

Beasts, Burgers, and Hummers: Meat and the Crisis of Masculinity in Contemporary Television Advertisements

Richard A. Rogers

This paper examines three recent television advertisements that symbolically link meat not only with masculinity, but specifically with the “crisis in masculinity.” Using an ecofeminist lens, I engage in an intersectional analysis of these advertisements to demonstrate how they articulate the eating of meat with primitive masculinities as a response to perceived threats to hegemonic masculinity. These advertisements demonstrate that scholars interested in the status of masculinity must pay attention to the “threats” to masculinity posed by environmental and animal rights movements, and that scholars interested in environmental movements must pay attention to the role of masculinity in resisting moves toward sustainability. This analysis demonstrates the utility of ecofeminism in understanding the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and environmentalism while also pointing to the need for ecofeminism to continue to explore the implications of intersectionality for ecofeminist theory and criticism.

Keywords: Ecofeminism; Environmentalism; Intersectionality; Masculinity; Meat

Meat, specifically red meat and beef in particular, has long been associated with masculinity in Anglo-America and western Europe (Adams, 2003; Rifkin, 1993; Sobal, 2005). From literature to everyday speech, from art to advertising, the articulation of hegemonic masculinity with the consumption of red meat is pervasive (Adams, 2003; Heinz & Lee, 1998). It comes as no surprise, therefore, that 2006 and 2007 offered television viewers a host of advertisements linking meat, beef specifically, with masculinity. Burger King, Del Taco, Hummer (GM), Jack in the Box, Quiznos, TGI Fridays, and others played on the gendering of red meat, and bloggers called

Richard A. Rogers is a Professor of Speech Communication at Northern Arizona University. Correspondence to: Richard A. Rogers, School of Communication, Box 5619, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff AZ 86011, USA. Email: Richard.Rogers@nau.edu

attention to their anti-feminist, anti-vegetarian, and (in the case of the Hummer advertisement) anti-environmental messages (e.g., Rubenstein, 2006; Stevenson, 2006). These advertisements articulate the oppositions of men's versus women's food, meat versus vegetables, and meat versus tofu to trivialize and oppose contemporary movements toward less meat-centered diets, diets motivated in part by concerns over animal rights and environmental sustainability. In three of these advertisements meat consumption is specifically linked and constructed as a response to a presumed crisis in masculinity. In these commercials the eating of beef is not simply coded as a masculine activity; it (or other, substitute actions that are also environmentally destructive) is specifically coded as a means of restoring hegemonic masculinity in the face of threats to its continued dominance. By understanding these advertisements as a response to a perceived crisis in masculinity and by paying attention to the role of intersectionality (the interplay of multiple lines of domination), new insights can be achieved concerning the contemporary state of masculinity, the "crisis" therein, and the role of environmental and animal rights movements in constituting the crisis.

These three advertisements not only involve the use of meat's gendered symbolism to revitalize hegemonic masculinity; an analysis of the advertisements using the frame of the crisis in masculinity makes apparent important connections between masculinity and contemporary environmental movements. Understanding the rhetorical dynamics faced by environmental and animal rights movements necessitates attention to meat's gendered symbolism and broader oppositional articulations between the crisis in masculinity and those movements. Similarly, an understanding of the position of feminism in contemporary culture necessitates attention to the symbolism of meat and the roles of environmental and animal rights movements in the rhetorical construction of the "threats" constituting the crisis in masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is predicated on domination and exploitation of others (Hanke, 1998), including nature (Plumwood, 1993; Rogers & Schutten, 2004). These advertisements constitute environmentalism as a threat to hegemonic masculinity; the backlash against feminism also involves a backlash against environmentalism. The articulation of this backlash is accomplished, in part, by the absence of explicit environmental references or depictions of nature in these advertisements. Nature is the "absent referent" (Adams, 2003) while nature's typical dualistic partner, the feminine, is re-articulated with civilization to become the most overt "enemy" named in the advertisements.

