

Meat, Masculinity, and Health for the “Typical Aussie Bloke”: A Social Constructivist Analysis of Class, Gender, and Consumption

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Abstract

Food choice is complex and influenced by a range of social, environmental, structural, and individual factors. Poor diet is one of the major contributors to the burden of disease, in particular for men who habitually have lower intakes of fruits and vegetables and higher intakes of meat. Food choice has been linked to the expression of masculine identities. This research used a Bourdieusian framework to explore the influential drivers of young Australian men's eating habits based on occupational groupings. Twenty men aged 19–30 years participated in in-depth semistructured interviews. Analysis used a grounded theory, social constructivist approach and identified five themes: performative masculinities and meat; meat cuts across social class; the influence of masculine autonomy on dietary choice; women protecting Australian men's health; and the role of environmental and structural barriers. These results indicated that habitus remains a useful conceptual framework to explain the results, and cultural capital is reinforced as a phenomenon. Occupation and gender appear to no longer be primary drivers of food choice in this group of men. Rather there is a shift toward an understanding of multiple masculinities and the development of microcultures with interactions between structure and agency. Meat still features in the food world of Australian men, but there are shifts to deprioritize its importance. There needs to be a more nuanced understanding of the importance of autonomy and control as well as the role of women in relation to men's dietary intakes and how this can be harnessed for positive dietary change.

Keywords

diet, masculinities, Bourdieu, habitus, cultural capital, social class

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Food choice is complex and influenced by individual (physiological and psychological), structural, and socio-cultural factors with implications for a range of health outcomes (Sobal, Bisogni, Devine, & Jastran, 2006). Poor diet has been identified as one of the major contributors to the worldwide burden of disease, implicated in the development of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, many cancers, and suboptimal mental health (Forouzanfar et al., 2016; Melaku et al., 2018). The burden of disease attributable to diet is generally higher among men (Imamura et al., 2015; Melaku et al., 2018). It is well accepted that normative concepts of masculinity and gender differences in health-related beliefs and behaviors contribute to health risk and moderate food choice contributing to this differential burden (Mahalik, Burns,

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& Syzdek, 2007; Munt, Partridge, & Allman-Farinelli, 2017; Wardle et al., 2004). The choosing, preparation, and eating of food is part of a symbolic system that encompasses social, political, aesthetic, economic, biological, and religious aspects, facilitating the performance of identity (Fischler, 1988; Lupton, 1996; Mintz, 1994). Influencing food choice, therefore, requires recognition of the multiple meanings that people bring to and derive from food and eating (microcultures) as well as recognition of the macro-social structures and discourses (for example, economic, political, and cultural) that are brought into play (Sellaeg & Chapman, 2008).

Men have habitually lower intakes of fruit and vegetables and a higher consumption of meat than their female counterparts do (Pechey, Monsivais, Ng, & Marteau, 2015; Prättälä et al., 2006). These intakes have given rise to questions regarding the sociocultural basis for beliefs that impact on male identity, mediated by a number of factors including age, social class, and occupation that ultimately impact on food choice (Sobal, 2017; Wandel & Roos, 2005). It has been suggested that occupational groupings relate to certain health statuses—that is, people are more or less likely to engage in healthful behaviors depending on their occupation (Marmot & Wilkinson, 2005). Along with different work structures that influence accessibility to certain foods, this association appears to relate to the culture of certain workplaces or to the adoption of hegemonic masculine ideals by those undertaking what are considered “men’s work” (Courtenay, 2000; Wandel & Roos, 2005). Men’s food choices could therefore enable the “performance” of certain masculine ideals (Courtenay, 2000; Moynihan, 1998). These constructs are reinforced when marketing links masculinity with animal products (Dumbrell & Mathai, 2008) and cooking is constructed as either a female or a leisure activity of choice (Culver, 2013; Fürst, 1997).

Several studies have reported that certain occupations have an influential role in men’s dietary habits (du Plessis, 2012; Råberg Kjøllesdal, Holmboe-Ottesen, & Wandel, 2010; Roos, Prättälä, & Koski, 2001; Roos & Wandel, 2005; Wandel & Roos, 2005). A study conducted in Finland demonstrated that blue-collar workers, such as carpenters or laborers, were likely to consume more red meat and alcohol than white-collar workers, such as engineers, were (Roos et al., 2001). Similarly, Gossard and York (2003) discovered, in their American study, that men in laborer occupations were likely to eat more beef and total meat than those in either service or professional occupations. The only known study in Australia explored apprentices working in the construction industry and concluded that dietary practices were influenced by a range of structural (convenience, availability, and cost) as well as sociocultural (beliefs, peers) factors (du Plessis, 2012). Based on available evidence, the dietary habits of blue-collar

(predominantly undertaking physical labor) workers align with more traditional masculine foods, whereas men working in white-collar positions (predominantly undertaking desk-based work) do not appear to sustain such dietary expectations; however, further research is needed to substantiate these findings. Whether or not this association correlates within an Australian context is yet to be explored.

