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Do Food and Drinks Have Gender?: Cultural Conceptions of Food Types among Emory Undergraduates

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a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences  
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## Abstract

### Cultural Conceptions of Food and the Gender Performance of Emory University Students

By Sierra Stubbs

Gender performance affects various aspects of life, from clothing choices, to personal relationships and sometimes, as discussed in this paper, food choices. Therefore, the goal of this thesis was to better understand the ways that individuals conceptualize common foods and drinks in relation to gender, and whether they apply these conceptions to their gender performances. This thesis also strove to evaluate potential patterns in conceptions and gender performances across genders and races. This thesis focuses on college students because they are an excellent population to examine these cultural conceptions of food within as the population is racially diverse, and in the process of developing and solidifying their gender identities. The author conducted an exploratory free-listing exercise in order to discover which foods to interrogate in relation to gender. The author also conducted two online surveys, one large survey which received responses one hundred and sixty-five responses, and another smaller pilot survey that received thirty-five responses. Of the thirty-five pilot survey responses, seven of these surveys were conducted in person to allow for a deeper examination of the participant's thoughts and opinions.

Both the first survey and the second survey allowed for an exploration of norms surrounding gender and food. The second survey allowed the author to further examine how individuals conceptualize the relationships between the free-listed foods and gender. The results of this thesis illustrate that individuals do conceptualize food as related to gender in the same ways that previous research has found, and some individuals follow the common food and gender norms, such as ties between femininity and salad. However, although the results indicate that people are aware of food and gender norms, they also break these norms frequently, and many individuals do not think that these norms should exist. Finally, these results indicate that the resistance to these norms and stereotypes is not simple, as respondents gave conflicting answers about the ways that they break gender norms, and they speak about the difficulty of actually breaking norms and stereotypes. Incorporating this connection between gender and food may help healthcare professionals create more targeted nutritional interventions.

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# **INTRODUCTION**

## **Inspiration**

The inspiration for this study came to me one day while I was out to dinner at a nice restaurant with my family and a few family friends. As we all went around the table ordering from the waitress, one of my family friends, a middle-aged man, ordered a salad as his entrée. His wife laughed at him and called him a wimp, pointing out that he never eats salad, even while he is at home. Everyone else sitting at the table laughed, and the waitress did too. Then the anthropologist in me started thinking— why do we laugh at men when they eat salad? Why had I never seen a man order a salad as his entrée in a restaurant prior to that day? Why do men seem to always order meat? These internal questions, and this participant observation, was the beginning of the formation of this thesis. These questions surrounding both salad and its association to femininity, and meat and its association to masculinity are also reflected in the literature that examines food and gender (Greenebaum and Dexter 2017; Rozin et al 2012; Gal and Wilkie 2010).

Specifically, Greenebaum and Dexter (2017) examine male vegans and seek to understand both individual and the larger group cultural interpretations and perceptions of male vegan's masculinity in the absence of consuming meat. They find that male vegans have rebranded veganism by applying masculine justifications to traditionally feminine reasoning of health and body image, such as focusing on how their vegan diet gives them strength, agility, and athleticism (Greenebaum and Dexter 2017). Rozin et al. (2012) interrogates the ways that meat is associated with masculinity through 6

different studies in order to test various ways that this association might be psychologically produced. The authors find that there is a metaphorical or symbolic link between meat and masculinity. Gal and Wilkie (2010) explore the ways that people conceptualize foods, as I do in this study as well, and whether these conceptualizations change depending on the resources (such as time and an absence of distractions) that individuals have while they are conceptualizing. These authors find that individuals resist food and gender norms when given plenty of resources (especially when given plenty of time), but when they make implicit decisions, they conform to stereotypes surrounding food and gender; a common stereotype that individuals in this study upheld was the associations between meat and masculinity (Gal and Wilkie 2010).

### **Background and Overview**

The shifting social and cultural construction of gender identity and its related norms penetrates all aspects of life, from friendships and relationships to parenting and clothing choice (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003). Recently, the rise of the #metoo twitter movement, in addition to a Super Bowl commercial by Gillette about “the best a man can do”, and the increase in the popularity of feminism have placed discussions of gender, toxic masculinity, and its consequences at the forefront of American society. Because gender affects all aspects of social life, it may be argued that it must also influence food, food access, and food choices, as “eating is one of the most biologically deterministic and, at the same time, socially adaptable human acts” (Wong 1993:18). For humans, eating (and not eating) is a social act as well as a biological act, and when we eat, we can express ourselves, our identities, cultures, genders, races, and classes (Maciel and Castro 2013). Specifically concerning the display of gender through food, in

Western societies, meat is found to be strongly associated with masculinity; this association is possibly due to the association between eating meat and visual “strength and virility” (Greenebaum and Dexter 2017).

In this study, I focus on the same male-female gender binary that exists in the available literature and examine whether foods are sorted into gender-based cultural categories among Emory University students.<sup>1</sup> I also interrogate whether study participants are aware of the existence of these cultural categories, and whether they conform to the norms that involve these gender-based cultural categories. I find that participants do place foods on a gender-based scale, which aligns with previously conducted studies about food and gender (Greenebaum and Dexter 2017; Gal and Wilkie 2010). I also find that the majority of participants either recognize these norms and stereotypes exist and feel uncomfortable breaking them, or recognize that they exist and feel comfortable actively attempting to break them. Either way, my findings suggest that these gender-based cultural cognitive categories are ingrained into the social order of our society.

### *Rationale and Anthropological Connection*

I chose food, and specifically, food choices, as my research topic, because examining food can shed important light on the social and cultural practices of a group. Food can often be an important part of a person’s identity. For example, salsa is intertwined with Latinx cuisine and culture, and spaghetti is intertwined with Italian cuisine and culture (Riley and Cavanaugh 2017). Not only is eating food part of a

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<sup>1</sup> Out of all the data that I collected, only 1 respondent (out of 200 participants) was gender non-conforming, so I was unable to draw any conclusions outside of the male-female gender binary.

nutrient-based biological process, but it is part of social processes as well. As anthropologists Maciel and Castro (2013) argue, through their analysis of Claude Levi-Strauss' work, that food is good to eat with but also good to “think with” in order to understand the culture around us (Maciel and Castro 2013; Levi-Strauss 1970). They also argue that cuisine can be utilized by individuals as a language to communicate various dimensions of their identities, such as race, class, and as this paper focuses on, gender (Maciel and Castro 2013).

This study is situated within the field of food anthropology, or the “field of study on the set of representations, beliefs, knowledge, and practices inherited and/or learned that are associated to food and that are shared by individuals of a given culture or a particular social group” (Maciel 2013:322). Examining this topic of food, gender, and masculinity through an anthropological lens will help to add to the research on this topic, and to answer ethnographic questions of why and how.

### **Positionality**

As a researcher, it is important to note my approach to the topics within this study, and my positionality in reference to the research that I conduct. I am a current undergraduate student and an anthropology major at Emory University in the College of Arts and Sciences. I was born in the United States, and I am a twenty-one-year-old black woman. These identities that I hold may affect the way that these data were collected or bias the way that they were analyzed. Interestingly, the first time that I truly learned about gender, and its distinction from biological sex, I was at Emory. It fascinated me to hear about the ways that we are consistently doing and performing

gender, rather than simply *being* of a certain gender. The norms surrounding femininity and masculinity really drew my attention.

As I learned about the ways that men exhibit hyper-masculine traits that affect their health, such as avoiding preventative medical care and engaging in risky behavior, I also found that men have shorter average lifespans than women in every part of the world (UN 2015). Because of these interests and this knowledge about masculinity, while I was creating the research goals for this thesis, I began to wonder whether similar masculine norms exist in the realm of food as well. If they do exist, I wanted to take that question a step further and also touch on why they occur. As a research assistant on a project on alternative food movements in Atlanta, food has grown to become a passion for me as it is something that I have learned is truly cultural and deeply ingrained in my identity and the identity of others.

As I read more about the relationship between food and culture, I began to wonder whether other foods, beyond simply just meat, are used to contribute to the ways that people convey their genders, and how do these foods fit into the norms that society prescribes to certain genders? Do the selections of these foods in order to perform gender change with different social contexts? This study seeks to interrogate these questions, as well as to add to the literature within food studies, the anthropology of food, and cultural anthropology.

## **Study Location**

This study takes place at Emory University, with a focus on American-born undergraduate students. I choose to only examine American-born students as the gender norms of international students may differ from American students, creating conflicts in the data analysis.<sup>2</sup> All students at Emory have the option of purchasing a meal plan, and as most of the students who participated in the study were freshman, they are required to purchase an on-campus meal plan.

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<sup>2</sup> I analyze the international students together, separate from the American students, and I give these results in the Findings and Analysis section.

# ***LITERATURE REVIEW***

In this section, I give a background about the key terms, concepts, and relevant research that will help to facilitate a better understanding of this study and its goals.

## ***Culture and Gender***

In this study, I find that individuals utilize symbols--their food choices and avoidances-- to conceptualize their their gender identities and what it means to perform gender normative behavior as a man or a woman within their culture. Geertz (1973) defines culture in relation to symbols as a "transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (Geertz 1973:89) This definition focuses on how individuals use symbols to convey meanings that are salient to their cultures. Also, culture and the symbols that people use to perform their cultures are crucial to the ways that individuals within a society conceptualize and display their identities (Geertz 1973).

Gender identity, which is distinct from biological sex, is the cultural construction of norms and behaviors that society assigns to the sexes (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003). Anthropologist Henrietta Moore argues that understanding gender relations "must remain central to the analysis of key questions in anthropology and social sciences as a whole" (1988:195) Furthermore, gender is not static: it changes over time to reflects the norms of a society, but it also evolves as individuals age and change too. Linguists Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet state in their book that "gender



and sex come together, as society tries to match up ways of behaving with biologically-based sex assignments” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003:2). These authors further describe gender as learned; newborns and infants do not exhibit gendered behaviors, but as children age, they begin to display those behaviors. Individuals internalize cultural gender patterns and display them to enact their gendered roles in social interactions.