The connections between environmentalism and feminism have been highlighted and interrogated, especially in the context of ecofeminist theory and criticism (e.g., Plumwood, 1993; Warren, 2000); however, the ways in which masculinity specifically operates in resisting environmentally sustainable ideologies and practices has been given far less attention (an exception being Connell, 1990). Nevertheless, the connection between gender and environmentalism has recently been highlighted in the popular press and online publications, perhaps most prominently in Thomas Friedman's (2007) article in *The New York Times Magazine* titled "The Power of Green." Friedman argues that becoming green is necessary to "restore America to its

natural place in the global order” (Section I, ¶1). To do so, however, “a redefined, broader and more muscular green ideology” that can overcome the existing image of green “as ‘liberal,’ ‘tree-hugging,’ ‘sissy,’ ‘girlie-man,’ ‘unpatriotic,’ [and] ‘vaguely French’” is needed (Friedman, Section I, ¶2–3). In response, Gould and Hosey (2007) penned an opinion piece in *Grist* subtitled “Is the Environmental Movement Losing Touch with Its Feminine Side?” They catalog statistics showing that women are more likely to vote, volunteer, and mobilize around environmental issues than men and critique the “muscular green ideology” advocated by Friedman. However, what is left out of the discussion is an in-depth examination of the ways environmentalism threatens traditional models of hegemonic masculinity and the implications of these threats for both masculinity and environmentalism. Recent advertisements that link meat and masculinity offer an opportunity for such an examination.

Using the literature on the crisis in masculinity as a guide, I engage in an intersectional, ecofeminist analysis of three advertisements that link meat to the crisis in masculinity—with the absence of meat as its cause and/or the consumption of meat as its resolution. After a review of environmental analyses of advertising, a discussion of intersectionality and ecofeminism, and an overview of the crisis in masculinity, Del Taco’s “Feed the Beast,” Hummer’s “Tofu,” and Burger King’s “Manthem” will each be analyzed.¹ In addition to demonstrating the importance of intersectional analysis in understanding systems of oppression, these three analyses highlight the importance of these interconnections for feminist, animal rights, and environmental movements, as well as for ecofeminist theory and criticism.

Advertising and the Environment

Several scholars have analyzed representations of nature and articulations of environmental issues in advertising (e.g., Corbett, 2006; Hope, 2002; Meister, 1997; Olsen, 2002; Williamson, 1978). In her recent overview, Corbett discusses the substantial critical focus on the use of advertising to attribute green values to products and corporations, noting that “nature-as-backdrop ads, even though they represent the most widespread depiction of the natural world in advertising, are the least studied” (p. 148). When nature is used as a backdrop in advertising, relevant structures of meaning include nature as something to be dominated or controlled, nature as commodity, nature as sublime, nature as purity, nature as escape from the contemporary social and technological world, and nature as Utopian ideal (Corbett; Hope; Olsen; Williamson). Analyses of advertisements that use nature as a backdrop work to identify the meanings attributed to nature, ideologies of human–nature relations, and their potential to shape environmental attitudes and behaviors. While evaluating the potential impact of particular advertisements is certainly a goal, understanding the widespread structures of meaning used across a wide range of advertisements enables a clearer understanding of how “nature” is used to perpetuate commodity capitalism’s unsustainable relationship with nature.

Carol Adams’s (2003) analysis of the discourses of meat points to another potential position for nature in advertising. At the core of Adams’s argument is the concept of

the absent referent. Labels for meat (e.g., beef, pork) as well as visual representations of meat products and advertisements for meat function to erase the animal, its treatment, and the system of production that transformed it into meat; the animal and these systems of production become the “absent referent” of the discourses of meat. Therefore, while Corbett (2006) calls for attention to the importance of advertisements featuring nature as a backdrop, Adams’s work also suggests a need to pay attention to how nature operates as an absent referent, a figure that is erased in order to promote objectifying and exploitative relations between humans and the natural world.

As will become clear in my analysis of the three advertisements, understanding how nature functions as the absent referent in advertising is enabled by attention to the operation of metonymy. While often used narrowly as a virtual synonym for synecdoche (a part of something standing in for the whole) or broadly as one thing standing for another due to a long term, naturalized conventional relationship, for the purposes of this essay I rely primarily on Kenneth Burke’s (1969) discussion of metonymy as the conveyance “of some incorporeal or intangible state in terms of the corporeal or tangible” (p. 506), and more specifically on his point that metonymy correlates with reduction. In representing the less tangible through more tangible, the abstract or hard to grasp through the concrete or familiar, or the whole through some part of it (as in synecdoche), the larger concept is reduced, and such reductions erase aspects of the less tangible referent in the very act of representing them (Burke). Following this conceptualization, a key part of this analysis will be to identify how “nature” and other intangibles are represented in the advertisements and what erasures this enacts, i.e., how nature is made absent through the very means of its representation. In addition to the use of metonymy, understanding the hidden but central role of nature in advertisements in which nature is not present even as a backdrop is enabled by ecofeminist theory and the concept of intersectionality.

