

## 1.2 Challenging the masculinity of meat

***Support for public communication campaigns specifically attacking the established association between meat consumption and desirable masculine traits.***

### **What problem is your proposition addressing?**

The link between masculinity and meat is deeply imprinted in our psyche and supported by evolutionary narratives connecting 'hunting' (animals) to the masculine role, and 'gathering' (plant-based food) to the feminine role. While there is not much evidence for such strict role divisions (and quite some evidence to the contrary; Ember 1978, Rozin et al 2012), the narrative itself has become the basis for attributing meat consumption to masculinity. Meat as a nutrient provides males with physical strength, and as long as it was a limited resources in male dominated societies became the preferred food for males, and by extension the food that promotes manliness. Recent studies show that men tend to choose significantly more gender-normative masculine meal options, usually containing large portions with ample meat, while women do not object to lighter, vegetarian, plant-based foods (Sobal, 2005; Rothgerber, 2013). In addition, a male choice to not consume meat is often as threatening masculinity and male gender identity (Bogueva & Marinova, 2019; Gal & Wilkie 2010). As a consequence, femininity and greenness have become associated, which further distances males from ecologically friendly (food) consumption (Brough et al 2016). In addition the link between meat and masculinity also relates meat consumption to autonomy and power, which makes it an attractive target for those who currently have less social power. Meat, through its masculine connotation, has become an object of 'aspirational consumption'. The wide availability of meat and meat-based foods have then resulted in production and consumption levels of meat which are considered to be damaging to health and unsustainable for the planet.

### **How does your proposition address the problem?**

I propose that UN supports a concerted campaign to dissociate meat consumption and masculinity. Such a campaign can directly attack the relationship between meat eating and desirable masculine traits (like strength, decision autonomy, self-determination, ...). It can also positively related plant-based food consumption to exactly these traits, which are stereotypically male but obviously desirable traits for women as well. Such campaigns provide support for an alternative for the meat-masculinity link, that is an important implicit driver of excessive meat consumption. By attacking this implicit base, it also provides support for other measures to curb meat consumption (regulation, pricing, development of product alternatives for meat) and helps those measures to be more successful. So, I see this as a supporting activity for other measures.

It can work through traditional advertising channels (mass media and social media) but can also use important influencers for food preparation and consumption. Vegetable based cuisine is often believed to be tasteless and the choice of those who cannot afford 'better options'. One way to counter the negative associations is to work with 'influencers' who have an impact on what people see as fashionable. I refer mainly to well-known culinary celebrities, or (male!) TV-chefs like Jamie Oliver or Yotam Ottolenghi. Every culture has their own celebrity chefs. They can have a tremendous impact on what people perceive as

suitable everyday cuisine. The UK is a very good example on how they have influenced food culture, making the UK one of the most vegetarian-friendly culinary environments in the world. There are books, TV programs, websites and social media that can be supported and where these well-known chefs can lend credence to plant-based alternatives.

**Is this a new solution or an existing solution that needs scaling?**

I am sure there must be examples of such communication initiatives in different countries, but there has to my knowledge never been a global effort, and I am not aware of any large-scale campaign trying to break the association between meat and masculinity, per se.

**Which organisation/s, institution/s or groups of individuals are associated with the solution?**

Government communication offices, health directorates, etc...

**What is the scientific evidence that supports your proposition?**

Brough, Aaron, James E. B. Wilkie, Jingjing Ma, Mathew S. Isaac, David Gal, Is Eco-Friendly

Unmanly? The Green-Feminine Stereotype and Its Effect on Sustainable Consumption, *Journal of Consumer Research*, Volume 43, Issue 4, December 2016, Pages 567–582,

Bogueva, D., & Marinova, D. (2019). Reconciling Not Eating Meat and Masculinity in the Marketing Discourse for New Food Alternatives. In D. Bogueva, D. Marinova, T. Raphaely, & K. Schmidinger (Ed.), *Environmental, Health, and Business Opportunities in the New Meat Alternatives Market* (pp. 260-282). IGI Global. <http://doi:10.4018/978-1-5225-7350-0.ch014>

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G, D & Wilkie, J. (2010), Real Men Don't Eat Quiche Regulation of Gender-Expressive Choices by Men," *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 1, 291–301.

Rothgerber, H. (2013). Real men don't eat (vegetable) quiche: Masculinity and the justification of meat consumption. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 14(4), 363.

Rozin, Paul, Julia M. Hormes, Myles S. Faith, Brian Wansink, Is Meat Male? A Quantitative Multimethod Framework to Establish Metaphoric Relationships, *Journal of Consumer Research*, Volume 39, Issue 3, 1 October 2012, Pages 629–643, <https://doi.org/10.1086/664970>

Sobal, Jeffrey (2005), "Men, Meat, and Marriage: Models of Masculinity," *Food and Foodways*, 13 (1–2), 135–58.

**Is this idea applicable to a particular geography, demography, landscape, or other type of setting?**

No, should be quite generally applicable.

**Who are the main actors that would put this action into place?**

Governments working with advertising agencies and media companies.

**Source and process**

- Luk Warlop (AT2 Leadership Team member)