Additionally, gender is not something that people have, it is something that they are constantly doing and performing (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003; West and Zimmerman, 1987). It permeates every aspect of daily life: “it is deeply embedded in every aspect of society – in our institutions, in public spaces, in art, clothing, movement” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003:20). Further, according to anthropologist Sandra Morgen, gender is recognized as a fundamental aspect of “individual and collective identity”, culture, and power relations within a society (Morgen 1989:1). Within a society, individuals make use of symbols, such as the way that they dress and their behaviors, to signal their gender to the people they interact with. Gender also provides an individual with the means to interpret their gendered interactions with others (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003; Morgen 1989). Gender is especially salient when individuals interact with potential sexual partners and when individuals perform gender normative behaviors during interactions with the same gender (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003). In my work, I find that individuals have conceptions of food and gender related to dates (interactions with potential sexual partners) and men discussed their food selections in the context of being around other men. Also, it is important to note that although much of the available research on gender focuses on a binary of gender, just men and

women, there is a spectrum of genders, and some individuals do not conform to any gender at all (Morgen 1989).

In his *Annual Review of Anthropology* article, Gutmann outlines three main concepts of the definitions of masculinity within anthropology: (1) masculinity defined as what men think and do in order to be men; (2) the concept that some men are seen to be inherently more manly than others; (3) the concept that masculinity may be considered anything that women are not (Gutmann 1997). The first and third concepts about masculinity relates to my questions about whether individuals engage in food and gender norms and stereotypes, such as meat's link to masculinity, in order to contribute to their gender identities (Rozin et al. 2012; Gal and Wilkie 2010). On the other hand, a variety of behaviors and symbols are also feminine-coded by American society. The norms of a feminine gender role are apparent when examining the division of labor by gender in the United States; further, female coded norms and behaviors typically involve care-taking, domesticity, and raising children (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003).

When it comes to performing gender, males tend to engage more with their masculinity and follow masculine gender norms more closely than female-identifying individuals follow feminine norms. This engagement with masculinity typically begins at an early age, with male children following the gender norms that concern friendships, playing and toys more strictly than female children. This trend continues into adulthood; male parents are more likely than female parents to reward their sons (but not as frequently their daughters) for engaging with gender norms such as selecting "boy toys" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003). This bias towards rewarding males for male behaviors more frequently than rewarding females for female behaviors involves

consequences for “unmanly” behavior: males are more likely than females to be ostracized by their peers for breaking gender norms. Although, as De Visser and Smith (2007) argue, [hyper-]masculine men may confidently engage in or discuss feminine activities since their masculinity is tenacious. So, men that display as or feel more masculine may engage in feminine normative behaviors more easily than men who appear to be less masculine. This confidence for hyper-masculine individuals during their gender performance may relate to the possible patterns concerning race and the over-performance of masculinity that I found.

### **Race and Masculinity**

As Gina Bell and Tina Harris discuss in their study on race and masculinity, black men, and to a lesser extent other men of color, have been systematically emasculated through direct ways, such as lynchings, police brutality, and castration (Bell and Harris 2016). These emasculations typically occur after men associate with white women, “disrespect” white men, and act “suspicious” (Bell and Harris 2016). The emasculation of men of color, especially of black men, also occurs in indirect ways, such as the regular depiction in television and movies of these men as inferior criminals, hyper-sexual, disposable sexual objects, drug abusers, and supporting actors to white leads (Bell and Harris 2016). My findings in relation to the over-masculine nature of the answers of men of color suggest that their answers may be a response to the consistent public emasculation of men of color and the need to exert their masculinity.

## **Food**

In their chapter “Food Talk: Studying Foodways and Language in Use Together” in the book *Food Culture: Anthropology, Linguistics and Food Studies*, Riley and Cavanaugh (2017) argue that eating and creating food is one of the ways that humans negotiate their existence within society and interactions with each other. Producing, sharing, and consuming food allows individuals to perform their cultural identities within different social contexts. What individuals cook, how they cook it, what they eat, and who they eat it around is often dependent on cultural identities, typically either race, ethnicity, gender, or class. Individuals use foods to make cultural and emotional meaning. Food also is deeply connected to language in the ways that it is categorized and socialized symbolically (Riley and Cavanaugh 2017).

### **Settled and Nomadic Sensibilities**

The gendering of settled and nomadic sensibilities of culture that anthropologist Richard Shweder (1993) explains in his article “Why Do Men Barbecue?” also applies to this research. Sensibilities are defined as the conceptualization of a culture’s tastes and preferences. Shweder argues that cultures with settled sensibilities find value in defined distinctions, such as the separateness of what it means to be male and female . Men and women grow up separately, then continue to exist within different spheres as adults as spouses may sleep in separate beds and families may divide the chores of the home by gender . Alternatively, cultures with nomadic sensibilities do not value distinctions; for example, these cultures might group males and females together both in wording such as “human kind” rather than “mankind” and “parenting” rather than “mothering”

(Shweder 1993:291). Cultures with nomadic sensibilities might also eliminate the barriers that exist in domestic spaces as well, such as a male occupation of a traditionally female space like the kitchen. These two cultural sensibilities might also co-exist, though occasionally this coexistence may be uncomfortable, within different spaces of an individual culture, such as the tradition of men as the typical barbecuer in American culture — a settled sensibility — in coexistence with men and women sleeping in the same bed— a nomadic sensibility (Shweder 1993).

These concepts of sensibilities can be used as a way to think through my research. Specifically, my research is an example of settled and nomadic sensibilities co-existing. The fact that men and women appear to cognitively sort foods and drinks into gender categories, whether that is based on the norms they have learned from watching television or their families, is an example of the settled nature of this cultural sensibility. There are distinct differences between the foods that exist as masculine and feminine, and there seems to be a consensus about what those foods are. However, at the same time very few people conform to the norms and stereotypes that these categories create. Instead, they eat what they want and disregard the categories and norms, illustrating the nomadic nature of this cultural sensibility. Although there are distinct differences between masculine and feminine foods and drinks, the lines are blurred when it comes to the behaviors of men and women in relation to the norms surrounding those foods and drinks. Furthermore, some of the respondents stated that they would be uncomfortable breaking certain food and gender norms, or that sorting these items into categories was difficult for them, which shows that the “unhappy”, or

uncomfortable, existence of both settled and nomadic cultural sensibilities in relation to this aspect of our culture (Shweder 1993).

## **Structuralism**

Claude Levi-Strauss, a famous French anthropologist, frames structuralism as a method of breaking down cultural phenomena and experiences (Jary 2006; Levi-Strauss 1970). Levi-Strauss argues that patterns in thinking developed as humans started engaging in more cultural practices rather than natural, reflexive practices, are the ways that humans make sense of the world; the structures typically exist in binaries such as the raw and the cooked. The “raw” exemplifies the natural world that humans existed within before culture, which is the “cooked”. Levi-Strauss also makes distinctions between the broiled and the roasted. The broiled is tied to femininity and conducted inside (by women), and the roasted is tied to masculine and conducted outside (by men).

Furthermore, he states that “in our own society, table manners, social etiquette, fashions of dress, and many of our moral, political, and religious attitudes are scrupulously observed by everyone, although their real origin and function are not often critically examined,” and argues that structuralism seeks a deeper understanding of these practices within and across cultures (Levi-Strauss 1970:18). He argues that these cultural practices can be examined through the study of food; he argues that food embodies the culture it is from in the ways that it is prepared and displayed and that it can act as a form of communication (Maciel and Castro 2013; Levi-Strauss 1970). This structuralist lens can be applied to the examination of food and gender; individual food

selection and the ways that those chosen foods are prepared may shed light on what masculine and feminine ideals and conceptions exist as within a culture.

### **Real Men Don't Eat Quiche**

As noted in the gender section above, masculinity often involves what men avoid (feminine things) in order to perform as men. The book *Real Men Don't Eat Quiche* by Bruce Feirstein and Lee Lorenz (1982), a New York Times best-seller that sold over 55 million times, gives some sarcastic examples of what foods, behaviors, and practices that “real men” should do avoid in order to be men. The popularity of this book suggests that Americans were interested in this topic of what men “don't do,” even if only to laugh about it or not take it seriously. This book, though tongue-in-cheek, gives some examples that I considered while thinking through the conceptions of this thesis and my research question. Feirstein and Lorenz state that “yogurt, tofu, veal, pate, creamed spinach,” and many more “wimp foods” would not be found in a “Real Man's stomach” (1982:75). They also give a “nutritional guide” for “real men” and 41% of the items that he listed were meat, such as burger variations and steak. However, their guide includes potato chips and french fries as masculine, and the majority of my respondents listed these items as neutral.

### **Food and Gender Studies**

Sociologist Jemál Nath (2011) examines the ways that vegetarian men engage with hegemonic masculine gender norms, especially the norms that call for the consumption of meat. The data in this study are collected as part of a larger Australian

health study about vegetarian men and women of all ages. Nath uses an ethnographic research method, face-to-face interviewing, for data collection. He records semi-structured interviews of 25 men. The interviews average 2 hours and discuss nutrition, health, how the men interact with others who discuss their vegetarianism, and the way they perceive others to view them. His findings show that vegetarian men often feel that they are pushed to justify the existence of their masculinity in the absence of meat eating. This finding illustrates the men's public and the personal acknowledgment that they are straying from traditional gender norms (Nath 2011). I find that many Emory students are also aware of these norms surrounding meat and masculinity, and that they also have a desire to reject them or stray from them at the least.

Linguist Buerkle also studies the relationship between meat eating and masculinity. In order to examine this relationship, Buerkle examines the relationship between beef consumption and hegemonic masculine performance in juxtaposition to femininity and metrosexuality (Buerkle 2009). Specifically, he observes the ways that fast food ads reinforce notions of hegemonic masculinity while rejecting femininity in Burger King and Hardee's television ads. He specifically chooses Burger King and Hardee's out of all of the fast food restaurants because of their history of displaying masculinity on their television ads. In this study, the author codes and examines videos of fast food advertisements in order to collect data. He does this data collection by coding for animalistic references or suggestions, over-sexualization of the act of hamburger eating, references to a link between women and meat, and the rejection of traditional female norms, such as driving a minivan. He finds that these articles exhibit the present world- one where hetero-masculine men eat meat to convey their



masculinity, assert their dominance, and distance themselves from femininity (Buerkle 2009). My findings from interviews and participant observation align with these notions about the present world.