Intersectionality and Ecofeminism

Since much of the conceptual and analytic groundwork for the meat-masculinity linkage was developed, a significant development in critical/cultural studies has been a focus on intersectionality: the ways in which multiple lines of oppression (e.g., race, gender, and class) operate in conjunction. More radically, intersectionality reveals the very categories of domination and subordination (which also include nationality, ethnicity, sexuality, and ability) as mutually constitutive, pointing to an interdependence between and lack of any firm foundation for such categories (Ashcraft & Flores, 2000; Bederman, 1995; Rogers, 1993). Ecofeminism, among other forms of radical feminist theory, was an important contributor to this development, adding a general understanding of mutually supportive lines of oppression as well as a specific focus on the ways gender, race, class, and other structures of domination are intertwined with the human domination of the other-than-human world (Adams, 2003; Gaard, 2002; Rogers & Schutten, 2004). In addition, critical analyses of the crisis in US-American masculinity (in contemporary times as well as circa 1900) have also

achieved sharper insights into the nature and operation of the crisis by applying an intersectional critical lens (Ashcraft & Flores, 2000; Bederman, 1995; Robinson, 2000; Rogers, 2007).

Plumwood's (1993) ecofeminist theory centers on the constitution of the "master identity" by Western culture, an identity based on the exclusion, homogenization, objectification, incorporation, and denial of the other. This master identity forms the basis for systems of exploitation and oppression, and has a decidedly (though not intrinsically) masculine character (Plumwood, 1993; Rogers & Schutten, 2004), one consistent with common definitions of hegemonic masculinity (Hanke, 1998). Of greatest relevance to my analysis here is her identification of backgrounding as a key element in dualistic systems of oppression. Backgrounding is a means of addressing the master's simultaneous reliance on the other (e.g., nature, women, people of color, and the working classes) and a denial of dependency on such others. This denial of dependency can be enacted by placing the other in the background so that "the real role and contribution of the other is obscured in culture, and the economic relation is denied, mystified, or presented in paternalistic terms" (Plumwood, 1993, p. 49). The other is a necessary but threatening aspect of the master identity, as even justifications for subordinating others make evident the dependency of the master on the other. Again, metonymy can be understood as a key mechanism enabling backgrounding, for the reductions involved in metonymic representation enable certain aspects of the other to be highlighted while other aspects are obscured.

When ecofeminist criticism is combined with the analytic tool of intersectionality, however, another backgrounding dynamic can be revealed: the ways in which others can be erased from the master's discourse via the use of multiple lines of interconnected difference in which, for example, other races can substitute for the feminine, the feminine for nature, nature for primitive peoples, and so forth. Indeed, intersectionality makes evident the ways in which the dualisms at the heart of the master identity and the logic of domination (nature/culture, primitive/civilized, body/mind, feminine/masculine) are not only interconnected and mutually supportive, but can be reversed when doing so is useful for obscuring the contradictions involved in the simultaneous dependency and denial of dependency of the master on the other. The contradictions present in the master identity, the role of dualisms therein, and the use of opportunistic dualistic reversals to perpetuate systems of dominance are especially evident in discussions of the crisis in masculinity.

The Crisis in Masculinity

The crisis in masculinity, both historically and in post-1960s US-America, has been the subject of several analyses. Bederman (1995), for example, analyzes the crisis of middle-class Anglo-American masculinity circa 1900, identifying its sources in shifting patterns of work, threats from others (women, working class, and racial minorities), and tensions over masculinity as physical strength versus self-mastery. Whatever the origins of the crisis, "working class and immigrant men . . . seemed to possess a virility and vitality which decadent white middle-class men had lost"

(Bederman, 1995, p. 14). Similarly, many analyses of the contemporary crisis in Euro-American masculinity point to shifts in work and economics, such as Faludi's (1999) focus on the loss of "utilitarian masculinity," which "required that a man wrest something out of the raw materials of the physical world" (p. 85) and that his work be "critical to society" (p. 86). Not only blue collar but also white collar masculinity is under siege by the feminization of (male) professionals. Ashcraft and Flores (2000) write, "whereas corporations have long supplied an institutional anchor for white, middle-class masculinity" (p. 23), "contemporary discourse casts suspicion on the white collar, as well as the notion that a man is defined by his professional achievements and material possessions" (p. 22).