International research conducted on male eating habits across occupation groups may not necessarily be comparable to the Australian context. There are indications that constructs of masculinity within Australia are unique compared to those of other countries (Mahalik, Levi-Minzi, & Walker, 2007). Upon examination of Australian men’s performance of masculinity, Butera (2008) found an evolution toward a number of different masculinity types, as opposed to a singular masculine ideal. The plural term “masculinities” has been used to denote the diversity and complexity of masculine identity (Gough & Conner, 2006). More recently, young Australian men have been noted to be negotiating masculinities that prevaricate between progressive (softer) and traditional (harder) narratives (Elliott, 2019). Considering the aforementioned association, men’s eating habits could therefore be expected to change to align with current social norms around masculinity.

This study aims to explore the influential drivers on young Australian men’s eating habits based on occupational groupings. The research uses a gender lens to explore food beliefs and the consumption of certain foods as “doing male.” By exploring the perspectives of young Australian men, a better understanding of their eating habits will develop assisting with the development of more effective healthy eating promotion programs targeting this population group. Specifically, it explores the ways in which performative masculinity across various socioeconomic statuses and cultural dispositions pertaining to heteronormative positioning drive food choice. This research reports on interviews undertaken with young “blue-” and “white-collar” workers in Australia. The key concepts of cultural capital and habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) were used as the foundation for an inquiry into how sociomaterial structures drive food choice for men of different occupational groups in Australia.

Methodology

Theoretical Framework

Social and cultural factors have been identified as driving differences in the preferences for some foods over others as a way of expressing and embodying identity (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieusian frameworks (primarily through the concepts of habitus and cultural capital) have been used to explore food practices and social class, taste, food provisioning, and food

choice (Sato, Gittelsohn, Unsain, Roble, & Scagliusi, 2016). Bourdieu (1984) theorized that sociomaterial structures provide the scaffolding that influences the consumption of food as a way of showing both belonging to some groups and differences from others. Bourdieu generated an empirical argument for social, cultural, and economic status as the condition via which certain population groups follow predictable patterns in the consumption of food. These social conditionings may stem from structures such as class divisions or social groupings, including occupation types. Bourdieu found that occupational conditionings are determined by workplace environment, type of workload, and the social expectations of particular jobs (Bourdieu, 1984). The notion of cultural capital is therefore used to explain clusters in consumption and clear patterns in food choices across different social groups over time as a way of formulating a social identity. Bourdieu referred to the notion of “habitus,” which explores the relationship between perceived social identity and status over a lifetime and human behavior.

“Cultural capital” is used to describe symbolic arrangements of artifacts, clothing, possessions, consumption patterns, and communication to indicate one’s social positioning in the world. Bourdieu’s work with cultural capital sat at the interface between material structure and culture and brought into question the juxtaposition between possession and practice as being symbolic of both social and economic class. He spoke of cultural capital as being embodied, objectified, and institutionalized—with these terms referring to such things as accent, car ownership, or credentials, respectively. Cultural capital acknowledges that people operate within their means to consume in a way that both affirms and does not endanger their social identity. In other words, Bourdieu’s idea of cultural capital allows us to analyze food consumption at the intersection of a multitude of sociocultural intersections.

Habitus was a complex concept used by Bourdieu in which he tried to sociologically envision the space between social contexts and behaviors, which, he argued, almost become inseparable over time. He made the case that patterns in social groups become more instinctive than prescriptive if they are observed, imitated, and practiced long enough from generation to generation or from network to network. Habitus refers to our socioculturally produced dispositions and our reflective responses to our environments, which, in turn, shape and confirm our social identities. The concept of a “gendered habitus” (Ashall, 2004) with respect to food, eating, and health from a masculine perspective may be underexplored (Sato et al., 2016). The case is made here that this notion, in conjunction with the notion of cultural capital, creates a useful lens for the examination of data linking Australian masculinity as a social identity and patterns and habits in the consumption of foods specifically.

Research Design

The methodology of the present study was qualitative and used semistructured interviews. The data analysis combined the theoretical lens taken from Bourdieu with a social constructivist framework introduced and refined by Charmaz (2005, 2006) to explore the lived experiences of men from different occupational groupings regarding food consumption and health. To do this, performance was navigated in context as a socially constructed experience and truth, rather than reflections of true selves or objective truths (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz’s framework was used in order to consider the researcher and analyst as co-creator in theory-making and highlight subjectivity—as it is experienced, expressed, and interpreted—as a valid mechanism for understanding the food worlds of Australian men.