Another scholar that examines how men distance themselves from femininity is Jonathan Deutsch (2005), who studies food culture. Deutsch interrogates the ways that men exert masculinity in the traditionally feminine dominated spaces of food shopping and cooking. Specifically, this article examines male firefighters, traditionally a very masculine job, and how they adjust their gender performance while engaging in what are seen as traditionally feminine practices (Deutsch 2005). The entire firehouse agreed to participate in the study. All participants in this study are heterosexual men and the majority of them are white. He conducts interviews and participant observation where he sits and silently observes the men interacting with each other. He uses the silent participant observation to create a timeline of the daily cooking practices, and he makes sure to ask the men about their practices at home in comparison to in the firehouse. He also transcribes and codes the interviews, and he finds common themes- sexuality, meat-eating, and adjusting masculinity. His most important findings are about the ways that the firefighters actively attempt to adjust their masculine gender performance while cooking. They crack sexual jokes and center many of their meals around meat. The author concludes that gender pathways of food preparation may differ depending on the context that the men are in, such as at work surrounded by men versus at home with their wives and children (Deutsch 2005). In my study, many participants describe social context when discussing whether they follow gender and food norms. Further, male respondents specifically mention being made fun of by other males for eating salad, and

witnessing the way that a heterosexual male was made fun of by his wife for eating a salad, which she deemed “girly” was my inspiration for this thesis.

Gal and Wilkie (2010) also attempt to evaluate the way that social context affects food selections by different genders. The authors utilize a three part study to examine the ways that men and women select foods and self-regulate under both constrained and unconstrained time. Undergraduate students enrolled in introductory psychology courses at a large public low-ranked university were offered extra credit for their participation in the first two experiments. In the third experiment, the authors found subjects through recruitment on a social networking site. They manipulate the time that students have to make decisions, as well as the difficulty level of the decisions that they are making (Gal and Wilkie 2010). The authors used survey experimental methods for each part of the study. For the first survey experiment, the authors present participants with 16 pairs of food choices (one made up of masculine-associated foods such as meat and one made up of feminine associated foods such as vegetables) and ask them to choose one of them. Participants were randomized into two groups- either high or low resource availability (time) for the selection. The second survey experiment used a similar design but instead of time as the resource availability factor that was changed between the groups, distractions that made it harder to make a selection were introduced by the authors. The two groups either listened to the song “Here It Goes Again” during selection, or had to listen and count the number of times that the song said, “goes” (Gal and Wilkie 2010).

Additionally, in these experiments, subjects were purposefully deceived about the purpose of the study in order to remove potential bias. In the final survey experiment,

the authors present subjects with food choice sets and ask them to choose which foods they prefer. The author's findings indicate that when men are resource depleted (such as being given a limited amount of time), then they make choices that are in line with traditional food gender norms. But, when they have plenty of resources, then they made attempts to reject and resist the traditional food-related gender norms (Gal and Wilkie 2010). In comparison, the participants in my study were given ample resources (unlimited time and no forced distractions), and they made selections that align with traditional food and gender norms, but they also stated that they reject these norms in their personal lives.

Much of the available literature that I reviewed on the relationship between gender and food finds that meat is associated with masculinity, and that the absence of meat is associated with femininity (Greenebaum and Dexter 2017; Rozin et al. 2012; Gal and Wilkie 2010; Buerkle 2009). Further, individuals who do not eat meat or who engage with feminine food norms often attempt to justify their masculinity (Greenebaum and Dexter 2017; Newcombe et al. 2012; Deutsch 2005). The literature also finds that choices change due to internal variables such as resource availability and depletion (Gal and Wilkie 2010) as well as external variables such as the presence of other males (Deutsch 2005). However, many of these studies are not anthropological works, do not fully address whether individuals are aware of gender norms when they are selecting their foods and engaging in food-centered behavior, and do not fully address what individuals think about these norms in relation to their own gender experiences. They also fail to address whether the gender associations with foods are more nuanced than simply masculine (meat) or feminine (not meat).

My study addresses these gaps in the literature by examining the categories foods and drinks outside of solely meat, and allowing participants to categorize the genders of foods on a scale rather than just as masculine, feminine, or neutral. My study also seeks to add to the existing literature by asking participants whether they engage with food and gender cognitive categories while performing their own gender identities.

# ***METHODOLOGY***

In this section, I deconstruct my project goals and the main questions that I examined through my research. I also discuss the methods that I chose in order to examine my main questions, and why I believe those methods were the best choice.

## ***Project Goals and Questions***

The following is my primary research question: do Emory students categorize foods and food choices as gendered? However, this question leads to other questions as well: Do male-identifying students consume meat in order to contribute to their performance as masculine individuals? How does the consumption or avoidance of certain foods contribute to the definitions of culturally-defined gender roles? The previous question leads to a follow-up question: how does food and food selection help to define what our culture thinks of as masculine and feminine gender norms? Does one gender seek to follow the food-related gender norms more than others? This study seeks to add to the literature surrounding these questions.

## ***Hypothesis***

Based on the previously cited literature, I hypothesize that on Emory's campus, food does indeed exist on a gendered scale, with meats existing on the extremely masculine part of the scale and healthy and light foods existing on the extremely feminine part of the scale (Rothgerber 2013; Rozin et. al 2012; Gal and Wilkie 2010).

### **Step One: Participant Observation**

This study was conducted in a three part stepwise fashion, with the results from the first step informing the next two steps. I also conducted participant observation throughout the entirety of the study. During this participant observation, I paid close attention to the food choices of the people around me in relation to their genders. I also had frequent informal conversations with my friends about my research in order to learn their reactions and opinions. Many people that I spoke with were aware of the existence of norms and stereotypes in relation to gender and food.

### **Step Two: Free Listing Exercise**

The second step was a free listing exercise that I conducted in person with 42 undergraduate anthropology students<sup>3</sup>. For this exercise, I asked respondents to list as many as possible of masculine foods, feminine foods, and foods they believe that masculine men might avoid in order to portray their masculinity that they could on large index cards. I chose to conduct a free-list so that I did not simply pull random foods to interrogate. Further, free lists are often used to determine cultural consensus and food choice patterns, which is why I elected to utilize them in this study (Hough and Ferraris 2010). In order to analyze the data collected during this study, I examined each answer on the index card and created a table with the number of times that each food or drink was listed overall (see Findings and Discussion section). There was a clear divide

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout each step in this study, I reminded participants that participation was voluntary.

between the most mentioned foods (33% or higher) and the least mentioned foods (19% or lower), and the most mentioned foods were included in the third survey.

### **Step Three: First Online Survey**

The third step of this study was a Google Forms online survey which was supplemented by in-person interviews. This first survey was a pilot for the second larger survey, as I utilized some of the same questions from this survey on the second survey. The URL link for this survey was posted in Emory undergraduate Facebook groups, and was sent out to undergraduate students that I know personally. I received 35 responses to this survey, which includes the 7 interviewees. For the 7 interviews participants, I used a snowball sample, where I connected with individuals of specific races, sexualities, and genders who referred me to other individuals to speak with, and availability sampling, where I recruited people that I know (Bernard 1995:97). I recruited the interview respondents in a purposive way and based recruitment on undergraduates that I already had a connection with. I also contacted people that I believed would feel most comfortable speaking with me about potentially uncomfortable gender behaviors and norms.

I attempted to give an in-person survey to a variety of genders (2), and races (3). In this survey, I asked questions about favorite foods, diet, menu selections, and cooking habits (see Appendix for full survey). I used the open-ended survey questions as guidance in the during in-person interviews, with follow up and clarifications asked as well. In person, I also asked which foods men and women feel comfortable with eating

depending on the social context that they were in. In both this survey and the second survey, I asked whether students were born in the United States in order to analyze American students in relation to their conceptions of gender separate from international students. Further, I grouped the data by race and gender in this step, and analyzed it by looking for patterns along race and gender lines. Patterns that arose include social context, norm resistance, and race and masculinity.

I chose to do online surveys and in-person survey interviews because each of these research methods have different strengths. One strength of surveys is that they can gather more reliable and generalizable results than interviews (Vogt 2017; Chambliss 2016). Surveys also allow the researcher to reach more participants than an in-person interview does (Bernard 1995:259). However, in-person surveys have the advantage of allowing participants to elaborate upon descriptions about their experiences, feelings, and perceptions in their own words, and they also allow researchers to ask subjects follow up questions about any answers that are given (Vogt 2017; Chambliss 2016; Bernard, 1995).

#### **Step Four: Larger Online Survey**

The fourth and final step of this study was a survey which was conducted through the online platform Qualtrics (see Appendix for the full survey). I included the 14 commonly free-listed foods on this survey, and asked participants to place them on a scale from 0 to 50 with 0 being masculine, 25 being neutral and 50 being feminine. I chose 0-50 to allow participants to be more specific than simply a 1-10 scale, but without the larger variance that a 1-100 scale would have produced. For the analysis of



the gender scale data, I followed the methodology of Rozin et al. (2012) in their study of food and gender scales, and took the means of each of the foods in relation to the assigned gender numbers. This online survey also included questions that would produce qualitative data such as participant's favorite foods, most recent meal, and gender norm performance and resistance. I sent the online link to survey to various food and environmental-based campus clubs such as Slow Food and Emory Food Chain. I also contacted professors and asked if I could send this survey to their classes. Two anthropology professors sent the survey link to their classes, and one of the professors teaches Anthropology 101, a class that is mostly freshmen, and offered his students extra credit for completing it. I received 165 full responses to this survey, 143 of which were American-born students. Similarly to the first online survey, I analyzed the data for gender and racial patterns. The data from this study contains similar patterns to the first study: participants' answers reflect the importance of social context and norm resistance.

## **Methods Table**

I have included a table of the various methods that I utilized during this thesis, as well as the number of respondents that participated during each method, in order to display them in a clear manner.

Method	Description	Number of Respondents
Participant Observation	The interactions that I had while I was with people as they ate and selected food both helped inspire me for this study. I also supplemented every method throughout this study with participant observation.	N/a
Free List	I conducted a free listing exercise with an anthropology class in order to find specific food and gender associations to interrogate	42
In-person Interviews	I supplemented the first online survey with in-person interviews in order to allow participants to elaborate	7
First Survey	The first Google Forms Survey	24 (not including the 7 interviewees & 4 international students)
Second Survey	The second Qualtrics online survey	165 (143 American students)

***Study Population: Only American Born For the Analysis***

I created this restriction of American-born in order to examine the gender expression at a specific place, Emory University, and of a specific group, young American-born undergraduate students. I excluded international students in order to ensure the gender and food cultural practices were at least partially American in nature, although a combination of American and immigrant parent-influenced practices may be present in the data as well.

# FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

## Respondent Profile

Method	Number of Respondents	Gender demographics	Race Demographics	Sexuality Demographics
Free List	42	71% female 10% male 19% unlisted *incomplete as not all participants listed their gender identities	N/a (individuals were not asked)	N/a (individuals were not asked)
First Survey	35 (which includes 7 interviews and 4 international students)	70% female 27% male 3% non-conforming	16% Black 16% Latinx 54% White 3% Asian 11% mixed	72% straight 28% LGBTQ
In Person Interviews	7	29% female 71% male	14% Black 43% Latinx 43% White	29% straight 71% LGBTQ
Second Survey	165 (143 American students)	64% female 36% male	27% Black 9% Latinx 30% White 28% Asian 6% mixed	87% straight 13% LGBTQ

Furthermore, the majority of the respondents to the second survey were also omnivores (80%).