Central to the crisis are a series of tensions or contradictions characterizing Western masculinities: physical strength versus intellectual capacity, sexual virility versus restraint, and blue versus white collar. Bederman (1995) focuses on the tension between civilized and primitive masculinities. The superiority of Anglo-American masculinity was predicated on the deployment of a civilized masculinity (based on self-mastery and intellectual capacity) over and against the primitive masculinity (based on bodily strength, sexual virility, and a lack of moral control) of racialized others. Civilized masculinity, however, was also seen as feminizing middle-class white men, threatening traditional signs of male superiority such as physical strength and sexual virility, and questioning the inferiority of racial and working class others. Bourgeois men therefore desired what "primitive" males were presumed to possess: strength and virility. Hence, Bederman notes a decline in civilized manliness and a rise in primitive masculinity circa 1900, although both models remained in circulation throughout the twentieth century. Bederman argues that the contradictions between these models of masculinity were not resolved or necessarily experienced as contradictions—both primitive and civilized masculinity were deployed in support of the hegemony of men over women, the bourgeois over the working class, and whites over immigrants and colonized peoples.

Ashcraft and Flores (2000) argue that tensions identified by Bederman remain in play one hundred years later in the contemporary crisis of white collar masculinity. Focusing on discourse that "mourns the imminent collapse of the corporate man, over-civilized and emasculated by allied obligations to work and to women" (p. 2), they demonstrate how both civilized and primitive masculine performances are deployed to maintain an elastic and mobile hegemonic masculinity. While the underlying tensions involved in such a "civilized/primitive" masculinity are unresolved, this lack does not necessarily imply a failure of hegemonic masculinity; "there is ample evidence to suggest that white and male power reproduces itself through cycles of crisis and resolution" (Robinson, 2000, p. 86).

The narrative structure often used to articulate the current crisis establishes a basis for identifying parallels between the discourse of the crisis and contemporary texts of meat (Adams, 2003). The narrative is grounded in a period of (mythical) gender stability most commonly represented as "the 1950s." Beginning in the 1960s, several factors eroded the stability, clarity, and harmony of the established gender configuration and specifically threatened the identity, social role, and prestige of

(white) men. First, the women's movement challenged traditional gender roles and promoted women's entry into male-only realms. More broadly, a range of related movements (civil rights, gay rights, antiwar) challenged the validity of white male privilege (Faludi, 1999; Jhally & Katz, 1999). Second, economic changes eroded the basis for (white) male identity. The guarantee of a good income and job security were weakened as a result of globalization and corporate strategies such as downsizing, outsourcing, and automation. Industrial production gave way to an increasingly information- and service-based economy. The loss of blue collar work, the rise of pink collar work, and the perceived feminization of white collar work parallel a perceived loss of men's status at home. The overall result is emasculation and feminization, with men feeling disempowered and angry (Faludi). Various versions of the narrative offer different resolutions to the crisis, including a return to primitive masculinities, homosocial configurations, and scapegoating women, minorities, and "soft men" (Ashcraft & Flores, 2000; Bederman, 1995; Faludi, 1999). The three advertisements analyzed below articulate many of these perceived causes and responses to the crisis.

"Feeding the Beast" and the Crisis of Utilitarian Masculinity

Del Taco's television commercial "Feed the Beast" features a twenty-something white male and occurs in a domestic setting, a living room coded as middle class through its furniture and other décor. The advertisement opens with the man emptying a large cardboard box containing the parts of a prefabricated but unassembled piece of furniture. The box is labeled *fürn*; the Germanic-looking (non)word resembles the English word *furniture* and is a possible reference to the Swedish retail giant Ikea. The man is shown ineffectively sorting pieces of laminated particle board and bags full of hardware as well as examining the small wrench included for the assembly process. In apparent frustration he turns to the instructions, which viewers can see are labeled *dork*. This could be a nonliteral reference to a Scandinavian or Germanic language (again cueing Ikea), and/or an "inside" joke—the man who cannot assemble this furniture is indeed a "dork" in the Anglo-American sense.

