



## Research report

## Meat and masculinity among young Chinese, Turkish and Dutch adults in the Netherlands ☆

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## ABSTRACT

The achievement of sustainability and health objectives in Western countries requires a transition to a less meat-based diet. This article investigates whether the alleged link between meat consumption and particular framings of masculinity, which emphasize that 'real men' eat meat, may stand in the way of achieving these objectives. From a theoretical perspective, it was assumed that the meat–masculinity link is not invariant but dependent on the cultural context, including ethnicity. In order to examine the link in different contexts, we analyzed whether meat-related gender differences varied across ethnic groups, using samples of young second generation Chinese Dutch, Turkish Dutch and native Dutch adults (aged 18–35) in the Netherlands. The Turkish group was the most traditional; it showed the largest gender differences and the strongest meat–masculinity link. In contrast, the native group showed the smallest gender differences and the weakest meat–masculinity link. The findings suggest that the combination of traditional framings of masculinity and the Western type of food environment where meat is abundant and cheap is bound to seriously hamper a transition to a less meat-based diet. In contrast, less traditional framings of masculinity seem to contribute to more healthy food preferences with respect to meat. It was concluded that cultural factors related to gender and ethnic diversity can play harmful and beneficial roles for achieving sustainability and health objectives.

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## Introduction

Achieving the objectives of sustainability, food security and public health in Western countries requires a transition to a less meat-based diet, as has been put forward by many scientists (see Aiking, 2014; Friel et al., 2009; Westhoek et al., 2014). One of the potential barriers to this transition is the alleged link between meat consumption and particular framings of masculinity, which emphasize that 'real men' eat meat (e.g., Fiddes, 1991; Meier & Christen, 2012; Roos, Prättälä, & Koski, 2001; Rothgerber, 2013; Rozin, Hormes, Faith, & Wansink, 2012; Ruby & Heine, 2011; Sobal, 2005). This link is indicative of the close association between food consumption and gender frames (i.e. cultural understandings of differences between women and men). As gender frames are salient and relevant in relation to all aspects of food-getting (O'Doherty Jensen & Holm, 1999),

they may significantly direct the consumption of gendered foods in a gender-congruent direction (Ridgeway, 2009). Theoretically, therefore, the link between meat and masculinity will not be invariant but dependent on the cultural context. Although there is little research on this context dependency, there are indications of recent changes in framings of masculinity in combination with more healthy food preferences with respect to meat and vegetables (Sellaeg & Chapman, 2008). In Western countries, however, gender frames are also changing due to the increasing inflow of new ethnic groups (Van de Vijver, 2007). Immigrants are a growing part of their populations, in particular in urban centers, and ethnicity is one of the main factors that play a role in food choices (Gilbert & Khokhar, 2008). The various combinations of gender, ethnic background, and types of acculturation raise important new concerns and questions on the role of gender differences in a potential transition to a less meat-based diet. To explore the nature of the meat–masculinity link in these contexts, the present paper examines whether meat-related gender differences vary across ethnic groups, using samples of young second generation Chinese Dutch, Turkish Dutch and native Dutch adults (aged 18–35) in the Netherlands.

Up to now, ethnic diversity has been given little attention in discussions regarding the promotion of more sustainable and healthy food consumption, except for the topic of obesity, which is also related to gender differences (De Wilde, Verkerk, & Middelkoop,

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2014). Our choice of Chinese Dutch (hereafter called Chinese) and Turkish Dutch (hereafter called Turkish) migrants was based on pragmatic and theoretical considerations. As to the first one, Turkish migrants are currently the largest minority group in the Netherlands and Chinese migrants are expected to become the largest one in the coming decades (Garssen & Van Duin, 2009). The theoretical justification is that the Eastern cultural background of these migrants is significantly different from the majority culture in the Netherlands in ways that may improve our understanding of the context dependency of the meat–masculinity link and its potential implications for sustainability and health objectives. Differences between the Far East, the Middle East and the West involve general value differences (Schwartz, 1999, 2006) as well as differences in food culture (Nam, Jo, & Lee, 2010). Among the migrants these differences have been affected, to a certain extent, by acculturation experiences as a result of living in the Netherlands (Gilbert & Khokhar, 2008), which may work out differently for the sexes as girls are more likely to be bicultural than boys (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). These theoretical issues will be addressed briefly below, as far as they are relevant for the links between meat and masculinity.

The masculinity of meat is thought to be an echo of the time of the hunter-gatherers and the participation of men in hunting large game and subsequent meat-sharing activities, which has gained them a reputation of being tough and daring (Rozin et al., 2012). This scene from the past nicely illustrates that the links between gender and meat can be considered at different levels of society. This lines up with recent insights (Ridgeway, 2009) showing that gender frames are multilevel structures, which involve mutually reinforcing processes at the level of societal institutions (e.g. men's jobs in the meat industry), social interactions (e.g. the man's role as meat carver at the dinner table) and individual identities (the way a man likes his meat). Due to various causes, including the growing share of industrialized meat production in Western countries, however, the status of these practices may have changed (see de Boer, Hoek, & Elzerman, 2006). The actual practice of slaughtering has been hidden more and more behind the scenes of social life and the serving of large parts of the animal to be carved at the table has largely gone out of use. Furthermore, although masculine identities are linked with particular body practices (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), these practices are changing too, with a tendency toward masculine performances (e.g. martial arts) that are fast and controlled and not slowed down by fat (Spencer, 2014). As a result, the traditional links between meat and masculinity may have become weaker, except on special occasions, such as 'outdoor cooking' events (Dummitt, 1998).