## **Free List Results and Analysis**

After analyzing the free list responses to determine which foods and drinks respondents mentioned repetitively, I compiled a list of foods to test. These foods were: burgers, ribs, beer, french fries, potato chips, black coffee (all listed as masculine foods and drinks on the free list), and dark chocolate, red wine, margaritas, salad, smoothies, yogurt (all listed as feminine foods and drinks). These foods and drinks were mentioned in much greater numbers than any of the other commonly listed foods, as illustrated in the table below. Either foods were listed in at least 33% of the sample, or they were barely listed at all (19% or less). Subsequently, these foods that were listed 33% of the time or higher were the foods and drinks that were included with pictures in the gender-sorting section of the second survey.

Notably, 3 out of the 42 free list respondents refused to participate in the free listing exercise, with 2 out of the 3 students stating that they do not personally see foods as gendered or associated with perceptions of gender. One of the two students states that even though the media might portray the foods as such, she does not agree, highlighting her resistance to the norms. The second student states that although they do not think foods should be gendered, men might avoid certain foods and drinks, listing the example of salad, because of social expectations. The third student refused to participate all together and did not elaborate on their opinions. Resistance to food and gender associations also arose during the analysis of the data from the surveys.

## Free-Listed Foods Included In the Second Survey

Free-Listed Description	Free-Listed Frequency	Second Survey Frequency
Steak, Masculine	32/42 (76%)	<b>118/143 Masculine</b> 20/143 Neutral 4/143 Feminine
Potato chips, Masculine	16/42 (38%)	33/143 Masculine <b>104/143 Neutral</b> 6/143 Feminine
Black coffee, Masculine	15/42 (36%)	53/143 Masculine <b>72/143 Neutral</b> 18/143 Feminine
Ribs, Masculine	17/42 (40%)	<b>116/143 Masculine</b> 23/143 Neutral 4/143 Feminine
Burger, Masculine	26/42 (62%)	<b>84/143 Masculine</b> 52/143 Neutral 7/143 Feminine
French fries, Masculine	15/42 (36%)	24/143 Masculine <b>105/143 Neutral</b> 14/143 Feminine
Beer, Masculine	32/42 (76%)	<b>128/143 Masculine</b> 11/143 Neutral 4/143 Feminine
Banana, Feminine	14/42 (33%)	11/143 Masculine <b>100/143 Neutral</b> 32/143 Feminine
Margarita, Feminine	14/42 (33%)	4/143 Masculine 37/143 Neutral <b>102/143 Feminine</b>
Yogurt, Feminine	15/42 (36%)	7/143 Masculine 40/143 Neutral <b>96/143 Feminine</b>

Dark chocolate, Feminine	16/42 (38%)	9/143 Masculine 65/143 Neutral 69/143 Feminine
Red wine, Feminine	17/42 (40%) listed as feminine  1/42 (2%) listed as masculine	8/143 Masculine 55/143 Neutral <b>80/143 Feminine</b>
Salad, Feminine	34/42 (81%)	2/143 Masculine 37/143 Neutral <b>104/143 Feminine</b>
Smoothie, Feminine	14/42 (33%)	1/143 Masculine 29/143 Neutral <b>113/143 Feminine</b>

#### Free-Listed Foods That Were Common But Not Used In the Online Survey

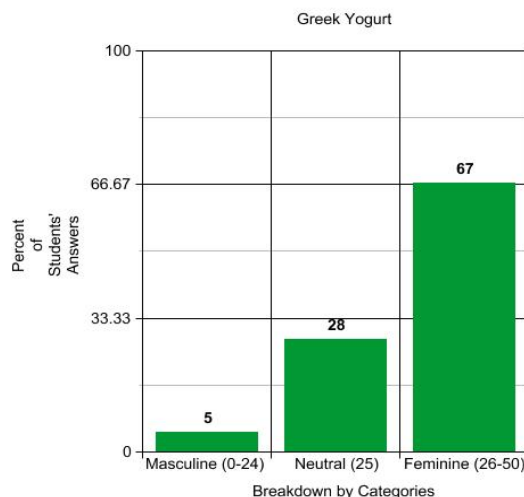
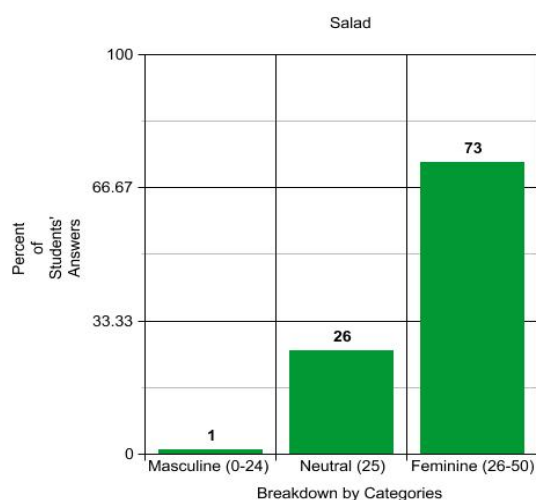
Protein powder, masculine	8/42 (19%)
Wings, masculine	6/42 (14%)
Fish, feminine	7/42 (17%)
Cakes/cupcakes, feminine	7/42 (17%)
“Vegan food/diet”, feminine	7/42 (17%)
Strawberries, feminine	6/42 (14%)
Chicken, feminine	4/42 (10%)
Cosmopolitans, feminine	4/42 (10%)
Straws, feminine	2/42 (5%)
“Mini Things”, feminine	2/42 (5%)

### **Quantitative Results of the Larger Survey**

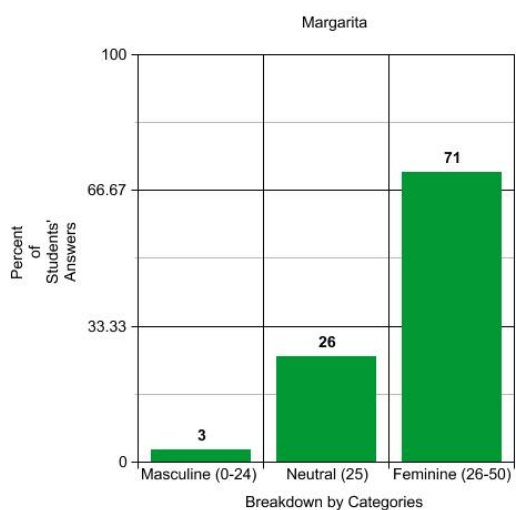
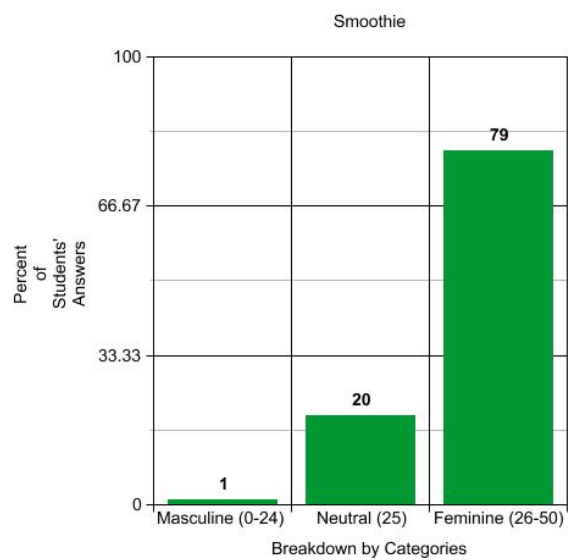
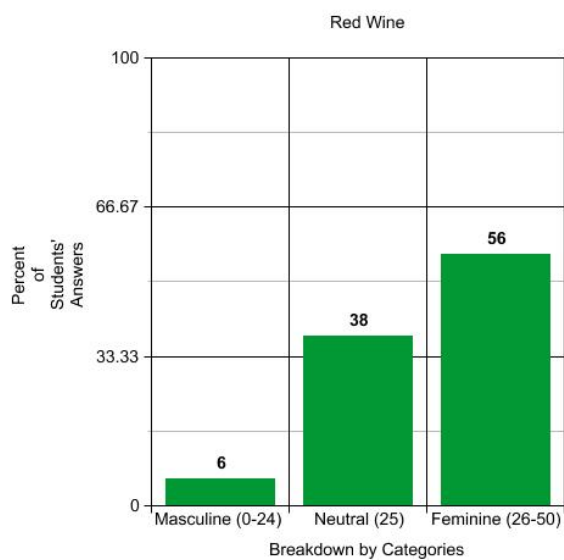
The second survey asked respondents to place the previously free-listed foods on gender scales from extremely masculine to extremely feminine. Respondents assign

each food or drink a number on a scale from 1 to 50, with 1 being masculine, 25 is neutral, and 50 is feminine. Any response above 25 illustrates that respondents made a choice to list an item as more feminine than neutral. Any response below 25 illustrates that respondents made a choice to list the item as more masculine than neutral, even if just slightly. Overall, the findings of respondents' food and gender-sorting patterns align with the findings from Gal and Wilkie's (2010) and Rozin et. al's (2012) studies that meat is associated with masculinity. However, these findings also illustrate that the scale may be more nuanced than meat = masculinity. For example, 36% of students listed burgers as neutral, and 16% listed ribs as neutral. Whether these neutral listings came from students who refused to participate because they do not view foods as genders, or if they came from students who did not find this exercise important, these answers illustrate that students do not automatically associate meat with masculinity. Furthermore, after conducting statistical analysis, I find that the p-value of these findings is  $< 0.00$ .