At this point in the advertisement, several gendered cultural discourses are already cued. Ikea and its ilk represent feminized performances of shopping and home decorating, elements often referenced in contemporary discourses of the crisis in masculinity. For example, in the 1999 film *Fight Club*, a Hollywood blockbuster expressing the crisis in masculinity of the 1990s, the feminization of the narrator is highlighted by his participation in shopping through mail order catalogs and his attention to home décor; he is specifically shown looking through an Ikea catalog (the novel on which the film is based also contains references such as "Ikea boy" and "slave to Ikea"). Shopping and decorating as practices, and materialism as a lifestyle and basis for identity, are coded as feminine; the participation of men in these activities evidences their feminization by larger cultural forces (Ashcraft & Flores, 2000). The domestic setting of the advertisement (a well-decorated home) implies that this man's actions occur in a feminine, "civilized" space. More specifically, his

attempt at pseudocarpentry does not occur in a garage or workshop (masculine space), but in a living room (feminine space) (cf. Gelber, 1997; Hanke, 1998). The feminine coding of the physical, cultural, and relational settings of the advertisement is further manifested by the man's female partner walking into the room, briefly looking on as he struggles to assemble the furniture, shrugging her shoulders, and walking away. This presence of an observing/judging female partner possibly cues discourses of "henpecked husbands" and the "honeydew syndrome (honey do this, honey do that)" (Gelber, 1997, p. 99). Broadly speaking, the living room serves as a metonym for the intertwined concepts of domestication, civilization, and femininity while as the advertisement progresses the male protagonist will come to serve as a metonymic reduction representing "nature," specifically a natural or "primitive" masculinity that is contained or caged by femininity, domestication, and culture.

The advertisement also invokes the image of the contemporary male who, unlike previous generations, is incapable of producing meaningful objects from the materials of the world (i.e., nature)—even with directions and prefabricated materials. The narrative presents a crisis of utilitarian manhood (Faludi, 1999) along with an indication of the feminine origin of his failure—presumably (following US-American cultural logic, marketing strategies, and narrative forms), the woman initiated the purchase of the furniture to contribute to a proper domestic space. This man is indeed a "dork"—he is both roped into feminized activities by his female partner and incapable of performing what has been asked of him or what he agreed to do. This crisis of utilitarian masculinity reaches a crescendo when the small wrench necessary for assembling the furniture falls out of his mouth. As he watches the wrench fall down a heater vent, he loses his hold on the semi-assembled furniture, which falls and knocks over a lamp, further illustrating his incompetence.

At this point, the man loses any remaining composure, that is, returns to his "natural" state. He suddenly appears with a powered nail gun, wielding it above his head like a pistol, and violently attacks the furniture, yelling while "assembling" it in a brutal, unplanned way. The violent performance restores, in some sense, his hegemonic masculinity. He may not have demonstrated competency in his masculine task, but he has dominated the furniture and all that it may represent: his failure at utilitarian masculinity; consumerism, materialism, and home decoration; and/or the feminizing forces of his female partner and domesticity. The primitive masculinity (Ashcraft & Flores, 2000) that this performance enacts is named by the narration that intercedes at this point: "Dude, if you're freaking out on the furniture, maybe it's a sign that you need to feed the beast The new shredded beef combo burrito It's the only burrito beefy enough to feed the beast." "The beast" is a common trope signifying primitive masculinity in its positive and negative forms. This advertisement uses both "the beast" and another, closely-affiliated trope—the eating of meat—to cue the fantasy of primitive masculinity as a response to the emasculation (inability to produce useful objects through physical labor) and feminization (domestication) of the advertisement's protagonist.

The tropes of "the beast" and of meat consumption operate here in relation to another contemporary symbol of (white, middle class, suburban) masculinity: power

tools. The combination of the assembly of the furniture as a kind of faux carpentry and the use of power tools to “finish” the job cues a set of cultural narratives. The development of carpentry and home improvement projects as leisure activities as opposed to “work” was grounded in the crisis of masculinity circa 1900 and continued throughout the twentieth century (Gelber, 1997). Urbanization, professionalization, and the rise of the white collar challenged existing definitions of masculinity. One response was to symbolically restore “utilitarian manhood” through the creation of workshops in the home and “do-it-yourself” tasks (Gelber). The advertisement cues intertextual references to power tools, to the “handy man” as part of fulfilling the role of “man of the house” (Gelber), and to the representation of a “mock macho” image of contemporary masculinity (Hanke, 1998).