Ethics. Ethical approval was obtained from the Queensland University of Technology Human Research Ethics Committee after confirmation of meeting the requirements of the National Statement in Ethical Conduct on Human Research (1100000772).

Participants. Participants were recruited to this study using convenience and snowball sampling with the following sampling criteria: men aged 18–30 years; living out of home; and working full-time in a blue-collar or white-collar position. The following definitions were used to determine the occupation criteria for participants:

“Blue-collar workers”: Occupations that involve predominantly manual labor (often outdoors) such as carpentry, plumbing, and other trade positions—these roles would have previously been aligned with hegemonic masculinities

“White-collar workers”: Occupations that include mainly office or desk work, such as accountancy, information technology, and many engineering positions (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013)

Twenty men were approached by e-mail or telephone and all participated in the study. These men who were predominantly of Anglo-Celtic heritage, between the ages of 19 and 30 years, and working in Brisbane, Queensland, participated in the study. Ten participants were aged 25 years or older and 10 were younger than 25 years of age. The participants were in a variety of relationships and living situations including living alone, with friends, siblings, partners, wives, and/or children. The study sample had a variety of occupations, including 11 blue-collar workers and 9 white-collar workers. Table 1 below detailed characteristics of each participant and the occupational designation for this study. Data was collected over 2 months in 2011.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics.

Participant #	Age	Occupation	Blue/white collar	Living situation/housemates	Relationship status
1	24	Electrician	Blue	1 male + 1 female friend	Girlfriend
2	21	Electrician	Blue	4 male friends	Single
3	28	Stockbroker	White	3 male friends	Girlfriend
4	21	Laborer	Blue	Girlfriend + 5 male friends	Girlfriend
5	25	Financial planner	White	Girlfriend	Girlfriend
6	22	Carpenter	Blue	2 male friends	Girlfriend
7	19	Laborer	Blue	2 male friends	Single
8	23	Accountant	White	1 male friend + 1 female friend	Single
9	22	Laborer	Blue	Fiancé	Engaged
10	27	Engineer	White	3 male friends	Girlfriend
11	28	Engineer	White	3 male friends	Girlfriend
12	26	Laborer	Blue	Alone	Single
13	22	Boiler maker	Blue	4 male friends + 1 female friend	Girlfriend
14	27	Engineer	White	Girlfriend	Girlfriend
15	26	Laborer	Blue	1 male friend	Girlfriend
16	22	Laborer	Blue	2 male friends	Single
17	28	Information technology (IT) manager	White	Wife + brother + 1 male friend	Married
18	28	IT technician	White	Wife + 3 children	Married
19	30	Graphic designer	White	Wife + 1 child	Married
20	22	Surveyor	Blue	1 female friend	Girlfriend

Interviews. Semistructured, in-depth interviews were conducted with participants at their worksite or at a mutually convenient public location. All participants were aware that the study was part of a final-year undergraduate dietetic student project; they each gave their written informed consent prior to their inclusion and were provided with a hardware shop voucher as compensation for their time. The interviews ranged in length from 15 to 50 min, with most averaging half an hour. All interviews were conducted by the second author. The interviews were based on a set of open-ended questions around food culture and the influential drivers of eating habits, developed from the current literature. The interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed verbatim by the second author. Time did not permit participants checking their transcripts.

Interviewer reflexivity. The interviewer was a young (early 20s), White, female dietetic student undertaking the interviews as part of research requirements for a degree in nutrition and dietetics. She had been provided with some training in qualitative interviewing as part of her degree. The researchers as a team were aware of the influence of gender and age on the performance of masculinity in the interviews and on the social construction of food and health by the participants. The student (EC) and supervisor (DG) had ongoing discussions regarding

insider–outsider perspectives (HellaWell, 2006) and how gender and background influenced the social construction of food, health, and gender as co-constructed between interviewer and interviewee. To provide a more enhanced reflexive perspective, a nonnutrition (sociological, albeit still female) perspective was provided at the analysis stage by the first author.

Data Analysis

The transcripts were read broadly in line with Charmaz's techniques. Initially the transcripts were independently open coded by all the authors. *Line-by-line coding* was conducted by all authors to seek subjective and temporal accounts of food consumption and health. This was followed by *focused coding*, using constant comparison, which is a more directive means of locating emerging themes and codes in the data (Charmaz, 2006). These were developed inductively and deductively using cultural capital and habitus as the theoretical lens. Text segments indexed with the same code were compared across participants and occupation groups. Tools including selective coding as well as cutting and sorting assisted in developing themes across and within codes. Finally, the focused or conceptual coding resulted in the emergent theoretical categories that represented the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors around food consumption in these

groups. Ongoing iterative discussions were had between the authors to compare and discuss the findings until thematic analysis was finalized. Emergent and generated concepts were derived from the interview data as well as deduced from previous literature and organized into five categories, each with subthemes (Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013). No new themes appeared to emerge from the data and so it was felt that data saturation was reached for the purposes of this study. Themes are supported by direct quotes designated by the type of worker, blue (B) or white (W), and interview number (which was sequential).