One of the drivers of this development may be that people in the West have come to develop values that strongly emphasize human equality (Siedentop, 2014), including gender equality and a more shared commitment to domestic participation (Aarseth, 2009). This process contrasts with the experiences of migrants from Eastern countries, where, in terms of Schwartz's cultural value orientations, hierarchical relationships and conservative values are more important (Schwartz, 1999, 2006). A recent study among migrants and natives in the Netherlands shows that Turkish men and women hold more traditional gender-role beliefs and report less sharing of household tasks than non-Eastern migrants and natives (Van de Vijver, 2007). A comparable study of Chinese migrants is lacking, but a study of Chinese migrants in the USA suggests a different pattern of cultural adaptation in which Asian masculinity has changed over time to include the view that masculinity can contain elements of both masculinity and femininity (Chua & Fujino, 1999). Although this pattern was found in a highly educated sample, it agrees with other observations that East Asians are able to adapt flexibly to multiple demands as they tend to tolerate contradiction, to accept and anticipate change, and to prefer a 'middle way'

(e.g. the concept of 'Zhong Yong'; see Spencer-Rodgers, Williams, & Peng, 2012). Regarding the differences in gender frames, therefore, it may be expected that the Turkish are the most traditional, followed by the Chinese and the native Dutch.

These cultural differences interact with the abundance of industrially produced meat, which is a typical Western phenomenon (Grigg, 1999; Swatland, 2010). In the Far East, meats were traditionally used as flavorings or condiments (Nam et al., 2010). Due to their fast economic growth, however, the level of meat production and consumption in Eastern countries has grown rapidly, which is leading to what has been characterized as an unhealthy Western type of diet, often based on traditional recipes with major additions and changes (Popkin & Du, 2003; Zhai et al., 2014). After immigration to another country, the majority of ethnic groups appear to modify their eating habits by combining parts of their traditional diet with some of the less healthy elements of the Western diet (Gilbert & Khokhar, 2008). As meat is abundantly available, it is accessible to a broad category of consumers, including ethnic groups who were used to a low-meat diet. In the course of this process, various differences between the sexes may also change, as shown by differences between women and men in the prevalence of obesity. In non-Western countries, the prevalence of obesity is often greater in women than in men (Garawi, Devries, Thorogood, & Uauy, 2014), but this pattern seems to have reversed in recent years, resulting in a higher prevalence in boys and men (De Wilde et al., 2014; Neslisah & Emine, 2011; Song, Wang, Ma, & Wang, 2013; Yang, 2007). This reversal cannot be explained in a simple way, but the meat–masculinity link might play a role in this process, as meat consumption or factors directly related to meat consumption are positively associated with weight gain (Gilsing et al., 2012; Tucker, Tucker, Bailey, & LeCheminant, 2014).

Although much has been written on the masculinity of meat, Fekete et al. (2012) note that there is surprisingly little literature that looks at gender differences in meat consumption systematically (i.e. instead of using gender as control or moderating variable), taking due account of the importance of age and living situation (e.g. marital status). The general pattern is that men eat more meat than women. According to a nation-wide German survey, in fact, about 50% more meat and meat products (MRI, 2008, p. 44) and, according to a Dutch survey, about 33% more animal protein (van Rossum, Franssen, Verkaik-Kloosterman, Buurma-Rethans, & Ocké, 2011, p. 54). A French study among healthy men and women, aged 20–30 and 65–75 years, found that men consumed more protein, including meat products, than women and that this difference was larger among the younger generation than among the elder one (Rousset, Patureau Mirand, Brandolini, Martin, & Boirie, 2005). A German study with middle-aged and older subjects also found that gender differences were more pronounced in those aged 45–59 compared to those aged 60–75, probably as a result of the influence of women on older men's nutrition (Fekete et al., 2012). As Sobal (2005) notes, spouses tend to correspond in the types of food they consume and this means that the gender difference in meat eating frequency may be small as compared to the gender difference in portion size, with men preferring the larger meat portions (Schösler, de Boer, & Boersema, 2012).

These studies confirm that gender differences are not invariant but they do not provide much information on the meat–masculinity link. This is understandable because gender frames are multilevel structures (at the levels of societal institutions, social interactions and individual identities) that cannot be measured directly. For that very reason it is important to compare gender differences in different contexts. The present study makes this comparison by examining statistical interactions between the effects of ethnic group and gender on a number of meat-related variables that have proven their strategic relevance in earlier work on sustainability and health. The variables are preferred meat portion size, number of meat eating

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