While this parodic “mock macho” mode encourages laughter at the expense of hegemonic masculine performances, Hanke (1998) argues that “mock macho” discourse involves “the male power bloc tell[ing] the truth about themselves and den[ying] any ability to do anything about it” (p. 77), ultimately maintaining hegemonic masculinity. As traditional forms of hegemonic masculinity are “endangered by the bureaucratic organization of corporate work . . . taking up power tools and outdoor barbecues” become symbolic means to reassert a form of hegemonic masculinity, however incompetently (Hanke, 1998, p. 79). The Del Taco advertisement reproduces a “mock macho” parodic frame, as the man turns to power tools and an “over-the-top” performance of violent masculinity to assemble the furniture, and the end result is catastrophe—the couple’s purchase is ruined and the man’s self-esteem is threatened. However, we see no questioning of the man’s attachment to hegemonic forms of masculinity. He may be incompetent, but he is still a beast in need of, and at least temporarily satiated by, meat. The advertisement is produced from and directed toward a masculine subject position in need of bolstering and reassurance. It highlights women/femininity as a cause of the crisis in masculinity and, while acknowledging changes in men’s roles, ultimately does not question the “naturalness” of hegemonic masculine performances.

After the narration encouraging the man to “feed the beast,” he eats a burrito while showing the results of his labor to his partner. The shelf unit he constructed lacks whatever functional and aesthetic qualities it might have had. He begins to say, “It’s...” just as the unit partially detaches from the wall on which it hangs, causing one end to drop several inches. The woman then finishes his statement: “. . . going to your mother’s.” Resigned to his failure and contented by his beefy burrito, he submits: “Okay.” Significantly, the beefy burrito does not resolve the crisis by restoring the form of masculinity at which he failed, but by providing symbolic compensation, a fantasy performance of violent, primitive masculinity to balance out his failure to successfully perform other kinds of masculine scripts (utilitarian, blue collar masculinity). Consumerism still rules, the home is still controlled by the woman (as signified by her decision to dispose of the furniture), and he remains incapable of validating his masculinity in any way other than by eating the flesh of a cow. Nevertheless, the advertisement implies that beef consumption restores his intrinsically masculine nature as a “beast” in spite of any and all efforts to “civilize”

(feminize) him. Eating beef may be one among many possible metonymic reductions of hegemonic masculinity, but this advertisement implies that it is the one that counts. The metonym's power is grounded in the absent referent—not just nature, or the cow who gave its life, but a “natural” masculinity manifested as “the beast.” Hence, masculinity's need for independence from femininity is foregrounded; while masculinity's dependence on nature is present metonymically, nature itself is not, thereby moving it to the background and perpetuating the denial of dependency.

A final point about this advertisement strengthens its connection to performances of violent, primitive masculinity and hence to the crisis in masculinity. There is an explicit intertextual reference between this advertisement and “all star” wrestling that indicates more than simply a common target demographic for Del Taco and wrestling entertainment. Del Taco's “Feed the Beast” campaign is tied into the World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) through a sweepstakes contest about “Who is the biggest beast in the WWE?” (World Wrestling Entertainment, 2007). While the WWE can itself be understood as a parody of hegemonic masculinity, it is also structured and consumed in ways that reinforce misogyny and violence against women, as well as violence against all that is coded as feminine (Jhally, 2002). In short, the Del Taco advertisement and its connection to the WWE makes clear that men do not need to and perhaps even should not restore their utilitarian masculinity, as doing so could potentially subjugate them more effectively into feminized domesticity. Instead, the advertisement and the accompanying sweepstakes suggest that one's masculine status should be symbolically restored by referencing a primitive, bestial masculinity that highlights power, domination, and violence.

Tofu, Rabbit Food, and the Crisis in Masculinity

Of the recent advertisements linking meat and masculinity, perhaps none generated as much outcry as GM's Hummer H3 advertisement titled “Tofu.” This advertisement combines two symbols loaded with ideological significance in relation to masculinity, environmentalism, and vegetarianism. Hummers are identified with the US military and other figures of hegemonic masculinity, such as Arnold Schwarzenegger (Pomfret, 2006). While the Hummer-masculinity articulation is ever present, it has in some ways been overshadowed by the Hummer's role as a metonym for sport utility vehicles (SUVs), which in turn serve as metonym for US-Americans' love affair with the automobile and off-highway vehicle recreation as well as addiction to petroleum (Meister, 1997; Olsen, 2002). The environmental symbolism of Hummers has also been enhanced due to publicity surrounding the involvement of the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) in the destruction of more than 20 Hummers and other SUVs at a California dealership (Madigan, 2003).