## Feminine-Sorted Foods



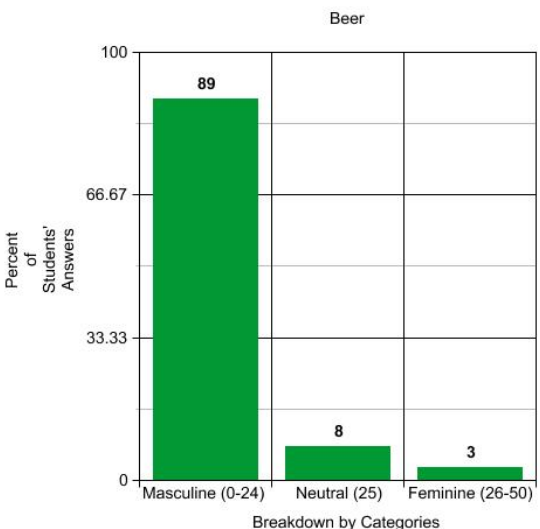
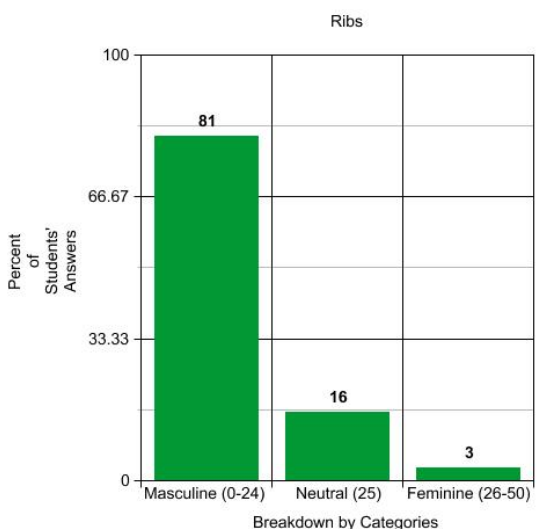
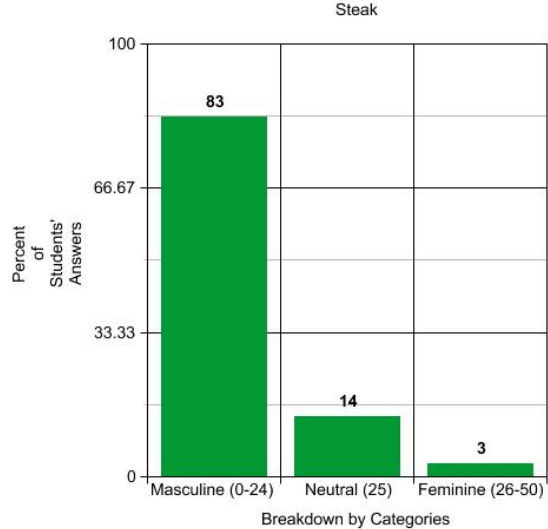
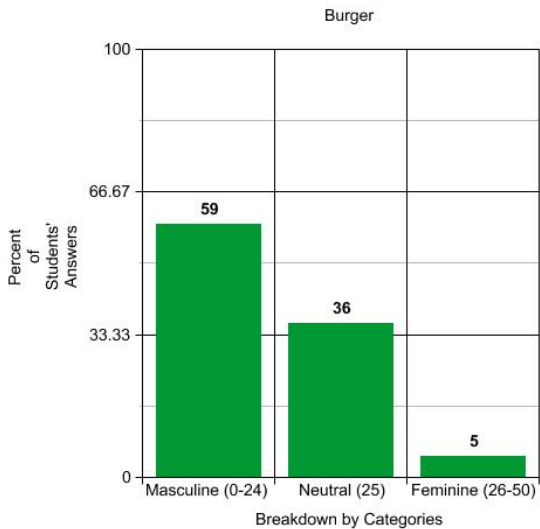




Respondents list salad full of vegetables, greek yogurt, smoothies, margaritas, and red wine as feminine at varying levels. This pattern of sorting matches with the free list, as these items were all listed as feminine during the free list. One commonality among these food– salad, greek yogurt, and smoothie– is that they are all nutritious, healthy foods. Scholars also consider red wine to have health properties, such as its high level of antioxidants (Saleem and Basha 2010). All of these foods and drinks are

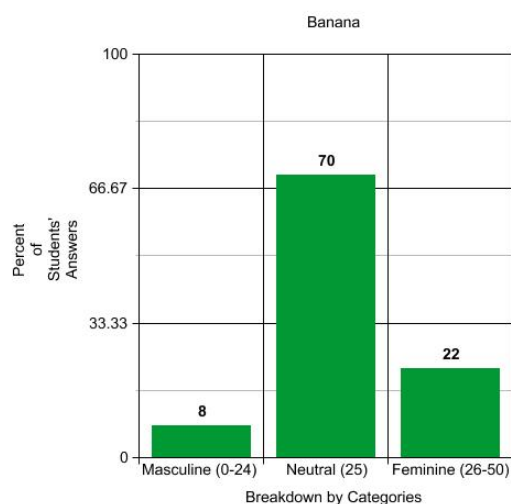
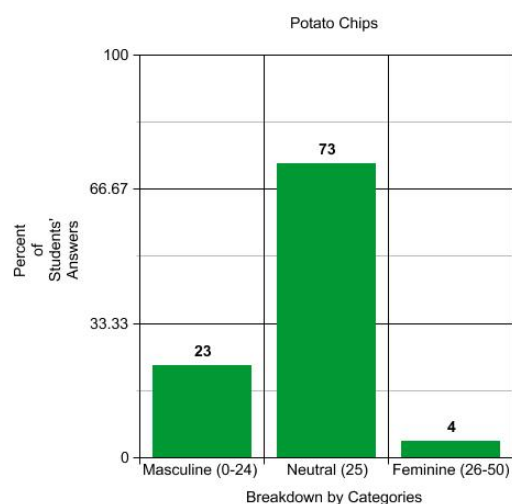
also low in fat content. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), salad contains 0 grams of fat per 100 gram serving and vanilla greek yogurt contains 2.5 grams of fat per 100 gram serving. Simple smoothies contain .4 grams of fat per 100 milliliter serving, and both red wine and margaritas contain 0 grams of fat per 100 milliliter serving (USDA 2018).

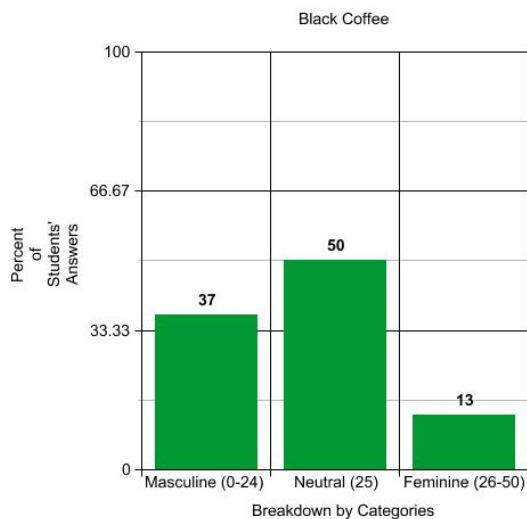
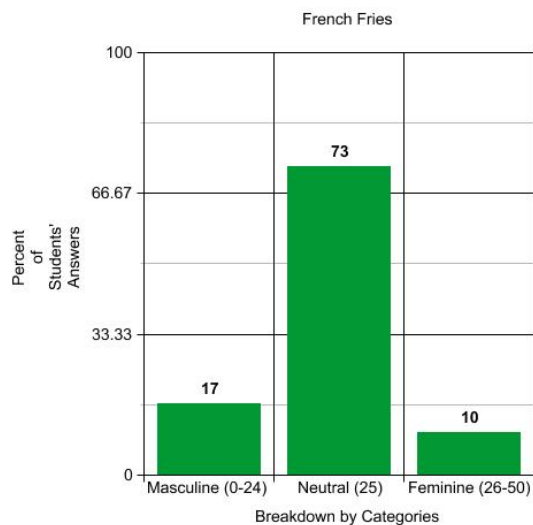
### Masculine-Sorted Foods



Respondents sorted steak, beer, ribs, and burgers as masculine. This sorting matches with the free list findings, as all of these items were listed as masculine during the free list. These foods, with the exception of beer, are higher in fat than the foods that were sorted as feminine. Beer contains 0 grams of fat per 100 gram serving. Steak contains 11 grams of fat per 100 gram serving, ribs contain 6.5 grams per 100 gram serving, and burgers contain 10 grams of fat per 100 gram serving (USDA 2018). This higher fat content illustrates how the foods are more unhealthy than the feminine associated foods as well. These foods, specifically ribs and burgers, are more messy to eat than the feminine-sorted foods. They are typically covered in sauces and condiments, and they are foods that are picked up and eaten, unlike salads, smoothies, and greek yogurt.

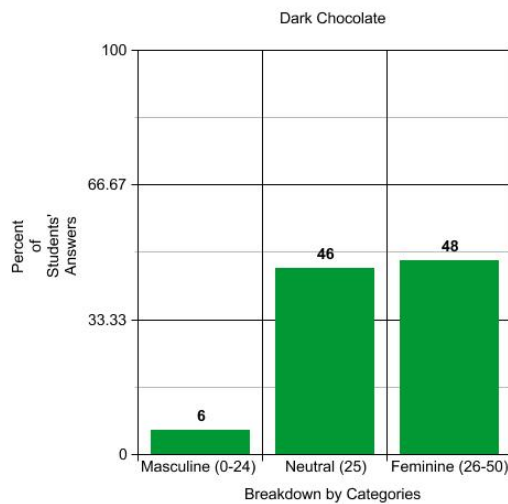
## Neutral-Sorted Foods





Potato chips, bananas, French fries, and black coffee are all sorted as neutral by the majority of respondents. However, respondents did not list black coffee as neutral as frequently as they did for French fries, potato chips, and bananas. Potato chips and French fries are high in fat content, just like the masculine-sorted foods. Potato chips contain 31 grams of fat per 100 gram serving, and French fries contain 14 grams of fat per 100 gram serving (USDA 2018). These two foods are also messier finger-foods like the aforementioned masculine-sorted foods. However, the neutral category could be seen as a form of respondents' resistance to possible gender associations between these specific foods, as they may appear less gendered to participants. Some reasons for this gender resistance or lack of gender association may be due to gender-neutral advertising, or a lack of quick associations arising in the minds of participants. If the neutral category is removed, respondents listed potato chips and black coffee, and to a lesser extent French fries, as masculine and bananas as feminine.

## Dark Chocolate as an Outlier



I find that dark chocolate is an outlier among participant responses, as 46% of students categorized it as neutral, and another 48% categorized it as feminine. This result could be due to some student's associating dark chocolate to the women featured in advertisements or the ways that females are the ones who "crave" chocolate the most (Durkin et al. 2013; Rozin et al. 1991).

## **Qualitative Findings and Discussion- Themes of Resistance**

### **“Menu” Choices**

On the first online survey, I asked participants to select a dinner entree from a list of options, and to then explain their choices. I have included the question below (see the Appendix for the full survey):

You are on a date at a fancy restaurant with a partner that you really like. What would you choose to eat for dinner at this restaurant?