Throughout the analysis, Charmaz's guide to a social constructionist approach to grounded theory was applied, in particular, her emphasis on subjectivity as truth, as she explains, "Data do not provide a window on reality. Rather, the discovered reality arises from the interactive processes and its temporal, cultural, and structural contexts" (Charmaz, 2005, p. 524). The analytical approach acknowledges the relatively subjective process of theory building, while remaining primarily concerned with garnering insights into the social conditions driving the behavioral patterns of a certain group. The purpose of this research, however, was not to develop theory but rather to explore, using grounded theory techniques, the intersections between food, masculinities, and health by the men in this study.

Results and Discussion

The results of this study have been considered within the context of the current literature and sociological theories relating to the influential drivers of dietary habits among young Australian men and their association with occupation. Overall, the consumption practices of the men in this study construct a specific sociocultural articulation of masculine roles whereby their internal paradoxes are leveraged as a means to produce desirable experiences and self-identifications. This agrees with a study by Newcombe et al. (2012), wherein empirical data were collected through a series of semistructured interviews with 33 men, comprising of 4 age groups (18–35, 36–54, 55–64, and 65+ years). Regardless of age, an analysis and interpretation yielded three emergent themes, food as a component of (1) role-play, (2) contextual interactions, and (3) the management of a functional versus hedonic dialectic. Across these themes, various tensions and contradictions emerged suggesting a complex reflexivity to male food world experiences. Relational issues emerged such as the observation that some men concede control to their partners throughout their food experiences (Newcombe et al., 2012). Within the current study, five key themes emerged, which are discussed in more depth in the following text.

Preference for Meat Among Men: Flesh, Fires, and Resistant Mainstays

In line with Bourdieu's (1984) thoughts relating to the development of a food culture or aesthetic, the participants demonstrated a social understanding of gender-based food choices, that is, "It behooves men to eat and drink more, and to eat and drink stronger things" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 192). They discussed their inclination toward savory foods generally, particularly meat, especially that cooked on the barbecue. A preference for cooking with a barbecue over preparing food in the kitchen was also indicated.

Um, big meat eater. Um, we have a pretty simple diet here because we are renting so just sandwiches and fruit and stuff . . . steak, yeah, barbecue food. (17B)

However, some of the participants simply expressed their desire for meals that contained meat.

Enjoy eating? Ah, that's a good question. I don't know, I like things with meat in it. Um, yeah. (118W)

Um, we eat lots of red meat, because I'm originally from outback Queensland so we get a lot of produce from out there. Yeah my family's still out in Longreach and so whenever they come down they bring some meat down. (16B)

I really don't have a dislike. At the moment I've really started getting into the fruit and stuff but you know, I'm a big red meat fan. (14B)

The reported preference for savory foods, meat, and barbecued products aligns with previously documented gendered performances, based on a singular masculinity (Courtenay, 2000; Sobal, 2005). Further to expressing a desire for red meat and savory foods, these men expressed a specific dislike for sweet foods.

There are a lot of sweet things I really don't like eating, like cake, I don't like ice cream, I don't like chocolate. Things like that. (15W)

Oh, I enjoy eating sweet food on the odd occasion but I find it very overpowering. (110W)

Additionally, an Australian study on vegetarian men reported that those who did not consume meat products were discriminated by others, secondary to the alignment of meat eating with masculine ideals (Nath, 2011). One of the greatest points of emphasis in "foods I like to eat" was the consumption of meat among participants of both social classes:

Meat's generally number one. Don't mind the old chicken parmy. (120B)

Nath's study (2011) also noted that the association with masculinity went further than meat, to include the cooking method of barbecuing. While the participants of the present study reported cooking as an expected skill for themselves and their peers, cooking meat was raised as a feature of their cooking skills, particularly barbecuing. These findings concur with Bourdieu's notion of habitus, wherein behavior, identity, and context are inextricably linked, and in this case, the cooking and consumption of meat are closely linked with the notion of what it is to be masculine.

Like I don't like to cook everything, I'm not that good with cakes and biscuits and things but roasting, I can do that. And barbecuing, I've got the barbecue down pat. (I19W)

Uh, we cook lots of steak like on the barbecue. (I6B)

However, in line with the concept of a more "fluid masculinity" (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014), a number of the men, irrespective of their occupation, tempered the preference for meat with foods considered more feminine:

Stir fries, I really don't mind, I really just like playing around with stuff. A good salad every now and then I enjoy throwing together. (I4B)

A lot of the time during the week when you're sort of in a routine and that I like fresh food, like salads and stuff like that, I'm addicted to like the sort of vinegary taste. I basically sort of have salad most nights with either chicken or steak or fish or something different. And if it's the weekend and I'm lazy, I'm not scared of fast food or anything like that. (I8W)

Meat Cuts Across Cultures of Australian Men: Does Social Class Still Matter?

