-6-mix-or-match-now-with-the-impossible-whopper">https://www.ispot.tv/ad/ZCbA/burger-king-2-for-6-mix-or-match-now-with-the-impossible-whopper</a>
Burger King	'Impossible Croissan'wich'	(Burger King, 2020b)	20/12/2020	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZIWokipJnc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZIWokipJnc</a>
Burger King	'Original Whopper' 	(Burger King, 2020c)	20/12/2020	<a href="https://www.burgerking.co.nz/menu-item/whopper">https://www.burgerking.co.nz/menu-item/whopper</a>
Carl's Jr.	'Malibu Yoga'	(Carl's Jr., 2019a)	20/09/2020	<a href="https://www.ispot.tv/search/beyond-famous-star">https://www.ispot.tv/search/beyond-famous-star</a>
Carl's Jr.	'SoCal'	(Carl's Jr., 2019b)	20/12/2020	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/carlsjr/videos/1214731328725991/">https://www.facebook.com/carlsjr/videos/1214731328725991/</a>
Del Taco	'Meat Heads'	(Del Taco, 2019a)	13/01/2021	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_SAMaW__8pI">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_SAMaW__8pI</a>

Del Taco	'Meat Lovers'	(Del Taco, 2019b)	20/12/2020	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/deltaco/videos/297645994465704">https://www.facebook.com/deltaco/videos/297645994465704</a>
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Dunkin'	'Plant-Based'	(Dunkin', 2019)	21/01/2021	<a href="https://www.ispot.tv/ad/ZdkK/dunkin-beyond-sausage-sandwich-plant-based">https://www.ispot.tv/ad/ZdkK/dunkin-beyond-sausage-sandwich-plant-based</a>
Hardee's	'Makes My Head Hurt'	(Hardee's, 2019a)	21/01/2021	<a href="https://www.ispot.tv/ad/ZCzp/hardees-original-beyond-thickburger-makes-my-head-hurt">https://www.ispot.tv/ad/ZCzp/hardees-original-beyond-thickburger-makes-my-head-hurt</a>
Hardee's	'Simple Answer'	(Hardee's, 2019b)	21/01/2021	<a href="https://www.ispot.tv/ad/ZC8w/hardees-beyond-breakfast-sausage-biscuit-simple-answer">https://www.ispot.tv/ad/ZC8w/hardees-beyond-breakfast-sausage-biscuit-simple-answer</a>
White Castle	'The Impossible Slider is Now at White Castle, and the Reviews are in!'	(White Castle, 2018)	13/01/2021	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3NCd4rYLgDE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3NCd4rYLgDE</a>

### Appendix C - Interpretant Matrix of the Collective Sample

INTERPRETANT MATRIX OF COLLECTIVE SAMPLE						
Object of Advertisement	Plastic	Ethical	Masculine	Feminine	American	Racialised
<b>Iconic</b>	Appearance mirrors that of conventional meat product, particularly the burger – often shown sizzling on the grill (Burger King, 2019g) placed in a wrapper with a bun and layered with tomato, lettuce, onion (all) (Burger King, 2019i, 2020c)	No animals shown.	Dominance of the masculine body; all able, mostly white, presenting as Cisgender (see Appendix D).  All used a deep, normative male voiceover with the exception of Del Taco's 'Meat Lovers' (2019b).  Images of strength – muscular masculine bodies (Del Taco 2019a, 2019b)	Feminine bodies were present but represented the minority in all adverts (Appendix D)  Dunkin' (2019a, 2019b) presented the highest proportion of feminine bodies = most equal.	Californian beach (Carl's Jr. 2019b).	White body is dominant (see Appendix D).  Racialised body represents the minority, of which most present as black.  Masculine body is more unequal in representation than the white (see Appendix D).
<b>Indexic</b>	Taste approval indicates similarity even where not directly asserted.	No mention of animal – absent referent (Adams, 2010).  No mention of environmental imperative.	Lack of female, trans, queer and LGBTQ2+ representation constructs an exclusive space reserved for the bodies shown to exist within it.	Lack of female, trans, queer and LGBTQ2+ representation constructs an exclusive space reserved for the bodies shown to exist within it.		





Burger King (2019g)  'You're Not Gunna Believe This'	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Burger King (2019h)  'Impossible Whopper and Spicy Chicken''	2	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1
Burger King (2020a)  'Impossible Croissan'wich'	5	4	1	0	4	3	1	1	1	0
Carl's Jr. (2019a)  'Malibu Yoga'	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Carl's Jr. (2019b)  'SoCal'	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Del Taco (2019a)  'Meat Heads'	8	7	1	0	5	5	0	3	2	1
Del Taco (2019b)	5	4	1	0	4	3	1	1	0	1