- Grilled steak, mashed potatoes, roasted broccoli
- Steak salad with raw broccoli, lettuce, tomato, creamy dressing
- Grilled chicken, mashed potatoes, roasted broccoli
- Grilled chicken salad with raw broccoli, lettuce, tomato, creamy dressing
- Vegetarian salad with raw broccoli, lettuce, tomato, creamy dressing

Overall, in their answers to this question, male respondents report preferring similar masculine-typical foods such as steak/chicken, potatoes, and broccoli (89%). Male respondents give reasons for this preference that include “liking the taste of this food.” Additional reasoning for the male choices of steak include answers such as “I like steak and I don’t like salad!” and “Buying a salad at an expensive restaurant is a waste. Grilled chicken is a waste as well if it’s traditionally seared. So I chose steak.” These answers suggest that male-identifying Emory undergraduates are conforming to a gender norm surrounding salad and masculinity, as they choose to avoid salad. Furthermore, after I ask for an elaboration about his answers, one in-person survey

respondent, discusses how the women in his family eat salads but he and the other men in his family do not, which further exemplifies males conforming to this gender norm. Only 24% of the women selected a salad option, and the other 76% select the salad-less chicken and steak options. These selections do not follow the stereotypes of women eating salads in restaurants, possibly illustrating a resistance to this norm or stereotype.

### **Food and Gender Norm Resistance**

One question on the second survey asked respondents whether the process of sorting the foods as masculine, feminine and neutral was difficult for them, and why or why not depending on their response. The answers to this question illustrates just how deeply respondents are either consciously or unconsciously aware of gender-based cultural categories related to food. 110 respondents said it was not difficult to sort the foods, 14 said it was sort of difficult, and 16 said it was difficult. However, of the 16 respondents who state that this activity was difficult for them, 9 of them state that it was difficult because they recognize gender stereotypes but do not agree with those stereotypes. For example, one female respondent answers “Yes. I don't feel like it's "wrong" for any gender to eat any food so I had to just go off of stereotypes,” acknowledging the “ideal gender” stereotypes. A different female respondent states “I recognize when some foods are particularly associated with masculinity and others with femininity. But, it was difficult in the aspect that I don't think these foods should be gendered.” A Latinx male in-person respondent seems to have grappled with this question, answering:

It felt uncomfortable. I hadn't ever thought about this ever before... I had to become cognizant of something that I wasn't aware of. Men usually eat big meats. Then I realized oh shit I'm a man and I eat steak and I wondered- am I reproducing these notions of masculinity in public?

These answers illustrate that although they recognize the presence of these norms, some respondents do not agree with their existence. They think the foods *are* gendered, but that they *should not be*; they reject these gender and food categories.

One student refused to participate and instead listed all foods and drinks as neutral during the sorting exercise seems to reject society's norms about food categories. She states

Personally, I think all food falls into the gender-neutral category. However, I tend to eat more foods that society deems as "feminine", such as fruits and vegetables. Red meat which is a food that society views as masculine is not something I choose to include in my diet, but this choice doesn't have to do with my gender, instead, it is for personal health purposes.

This response suggests that the female respondent recognizes the norms but rather than sorting the foods as what she thinks society suggests, she instead sorted them in the ways that she thinks they should be sorted (by not sorting them at all). However, she argues that she eats certain things for health reasons, rather than because of her gender, but scholars Hurt et al. (2007) argue that a desire for health (often tied to body appearance and modesty) is tied to femininity. This respondent wants to reject gender norms, but she unconsciously still conforms to them.

All survey respondents in both the first and the second online surveys state that they eat foods that do not match their gender, citing reasons like "Although some are typically more associated with males, I still think they taste good!" (female respondent) and "In advertising, media foods are gendered (and also often racialized) but in my personal life I strive to unlearn these marketing strategies," (female respondent) and



others that are very similar. These comments in combination with the gender scale responses, illustrate that many Emory students are aware of these gender norms and cultural categories surrounding food, but choose not to operate within them. They recognize these “ideal” and stereotypical cultural gender norms and then resist them.

One male interviewee states:

I will eat something regardless of perceived gender notions of it. I am aware of the gender matching of foods and choose not to exist within them. However 3 years ago when I was less secure in my gender identity, I might have been more aware of it.

further exemplifying the presence of norm acknowledgement and rejection by Emory undergraduates. One female respondent says:

I think that I would feel comfortable eating the foods that don't necessary encapsulate my gender. At the end of the day I have to eat food and whether or not that food aligns with my gender and gender roles assigned to me can't affect that. That being said, I will say that depending on who I am with, I may select my food differently if I am being observed by others. I may want to stick with foods that are generally aligned with my gender as opposed to foods that strongly contrast it just because I don't want people to think that I don't fall in line with what's expected of me.

This response indicates that even though she recognizes the norms and gender-based cultural categories, she does not feel as though she must stick to them all of the time. However, she gives the caveat that she may still police herself depending on her social context and what she thinks others might expect of her with regard to her food selections.

## **Further Resistance Analysis**

I argue that this research can be situated as evidence that food-based gender categories exist as part of our gendered social order (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet

2003). The majority of participants recognize gender-based food and drink norms and stereotypes, which is evidenced in their answers about the lack of difficulty they experienced while sorting the foods and drinks. The majority of the students who stated that it was difficult or uncomfortable to complete the sorting exercise still acknowledged the existence of these norms. Just as there is an stereotype surrounding what a hegemonic-masculine male would wear and how he would act, there also seems to be a stereotype surrounding what he would eat (Connell 1990). This same argument holds for a stereotypical female as well. However, it is notable that in the same ways that people regularly break hegemonic gender norms, I find in my research that they claim to regularly break these food and gender norms too.

Further, because participants sort the foods into gender categories but then tend to ignore those categories when making food selections, I argue that this breaking of norms and stereotypes could further the ways that individuals “become themselves” and “engage in practices,” as the comfort in breaking the norm may solidify respondents’ lived experiences of their genders (Mcleod 2005:13; Webb et al. 2002:xii). Respondents recognize and argue that they are still a man or a woman despite what they eat, which illustrates the tenacity of their gender identities; they can engage in practices that are seen as the opposite of the norms related to their gender, further “becoming themselves” (Mcleod 2005:13; Webb et al. 2002:xii).

## **Social Context**

Both the in-person interviews and second survey include a question about social context. I ask participants how they would feel eating a vegetarian salad with men eating meat. Both women who answered the survey in person state that they would be

aware of the overly masculine nature of the men they were in the room with, while they would also feel slightly more feminine. Three of the men who answered the survey in person discussed variations of discomfort: that they would feel uncomfortable, that they would feel as though everyone would watch them, that they feel as though they would not get full without meat. The fourth male states that he would not only feel uncomfortable and feminine as well. These responses support my hypothesis that meat is viewed as masculine and that the absence of meat is seen as feminine on Emory's campus, but these responses do not support the hypothesis that men reject or avoid these foods in order to perform their masculinity more than women do.

In the second survey, the majority of respondents state that they would not feel uncomfortable eating salad in a room full of men eating meat- out of the 143 responses to this question, 36 said they would feel uncomfortable, 2 females said they would be hyper aware of their gender but not uncomfortable, and 2 males said they would feel comfortable but prepared to be made fun of by their peers. For the females who said that they would feel uncomfortable, all 13 of their responses acknowledged the gender norms and stereotypes that exist surrounding salad and femininity. They give answers such as:

I would feel ridiculous and craving meat. It's sometimes unfair that women are expected to eat salad and keep a lean figure while men are allowed to eat "juicier" things and eat "dirty".

I would feel really uncomfortable, even though I know that salads line up with my gender I would feel as if I am only further engendering the food and placing stereotypes not just on the food but on myself, and making myself feel more feminine.

If that is what I was in the mood for at the time then it shouldn't matter. However, a little part of me would feel like I'm supporting the stereotype that women only eat salads and not real food, like meat.

All 13 responses also show a desire to break the stereotypes or norms associated with the ways that salads are categorized as feminine foods. Thirteen of the 21 males who stated that they would feel uncomfortable gave reasons that included feelings of diminished power and masculinity: “I [would] feel less powerful and masculine” and “I would feel inferior and slightly stupid. The men would definitely make fun of me and would assume I was a vegan or a vegetarian which is considered a silly lifestyle compared to omnivores.” None of the women listed powerlessness or fear of being made fun of as reasons of discomfort. This difference in reasoning aligns with Eckert’s (2003) argument that males are more frequently ostracized than females for breaking gender norms.

### **Race and Masculinity**

Although the sample size of interviewees is too small to draw definitive conclusions, interesting patterns arose from this group during the data analysis. One pattern that arose during the data analysis was the ways that Black and Latinx men have more stereotypical masculine experiences, preferences, and thoughts surrounding food during in person surveys than white participants. Specifically, the black straight man that I interviewed used language that hints at hegemonic masculine ideals when speaking about his food choices and preferences. He states that the only type of cooking he participates in is grilling, and that he only eats foods that are categorized as masculine. His language also suggests a devaluing of healthy (feminine-associated) foods and flavors:

[My favorite food is] BBQ brisket, ribs, mac and cheese, burgers, hot dogs, fried chicken [because] they taste good. The flavor is not some weird healthy flavor, you have a nice rich flavor. The fat is probably what makes it taste good. I don't really eat vegetables either ... Grilling is very convenient and easy... and I mostly like meat. Plus my mom cooks most of the time so I don't have to.

The answers from this man reminded me of the statements about vegetables that my dad (a black male) frequently says to me. He does not like many vegetables, such as asparagus, brussels sprouts, kale, and refuses to eat them. Further, whenever my mother or I attempt to cook a vegetarian dish for dinner, or even something with a lot of vegetables in it, his first question is always "where's the meat?" The LGBTQ Latinx men that I administered in-person surveys to gave similar answers:

"I don't like salads in restaurants, and I think that my food needs meat in it. I didn't want steak," and "I prefer steak over chicken. Steak was more rare as a kid, and now I have the ability to indulge in it. I don't really eat very many greens like salad," "I love steak, it's what I have when there isn't a price limit. Chicken's what I have at home. I don't like salads and vegetables that much. My mom eats salad but most of my diet is mostly meat-based." All of these responses involve the men discussing how they would choose meat over vegetables when presented with various options at a restaurant. One of the responses even argue that the man has a "need" for meat. All 4 of the male participants of color stated that they would feel uncomfortable in their masculinity as a man eating salad in a room of men eating meat.