There has been a comprehensive global research effort into both the sociocultural drivers behind patterns in meat consumption across differing geographic and socioeconomic contexts and the important impact meat consumption has on health and well-being (Godfray et al., 2018). The study of meat consumption among men, in particular, has been of interest to both anthropologists and health researchers alike, as there is a well-established link between identifying as male and having an increased meat consumption profile globally (Rothgerber, 2013; Ruby & Heine, 2011; Sobal, 2005). This is of increasing interest to health researchers due to the established relationship between the consumption of meat and cardiovascular disease and some cancers, as well as concerns regarding the sustainability of producing meats within increasing environmental constraints (Willett et al., 2019).

Bourdieu (1984) suggests that occupation types can determine similar individual "habitus" and can be an indicator of social capital or class. Certain occupations have also been linked to certain performances of masculinity relating to certain taste preferences and food choices. In studies conducted in other developed countries, the dietary habits of blue-collar workers align with more traditional masculine foods, such as a higher intake of red meat, when compared to those in white-collar professions (Gossard & York, 2003; Roos et al., 2001). Despite Bourdieu's theory and the supporting literature, there were no discernible differences between the two occupation-based study groups, white-collar workers and blue-collar workers, in this study. Contrary to the hypothesis, there does not appear to be a distinction within young Australian men from an occupational perspective when exploring influential drivers of eating habits. Perhaps, unlike Bourdieu's suggestions, occupation (specifically blue-collar and white-collar groupings) is no longer solely indicative of social class or income status. Instead, social class moves beyond occupation and is potentially made up of a number of intersecting factors. When asked about the Australian male identity per se, participants used the following descriptions to outline this identity:

Just the general bloke. Like the whole thing you used to see: pluggers, footy shorts. They'd eat steak and three veg, and drink beer. (I9B; *thongs or flip flops)*

I think it's changing and it's different from generation to generation. I mean, probably the one constant would be hard drinking, no matter what generation there seems to be this expectation that Australian guys will drink a lot. (I19W)

Ah, yeah, active, like plays rugby or cricket or something, enjoys getting on the piss, hanging out with the boys. (I6B)

Interestingly, as predicted by Bourdieu, the symbols, artifacts, and identity markers such as clothing are highlighted as important, with health-related behaviors such as sport and drinking alcohol being put forward as an inherent part of that cultural capital. However, the demarcation of working versus upper classes was not noted, nor was it linked to differences in meat and food consumption overall. In particular, overall shifts in gender identity, consumption, and behavior were noted by one participant:

I think the typical Aussie male a while ago was probably someone who didn't really give a shit about what they ate or what they looked like. But I think that that's changed, it's changed in that way. They care about themselves and the way they look more so nowadays. So yeah. It might have been a typical Aussie bloke might have been someone who was like a builder or something and ate meat pies and drank

beers and wore Stubbies. But yeah, I think that that's definitely changed. (I14W)

And another stated:

Oh [men seem to be changing to become], a bit more fem, I don't want to say feminine, but sensitive, that kind of stuff. (I2B)

The continually changing landscape of occupation including training and/or education, wages across job sectors, and increased frequency of travel may have impacted this outcome. While it appears that a gender bias across certain occupation industries continues to exist in Australia, it is not understood whether there have been cultural changes within specific occupation types (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). One man commented on the more complex nature of emerging contemporary masculinities:

I guess there's probably a lot of different cultures of men. You've got the ones who don't care too much about how they look or what they eat through to the men who are the complete opposite of that. There's probably a lot more groups of different types of men these days than the past so it's a lot more individual, than large groups conforming. So yeah, it's very lacking of conformity these days I think. So not only do we have the gender equality but we've also got the individuality coming through too. And generally people then in those individual groups probably hang out together, so really depends on who you are depends on who you hang out with. (I17W)

His statement identifies that gender is not a homogeneous cultural group and according to Bourdieu, it could then be expected that the cultural capital and habitus of these men lie within smaller sociocultural circles within the broader definition of gender, with patterns in consumption being prescribed within these additional microlayers. Further investigation into other factors such as education level, salary, and regional background may provide more information on cultural capital and, subsequently, may highlight differences in dietary intake among participants. Regardless, occupation type as a marker of social class in young Australian men does not appear to resonate with certain food choices or taste preferences. Studies across different demographic groups of young Australian men may demonstrate more influence on dietary intake from the perspective of performance of masculinity as it relates to food and food literacy.