On the other hand, the white in-person survey respondents gave differing answers. Both of the white women stated that they would prefer salads and/or vegetables when choosing from a menu, with one of the white women stating she prefers her meals not to be too "heavy" (Melissa). Melissa, an LGBTQ woman, also

stated that she would feel hyper-aware of the masculinity of her dining partners in the scenario of eating a salad surrounded by men eating meat:

When I'm in a group setting with a bunch of guys and they order 2 racks of ribs and I'm eating a little salad, I'm hyper aware of their display of masculinity. Also I work in a restaurant and whenever a salad and burger are at a table you assume that the salad goes to the woman and the burger goes to the guy. I can't think of a time when this wasn't true.

The LGBTQ white man, John, who answered the survey in person also stated, like the men of color, that he prefers steak in restaurants. However, he was the only male that was interviewed who discussed vegetables in a positive light:

My diet consists of basically 50% chicken/50% meat. There's a CFA so close to me now that I need to eat there. Vegetarian would be better and healthier but between class and work, it makes finding alternative food options really difficult and I don't have time.

He also states that he is secure enough in his masculinity not to feel uncomfortable eating salad in a room of men eating meat, or breaking any food and gender norms and stereotypes. Additionally, all 5 men discussed their mothers cooking for them and their families; none of the white participants mentioned these patterns of female domesticity.

I find that respondents are aware of many food and gender norms, but some respondents choose not to operate within them. However one norm that respondents did not reject as frequently is that of salad and its association with femininity. This lack of rejection was exemplified when I presented respondents with the choice of salad or other non-salad options in the qualitative survey; none of the male respondents chose salad. Furthermore, all of the men interviewed stated, though I had a very small sample size, that they would be uncomfortable eating a salad in a room full of men eating meat,

illustrating discomfort with rejecting the femininity and salad associations and stereotypes.

### **International Student Qualitative Findings and Analysis**

As mentioned earlier, I separated the international students from the American students in order to streamline analysis. I separated them so that I could draw clearer conclusions about American student's perspectives on American gender norms and stereotypes related to American foods. I did receive some notable quotes, thoughts, and opinions from the international students. I received 4 international student answers on Google Forms and 22 answers from international students on Qualtrics. On the Qualtrics form, I asked participants if there is anything that they would like to add about gender and food, and one Asian male participant added that spicy foods are masculine. One Asian female participant added that egg yolks are feminine, further research is necessary to determine whether this response may relate to fertility. Another Asian female responded that she views bitter and messy foods as feminine. A Middle Eastern male states that for him, the character traits of females are associated with the foods "in Saudi we believe females are gentle and fragile creatures and we have to carefully treat them. That's why I associate them with peach and other soft fruits that remind me of the norm." These quotes illustrate that further research could provide insight that would help determine the nature of food and gender norms and norm resistance in other cultures.

## ***LIMITATIONS***

As with every research project, this study has a few limitations and biases that should be addressed in order to interpret the data as accurately as possible.

Specifically, the sample size and data collection may bias the study results, though I worked to ensure that this study was conducted with the maximum quality possible.

### *Sample Size and Demographics*

Because this project is an undergraduate thesis, it is limited in its size and scope. For example, I was unable to obtain a large randomized sample of the general population of undergraduate Emory students. As previously mentioned, I conducted in-person surveys with only 7 participants, which is a very small sample size in relation to the total population of Emory University undergraduate students. I also only obtained 35 responses on the first survey and 165 full responses on the second survey. I was unable to interview races other than Black, Latinx, and White due to scheduling conflicts, and I could not ask for demographic information other than gender during the free-list due to answer sheet space and time limitations. I also was unable to incorporate class or socioeconomic status into the analysis of this study. Furthermore, because I was unable to recruit a transgender, gender non-binary, or non-conforming individual to interview, I had to limit my research to focusing on the already-prevalent gender binary within the literature rather than adding to the very limited research on non-binary and transgender individuals and food selection.



# ***RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS***

## **Future Research**

Future research might expand upon my project by further studying elite college campuses, increasing the number of respondents, and incorporating participant observation of food choices in a more natural setting, such as in a restaurant. Future research could also work to gather more racially and gender-based diverse data, as the data may differ based on the lived experiences of different races and genders. Specifically, by interviewing a range of genders, researchers will shed light on whether transgender and gender non-conforming subjects conform gender and food norms, and how they conceptualize those norms. I recommend that future research focuses on a variety of ages, as gender conceptions might change over time and while the cognitive sorting of the food by gender might stay the same over time, how individuals incorporate those categories into their food selections might differ.

I also suggest that future research and future health interventions take these findings into account. Men have shorter lifespans than women in every region of the world, and while it seems that they do not necessarily avoid feminine-sorted foods just because they are feminine, they also describe enjoying masculine foods more than feminine foods and have conflicting views about the security of their masculinity (UN 2015). Furthermore, half of the men who gave responses that were hyper-masculine identified as LGBTQ; Errol Fields et. al find in their study of homosexual black college-aged men that their research participants regularly engage in “efforts to camouflage their homosexuality [and] strategies to prove their masculinity” in order to conform to

social pressures from their communities, families, and peers (2015:122). Future research might look at the ways that over-exerting masculinity in relation to food may fit into the strategies of “proving masculinity” for LGBTQ males.

One way that future research could build on my study is through a cross-cultural approach. Scholars might create a study about the culture of another society and look for similarities and differences in comparison to my findings about American students. Examining whether other cultures have the same resistance, either consciously or unconsciously, to gender and food norms would be a novel addition to the anthropological food literature. Future research might also examine portion size, “messy” versus “clean/dainty” eating, and caloric intake through methods such as photo analysis and participant observation in order to examine whether individuals exhibit norm resistance in these areas. Finally, future research should take socioeconomic status into account as well, as the intersections of identities such as race, gender, and class are crucial when examining social and cultural production.

## **Conclusions**

Overall, respondents’ answers illustrate that the consensus about different foods and drinks’ gender-based cognitive categories on Emory’s campus align with previous research findings about the association of certain foods with masculinity and femininity (Greenebaum and Dexter 2017; Gal and Wilkie 2010). Specifically, participants rank the foods and drinks that are associated with health and/or femininity—red wine, margaritas, salad, smoothies, yogurt— on the feminine part of the scale (Greenebaum and Dexter 2017; Gal and Wilkie 2010). Participants rank the foods and drinks typically

associated with masculinity— beer, steak, black coffee, and ribs— on the masculine part of the scale (Greenebaum and Dexter 2017; Gal and Wilkie 2010). Dark chocolate is an outlier that is ranked equally as neutral and feminine. The respondents' answers also further confirm the presence of a gender norm surrounding salad and femininity (Gal and Wilkie 2010).

In conclusion, the findings of this study suggest that food can be used in the conceptualization of a “typical” man or woman. However, lots of Emory students choose not to eat and drink the items that correspond with their gender and instead choose to operate outside many of these norms, with the exception of men and the norms surrounding the categorization of salad and vegetables as feminine and the consequential avoidance of these foods. Respondents' following of the norm related to salad and femininity illustrates that the cultural conceptions of what it means to be a man in reference to gender is not static, with men following the masculine gender-based food categories sometimes, and rejecting it others. Furthermore, respondents express discomfort in both following and rejecting norms, further illustrating the changing nature of the cultural conceptions of genders and the difficulty of norm resistance.

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## Appendix

### Links for the Pictures Included in the Second Survey

Picture	Link used in Second Survey
Steak	<a href="https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.seriousseats.com%2Frecipes%2Fimages%2F2015%2F05%2FAnova-Steak-Guide-Sous-Vide-Photos15-beauty-1500x1125.jpg&amp;imgrefurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.seriousseats.com%2Frecipes%2F2015%2F03%2Fsous-vide-steaks-recipe.html&amp;docid=wb8OYzi8sZCqM&amp;tbnid=pAgN7Gc7onhtpM%3A&amp;vet=10ahUKEwiHgu_M3evfAhXmc98KHSlrBmYQMwh1KAswCw..i&amp;w=1500&amp;h=1125&amp;bih=597&amp;biw=1256&amp;q=steak&amp;ved=0ahUKEwiHgu_M3evfAhXmc98KHSlrBmYQMwh1KAswCw&amp;iact=mrc&amp;uact=8">https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.seriousseats.com%2Frecipes%2Fimages%2F2015%2F05%2FAnova-Steak-Guide-Sous-Vide-Photos15-beauty-1500x1125.jpg&amp;imgrefurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.seriousseats.com%2Frecipes%2F2015%2F03%2Fsous-vide-steaks-recipe.html&amp;docid=wb8OYzi8sZCqM&amp;tbnid=pAgN7Gc7onhtpM%3A&amp;vet=10ahUKEwiHgu_M3evfAhXmc98KHSlrBmYQMwh1KAswCw..i&amp;w=1500&amp;h=1125&amp;bih=597&amp;biw=1256&amp;q=steak&amp;ved=0ahUKEwiHgu_M3evfAhXmc98KHSlrBmYQMwh1KAswCw&amp;iact=mrc&amp;uact=8</a>
Potato Chips	<a href="https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&amp;source=images&amp;cd=&amp;cad=rja&amp;uact=8&amp;ved=2ahUKEwjQ053CvIThAhUgCDQIHd5fDfMQjhx6BAgBEAM&amp;url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.finecooking">https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&amp;source=images&amp;cd=&amp;cad=rja&amp;uact=8&amp;ved=2ahUKEwjQ053CvIThAhUgCDQIHd5fDfMQjhx6BAgBEAM&amp;url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.finecooking</a>

	<a href="https://www.recipetips.com%2Frecipe%2Fpotato-chip-cookies&amp;psig=AOvVaw2-Pbn5pHnb5zISyULXJ0xX&amp;ust=1552750493272211">.com%2Frecipe%2Fpotato-chip-cookies&amp;psig=AOvVaw2-Pbn5pHnb5zISyULXJ0xX&amp;ust=1552750493272211</a>
Banana	<a href="https://www.huffpost.com/entry/peel-a-banana-from-the-bottom_n_56ebfe41e4b084c6721ffc70">https://www.huffpost.com/entry/peel-a-banana-from-the-bottom_n_56ebfe41e4b084c6721ffc70</a>
Black Coffee	<a href="https://www.deathwishcoffee.com/blogs/news/benefits-of-black-coffee">https://www.deathwishcoffee.com/blogs/news/benefits-of-black-coffee</a>
Ribs	<a href="https://mrecipes.com/smoker/pork/savory-sweet-ribs/">https://mrecipes.com/smoker/pork/savory-sweet-ribs/</a>
Burger	<a href="https://www.tasteofhome.com/recipes/barbecued-burgers/">https://www.tasteofhome.com/recipes/barbecued-burgers/</a>
Fries	<a href="https://www.corriecooks.com/instant-pot-french-fries/">https://www.corriecooks.com/instant-pot-french-fries/</a>
Beer	<a href="https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2018/07/19/flint-water-crisis-beer-name/800565002/">https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2018/07/19/flint-water-crisis-beer-name/800565002/</a>
Margarita	<a href="https://www.jamieoliver.com/drinks-tube/recipe/margarita/">https://www.jamieoliver.com/drinks-tube/recipe/margarita/</a>



Greek Yogurt	<a href="https://www.eatthismuch.com/recipe/nutrition/vanilla-greek-yogurt,254520/">https://www.eatthismuch.com/recipe/nutrition/vanilla-greek-yogurt,254520/</a>
Dark Chocolate	<a href="https://www.everydayhealth.com/type-2-diabetes/diet/why-dark-chocolate-one-best-desserts-diabetics/">https://www.everydayhealth.com/type-2-diabetes/diet/why-dark-chocolate-one-best-desserts-diabetics/</a>
Red Wine	<a href="https://www.livestrong.com/article/519609-is-red-wine-good-for-your-blood/">https://www.livestrong.com/article/519609-is-red-wine-good-for-your-blood/</a>
Salad	<a href="https://www.cicis.com/menu/salad-bar/salad-mix">https://www.cicis.com/menu/salad-bar/salad-mix</a>
Smoothie	<a href="https://busymommymedia.com/strawberry-kiwi-smoothie/">https://busymommymedia.com/strawberry-kiwi-smoothie/</a>

## **Google Forms Survey (Online Survey #1)**

2. I consent to participate in this study. If yes please PRINT your name \*
3. I am at least 18 years of age. \*
  - Yes
  - No
4. I give consent for my sexual/gender identity, NOT including my name or any other personally identifiable information, to be revealed in written materials resulting from this study \*
  - Yes
  - No
5. What is your gender identity? \*
  - Female
  - Male
  - Non-binary/non-conforming
  - Other:

6. **What is your sexual identity? \***
- Gay
  - Straight
  - Queer
  - Bisexual
  - Pansexual
  - Other:
7. **Do you consent to being contacted for a short follow-up interview? If yes, please add your email address or phone number below \***
8. **What racial identity(ities) are most salient to you? \***
9. *Check all that apply.*
- Black
  - Latinx
  - Native American
  - Pacific Islander
  - White
  - Asian
  - Other:
10. **Were you born in the United States? If no, please write where you were born in the other section.**
- Yes
  - No
  - Other:
11. **What type of high school did you attend?**
- Public
  - Private
12. **Were you eligible for free lunch?**
- Yes
  - No
13. **What type of diet do you eat the most?**
- Paleo
  - Vegetarian
  - Vegan
  - Gluten Free
  - Omnivore
  - Pescatarian
  - Other:
14. **Why did you choose that diet?**
15. **What is your favorite food?**

16. **Why is that food your favorite?**
- Yes
  - No
  - Other:
17. **Why or why not?**
18. Please read the scenario and then make a food selection based on the "menu" that is available in the question
19. **You are on a date at a fancy restaurant with a partner that you really like. What would you choose to eat for dinner at this restaurant?**
- Grilled steak, mashed potatoes, roasted broccoli
  - Steak salad with raw broccoli, lettuce, tomato, creamy dressing
  - Grilled chicken, mashed potatoes, roasted broccoli
  - Grilled chicken salad with raw broccoli, lettuce, tomato, creamy dressing
  - Vegetarian salad with raw broccoli, lettuce, tomato, creamy dressing
20. **Why did you choose the meal that you chose in the above question?**
21. **You are out with your best friends. What alcoholic drink would you order if you were not on a budget?**
22. **Why would you select that drink?**
23. Many foods have been associated with gender norms in our society. Please think about these foods in relationship to gender norms while you answer the following questions: Bananas, margaritas, beer, black coffee, potato chips, fries, steak, salad, smoothies, burgers, ribs, strawberries
24. **Would you eat any foods that you can think of which do not match the norms of your gender?**
- Yes
  - No
  - Other:
25. **Why or why not?**
26. **Was the process of thinking about foods in relation to gender difficult for you?**
- Yes
  - No
27. **If so, why?**
28. **Is there anything about gender and food that you would like to say?**

## Qualtrics Survey (Online Survey #2)

# Food & Gender

---

### Start of Block: Consent

Please print your name to confirm that you are over 18 and that you agree to participate in this study:

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

---

Q17 What is your gender identity?

- Male
- Female
- Gender non-conforming
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
-

Q18 What is your race?

- Black
  - Native American
  - Latinx
  - White
  - Asian
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Q19 What is your sexual identity?

- Gay
  - Straight
  - Bisexual
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Q20 Were you born in the United States?

- Yes
  - No
- 

Q21 What type of high school did you attend?

- Public
- Private

---

Q22 Were you eligible for free lunch?

- Yes
  - No
- 

Q23 What type of diet do you eat the most?

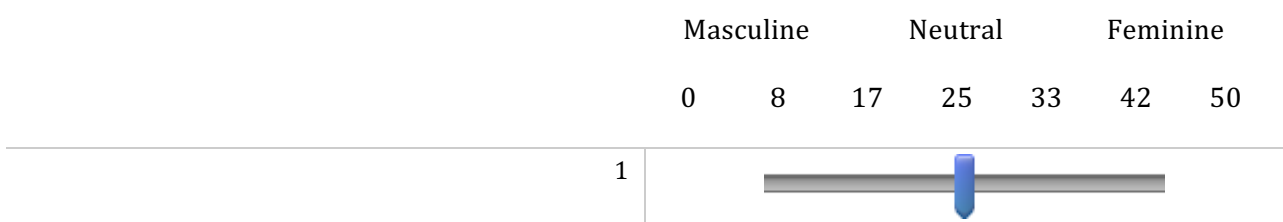
- Paleo
- Vegetarian
- Vegan
- Omnivore
- Pescatarian

End of Block: Consent

---

Start of Block: Food Categories

Q1 In our culture, many items are gendered and added to our conceptions of gender norms, either consciously or unconsciously. Please select where you believe each food should be placed on a scale from 1-50 with 1 being extremely masculine (masculine-coded) and 10 being extremely feminine (feminine-coded).



Q2  
Salad

Masculine		Neutral		Feminine	
0	8	17	25	33	50

1



Q3

Smoothie

Masculine		Neutral		Feminine	
0	8	17	25	33	50

Male



Q4

Red Wine

Masculine		Neutral		Feminine	
0	8	17	25	33	50

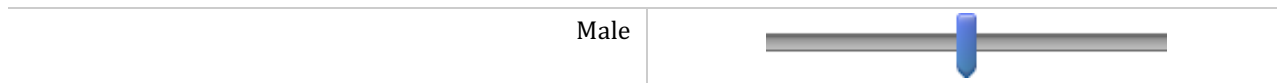
Male



Q29

Black Coffee

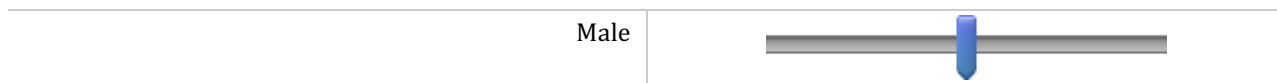
Masculine		Neutral		Feminine	
0	8	17	25	33	50



Q30

Beer

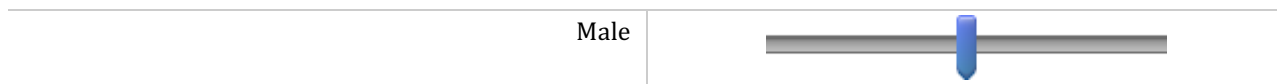
Masculine		Neutral		Feminine		
0	8	17	25	33	42	50



Q31

Ribs

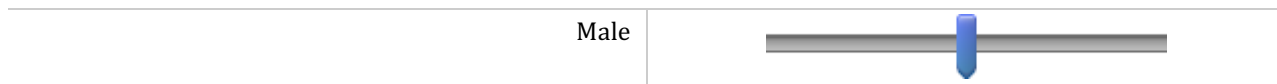
Masculine		Neutral		Feminine		
0	8	17	25	33	42	50



Q32

Dark Chocolate

Masculine		Neutral		Feminine		
0	8	17	25	33	42	50

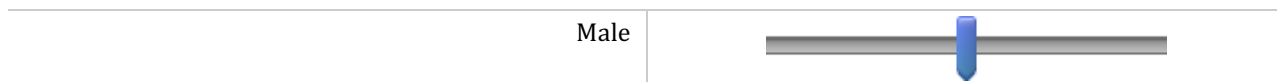




Q33

Greek Yogurt

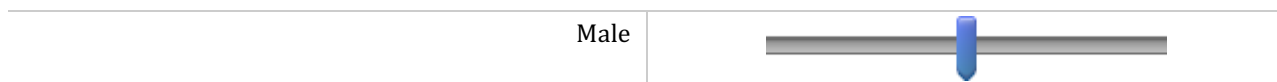
Masculine                  Neutral                  Feminine  
0    8    17    25    33    42    50



Q34

Burger

Masculine                  Neutral                  Feminine  
0    8    17    25    33    42    50



Q35

French Fries

Masculine                  Neutral                  Feminine  
0    8    17    25    33    42    50



Q36

Margarita

Masculine	Neutral	Feminine
0 8 17	25 33	42 50

Male



Q39

Banana

Masculine	Neutral	Feminine
0 8 17	25 33	42 50

Male



Q40

Potato chips

Masculine	Neutral	Feminine
0 8 17	25 33	42 50

Male




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 End of Block: Food Categories

Start of Block: Open Ended Questions

Q25 Would you feel comfortable eating foods that you said do not match your gender? Why or why not?

1 \_\_\_\_\_

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Q24 When was the last full meal that you ate? What did you eat?

1 \_\_\_\_\_

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Q26 Was the process of placing foods on the scale difficult for you? Why or why not?

1 \_\_\_\_\_

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Q27 How would you feel about eating a salad in a room full of men eating meat?

1 \_\_\_\_\_

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Q28 Can you think of any food and gender norms? What are they and where did you learn them?

1 \_\_\_\_\_

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Q37 Do you conform to any of the aforementioned norms? Which ones?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No, I don't follow any of them

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Q38 Do you NOT conform to any of the aforementioned norms? Which ones?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No, I follow them all

**End of Block: Open Ended Questions**

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