Masculine Autonomy as a Dietary Guide: You Can't Tell an Aussie bloke What to Do

The hegemonic masculine ideal pertains to autonomy and not to obedience (Gough & Conner, 2006). Performance

of this feature was evidenced by the lack of influence on eating habits from healthy eating messages seen in this study's population. The participants reported a general understanding of what it means to eat healthily in terms of "balance" and "moderation"; however, recalling actual recommended serve suggestions or healthy eating messages (e.g., "Go for 2 & 5, fruit and vegetables") did not resonate with this group. Instead, they reported taking guides around consumption from broader social observations and cultural aesthetics.

If I see someone obese walking down the street, I don't want to look like that so, it's not that I'm self-conscious of that, it's just an awareness I suppose. (I13B)

The group were not interested in being prescribed or dictated to, and therefore health promotion messages did not appear to be effective. The lack of influence from healthy eating messages is consistent with other studies. In their study of English men, Gough and Conner (2006) reported a cynicism from their sample population toward health promotion efforts filtered through the media. They linked this behavior with the conventional masculinity ideal, which regards autonomous decision-making over obedience to authority (Gough & Conner, 2006). In this study, men reported driving their own decisions around food choices, with their own internal drivers of control and change.

I try to eat fruit and salad when I've been on the piss for too long. (I11W)

Within this group, decisions to try to adopt healthy food behaviors were overall driven by individual health and illness or chronic conditions, rather than advice given by mainstream media and health promotion efforts:

I've got heart issues so I don't drink caffeine, I don't drink soft drink and obviously don't smoke but um, food-wise I don't add salt to any of my foods, I try to have low fat foods as much as I can and I drink a lot of water (I12B)

This reaction to healthy eating messages may also be seen, psychologically, as a form of "reactance" (Brehm & Brehm, 1981). Reactance is defined as a negative reaction to efforts by others that are perceived to reduce one's choices and freedoms. Although the participants did not necessarily appear threatened by these messages, they may have actively resisted government advice to ensure their fundamental right to have control over their own actions and behaviors, in line with hegemonic masculinity (Addis & Mahalik, 2003).

This reactive approach can be applied to the influence of exercise and appearance on the participants' food choices. Exercise routines emerged as a key influence on men's eating habits. Men reported being more likely to

eat healthily to complement their exercise routine or to enhance their appearance.

Oh, I guess like trying to get fitter or things. Like, you know, I'll try and go to the gym more so I'll try to improve my eating habits to complement that. (I20W)

Other external drivers of watching food consumption and promoting exercise included social pressures from “mates” and factors affecting sporting prowess, especially football.

My housemates are pretty, like they're pretty healthy. Well we all try and be healthy, 'cause we all don't want to be fat obviously. So they convince me to eat healthy which is good. Oh and playing rugby is keeping me healthy as well, exercising, sport. I want to eat healthy foods for my performance and stuff. (I2B)

Healthy eating habits were a reactive result of wanting to complement their exercising rather than a proactive choice to eat healthily for their own self-care. Despite limited priority placed on healthy eating, when it came to exercise, from a performance and appearance perspective, the men reported making healthier food choices. The importance placed on eating healthily during periods of exercise, considering the body as a project, reinforces Bourdieu's theory through the performance of masculinity. These changes in diet, along with a propensity to exercise more appeared to be largely related to both football and gym-related activities. Masculinities associated with these specific types of exercise as they pertain to changes in diet and meat consumption need further exploration.

Um, yeah when I'm trying to get fit, like every couple of months um, then I try and eat as healthily as I possibly can. And that sort of all comes back to when work is a bit easier and you've got a little bit more time to do a bit of exercise and stuff and try and eat well with it. (I3W)

It's more with the gym. . . . When I've gone through my stages of not going to the gym I wouldn't worry about it too much, I wouldn't think, "Ok, I need to eat this or this or this protein-wise." But when you start getting into it, you think a lot more about you, you know, sort of body building. (I8W)

Heteronormativity as Protective: Women Still Maintaining Healthy Australian Men

Positively, women's healthier food choices appeared to make an impression on their male partners. Participants explained that their partners, all female in this study, were generally healthier, more health conscious, and more willing to trial a wider variety of foods, which then impacted on their own dietary choices.

[If my girlfriend and I lived together] she'd probably get sick of eating just steak, like the basic, easy, big things and she would think that it was making her too fat or something so she'd probably like pick some more healthy options that I'd probably start eating as well I imagine. (I11W)

I think women are a lot more drawn to salad and vegies and stuff, and I guess men are more meat. I know from personal experience, my girlfriend, gets very creative with what she cooks and her salad is definitely her favourite food. (I1B)

Despite reporting that they themselves could cook, having someone to cook for them, particularly a partner, was seen as beneficial when it came to eating healthily.

Yeah, well [my partner] always cooks so it's definitely much healthier when she's around. (I3W)

I cook. I do. I like cooking roasts, with like roast vegies, I'm not too bad with the lamb and the pork. And then some baked taters, baked pumpkin, sweet potato and some onion. And then the wife just puts on some other sort of random things like cauliflower and stuff that scares me. (I19W; *potatoes)*

Heteronormative family food practices in the home, that is, women remaining the key “gatekeepers” to food choice and provision in the household is consistent with the current literature (Gatley, Caraher, & Lang, 2014; Mróz, Chapman, Oliffe, & Bortorff, 2011). In some cases this was seen as being simply a result of circumstances; however, it could be argued that the circumstances were generated by a primary gendered habitus inculcated since childhood that shaped the social structures and ultimately practice (Power, 1999).

Yeah I started cooking a lot more when I moved in with my girlfriend, when I was living with mates and at “Uni” I probably ate a lot worse than I do now. (I5W)

For example, my wife does most of the cooking but that's because I'm at work and that's just the way it worked out. Like I'm working because we've got kids, but if she was working and I was at home, I'd cook. And yeah I think it's a bit fun. Like I don't like to cook everything. (I19 B)

The gendered division of food work is primarily about women maintaining control of the household diet and domestic sphere (Lupton, 2000; Mróz et al., 2011). There are indications that there is a shift away from considering food work as simply for leisure and more as an expected, legitimate incorporation into Australian masculinities (Neuman, Gottzén, & Fjellström, 2017).

It's just the whole male to female thing you know like everything's shared now, which isn't a bad thing so. Yes. So like it's just whoever's home first will start the cooking. (I9B)

The Social World of Men: Environmental and Structural Barriers to Healthier Eating

Environmental barriers were raised by participants, which they believed made it difficult to eat healthily. Participants reported that the lack of time to prepare healthy food; cost of healthy food; convenience of less healthy foods; influence of peers; effort required to prepare healthy food; as well as difficulties accessing healthy foods all influenced their likelihood of eating healthily.

Yeah, like I said, convenience and time are big issues for us. Unless we've got something physically prepared for lunch then it is much easier just to buy it. Um, yeah I guess that'd be the main barriers for us—just time constraints and options constraints. (I1B)

Um, price would be a big factor, like going through the supermarket and a lot of the fresher stuff and healthier stuff is sometimes cheaper than processed foods, all that sort of thing. Not too much else really, just budget, yeah. (I15B)

From the participants interviewed, it appeared that healthy eating was only a priority at different points in their lives. This may have been influenced by transitional phases of their life such as commencing full-time work and adjusting to life out of home.

It's just because of convenience I suppose. Like we just live down the road from Eagle Boys so like it's every Tuesday, cheap Tuesday, we hit that up, yeah, it's a lot healthier. (I2B)

Additionally, access to healthy food or the convenience of food preparation at home and work promoted healthy eating among participants. The impact of time scarcity and convenience foods on poorer food choices and the increase in overweight and obesity has been well documented (Carrigan, Szmigin, & Leek, 2006; Howse, Hankey, Allman-Farinelli, Bauman, & Freeman, 2018; Jabs & Devine, 2006; Peltner & Thiele, 2017).

Ah, probably just time, because generally eating healthily requires more time and that is something we don't really have much of. That's probably the key factor there. (I17W)

Time—if I'm running late, extremely late it's always just yeah "It will have to be a fast food day today." (I4B)

While the salience of convenience and time in healthy eating among women and families has particularly been discussed (Bava, Jaeger, & Park, 2008), it appears that it is also an important factor in young men's food choices.

I dunno, it's more time consuming preparing like all vegetables and salads and things like that. (I7B)

As primary food preparers, the focus in the literature has been on women and the impact of convenience on food habits, where men have not been under such scrutiny for similar food choices (Bava, Jaeger, & Park, 2008). As an important factor in healthy eating for men, both single and those with female partners, more emphasis on convenience will likely contribute to a better understanding of their food choices.

Hmmm . . . probably not that influenced to eat healthily by other people, it's probably the other way like it's more of an influence to not eat healthy I think. Like there's always someone going out for lunch and asking you if you want anything or a group of people going down to get Thai or whatever, not that that's necessarily unhealthy. (I19W)

Attention on the existing environmental enablers to healthy eating among young men is also likely to assist their nutrition status and overall health outcomes. Enablers among participants in the present study included workplaces that provided a fresh fruit bowl as well as workplace kitchen facilities where fresh food could be stored and/or prepared. Additionally, working hours that allowed lunch to be prepared at home before work, time at the end of the working day to prepare evening meals, and adequate break times for food to be prepared and consumed were discussed.

Conclusion and Implications

The findings from this study, overall, point to Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* as an effective and valid conceptual framework for understanding human behavior—in this case men's relationship to the consumption of meat—as something that is both influenced by and which influences social contexts. Further, it reinforces the phenomenon of cultural capital as a product of social, contextual behavior and consumption; however, what this study also indicated is that the interactions between structure and agency, which typically generate consumptive patterns within human contexts, are potentially no longer dictated by or generated along traditional occupational and gender lines. Rather a more fluid notion of identity markers around class and gender is emerging, which is creating a shift to more microcultures both within and between these demographic characteristics. For example, in this study, living arrangements and relationships appear to be salient influences on food choice. A disruptive discourse is emerging that appears to be driven by changes in both culture and identity that no longer determines a predictable relationship between men and meat and that indicates a tendency to embrace more "feminine" dietary patterns, a potential shift away from meat as the sole centerpiece of an Australian male diet, and a shift toward

more shared responsibility and decision-making in purchasing and consumption patterns.

While there were clear observations emerging from the data analysis showing deviations from some of the more long-held cultural relationships between men and food toward more plural and challenged notions of masculinity, there were elements that appeared to be clinging steadfastly to historical traditions. When asked what types of foods they preferred, both occupational groups of these Australian men indicated that meat was an important component of meals that would be enjoyed. Further, not only was the inclusion of red meat important but the process of being able to cook or barbecue meat was highly valued as well, thus indicating some more long-held notions that men have an affinity for consuming red meat and cooking it in age-old ways, such as on an open fire.

An additional way in which traditional masculinities were still being upheld within this sample was noted in that there appeared to be a tendency for neither social class of men to enjoy being told what to do in relation to their diets, which aligns with traditional notions of “the man as the boss.” Neither group appeared interested in altering behavior due to advice from health authorities but rather being felt as a conclusion that the men had drawn for themselves. The results show that autonomy remains a crucial component of the cultural identity of Australian men and, as such, should be channeled when communicating to this group about behavioral and dietary change.

While Australian men appear to value autonomy highly, they are clearly still influenced by their partners wherein those partners are predominantly women. Although men seem to want to drive their own lifestyle changes and dietary choices, many within this cohort said that they are influenced by partners for two primary reasons: first, to improve their appearance and fitness levels and second, because their partners either cooked or shopped for them. The findings point to the fact that women still appear to be carrying the majority of labor around “food work” as well as being a healthy influence on men when it comes to diet. Although this traditionally gendered approach framed the majority of the findings, there were also voices expressing that it was no longer so much a gendered practice as a pragmatic one—and that whoever had the time and resources was going to be the one to make decisions about meals. This fits with other findings in this study that reveal a less binary approach to gender and food choice and a more complex and disrupted trend toward habits of consumption.

The final theme acknowledged temporal, logistical, social, and structural constraints that contributed to the shift, as noted in earlier analytical categories, that is, men were making decisions around pragmatic factors, as opposed to the more traditional notions and experiences of class and gender as proposed by Bourdieu. While there

is, no doubt, still a behavioral trend that reflects structural circumstance—which in turn shapes culture and consumption—these patterns are shifting to reflect a more shared set of experiences across gender and class. The practice of meat eating and dietary choice, overall, is emerging as a blend of historical traditions around these demographics and a shift toward both shared and overlapping social and economic roles across white-collared and working-class men and between men and women. The disruption of binary notions of class and gender as it pertains to food consumption generally and meat in particular needs to be reflected in both the understanding of changing patterns of consumption in the population and in health promotion campaigns directed specifically at men. With the evidence of a rapidly rising number of vegetarians and vegans in the population—many of whom are men—and an evolving poststructural account of the lived experience of class and gender, Bourdieu's framing of culture and consumption remains applicable and crucial for analysis. However, there is little doubt that groups have morphed and split to include microcultures that do not fit previous grand narratives around observed patterns.

There are a number of limitations that should be identified. The participants came from reasonably diverse occupational backgrounds, but there was no information on socioeconomic status, which may have been relatively similar and potentially a stronger driver that transcends occupation. All the participants in relationships were heterosexual. The interviewer was a young, White female and could have created a different dynamic regarding performative masculinities and the role of women. The data was collected 8 years ago and there has been a significant rise in the promotion of vegetarianism in response to climate change during this time that may further influence the shift toward microcultures that are not captured in this data.

Despite these limitations, this research provides the beginnings of a fresh critical approach that acknowledges the staying power of traditional masculinity as it relates to men's relationship with meat and the roles of their female partners in influencing these dynamics, while also paying close attention to the shifts that men are making to close gaps in class and between themselves and women as they move to deprioritize meat and increase healthy consumptive practices. Based on the literature and the findings in the current study, it is recommended that future research and interventions take heed of the importance most Australian men still place on autonomy and control in relation to their dietary intakes, while tapping into the continued role of women to aid in healthier food choices. There needs to be acknowledgment of the growing complexity and diversity in the emergent microcultures of men that will no doubt prove powerful in shaping their future consumptive practices.

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