In contrast, tofu is a prominent metonym for vegetarianism, which is, in turn, symbolized as feminine. Tofu is an alternative to meat, and insofar as the consumption of meat is linked to masculinity, the consumption of tofu is coded as emasculating and feminizing. This feminization is due to tofu's role in a vegetarian diet as well as its role as a metonym—tofu stands in for everything in a vegetarian

diet, such as vegetables, fruits, nuts, and grains. In turn, it stands in for the less tangible identities, lifestyles, and politics generally associated with vegetarianism, such as hippies, “granolas,” environmentalism, pacifism, feminism, and animal rights (Gaard, 2002). In this sense, and consistent with the dualistic structures upon which dominant Western ideologies are based (Gaard), tofu is not just *nonmeat*, it is *antimeat*. Recently, some conservative social critics have suggested that tofu and other soy products are inherently feminizing. For example, Jim Rutz (2006) claims that medical research shows that female hormones in soy will not only make girls reach menarche years earlier than normal, but result in delayed puberty, decreases in testosterone, testicular atrophy, smaller penises, and increasing homosexuality in boys. According to commentators such as Rutz, cultural shifts away from meat and toward soy products do not simply present a symbolic challenge to individual men’s masculinity (cf. Sobal, 2005), but present a broad-based cultural threat because such dietary shifts are biologically feminizing. Tofu is rhetorically constituted, therefore, as not just feminine, but anti-masculine and linked to the crisis in masculinity.

Against the symbolic backdrop of Hummers, tofu, and the crisis in masculinity, GM offers the following narrative in its “Tofu” advertisement. Two twenty-something white men are in a grocery store checkout line. The first guy watches while the female checker scans a large item labeled “tofu” (the package also includes, in smaller letters, the word “organic”). Other visible items being purchased by the first man include sprouts, an artichoke, carrots and radishes with abundant greens still attached, a container labeled “soy,” and a bottle of Odwalla juice. The second guy places large packages of meat and charcoal on the checkout belt while the first guy’s stuff is being scanned. After seeing the tofu, he looks at first guy, and they exchange a slight smile/smirk. At this point, the first customer looks down and away in an indication of subordination or shame. He then looks to the checkout belt to see what the second guy is buying: two large packages of intact rib sections (apparently beef), two more large packages of beef (steaks or some other form), a large bag of charcoal, and two large bottles of barbeque sauce.

The symbolic dynamics here are not reducible to tofu versus meat. First, the other products being purchased along with the tofu are symbolically important: not simply veggies, but veggies presented with prominent greens. The carrots in particular are significant, both for their abundant greens and for their direct association with another label often applied to veggies and “women’s food”: “rabbit food” (Sobal, 2005). Perhaps to enhance the visual effect of the greens and the veggies, they are not shown in plastic bags but sit bare on the checkout belt. Even if the absence of produce bags is for visual effect, not using plastic bags potentially signifies environmentalism. Along similar lines, labeling the tofu “organic” heightens many associations, with organic foods consumed due to concerns over individual, human, and/or environmental health. Second, the other customer is not only purchasing large chunks of cow flesh—he is also buying charcoal and barbeque sauce. Here the association of not simply meat, but the grilling of meat outdoors by men, adds to the second customer’s greater embodiment of primitive, hegemonic masculinity, of the need for men to

escape the domestic space (inside the home) for a more masculine space (backyard, tailgate party, or other outdoor setting) (Hanke, 1998; Rifkin, 1993).

This advertisement's narrative articulates a crisis in masculinity. Tofu symbolizes feminization; the presence of the meat, combined with obvious indications of shame and inferiority, clarifies that it also symbolizes emasculation. Why the first customer is buying tofu and veggies is not made clear; presumably, it could be due to animal rights, environmental ethics, or health reasons. Regardless of the reason, the effect is emasculation, the inability to claim the identity of "real man," and public humiliation. Another possible reason for the first man's purchases is the feminization of men's diet as a result of marriage. Sobal (2005) explores how conflict and negotiation over diet in the context of marriage involves conflict and/or negotiation over gender roles and identities, with heterosexual men often perceiving their female domestic partners as inhibiting their preferred diet of meat in favor of vegetables and other nonmeat foods. Therefore, another possible reason for the man's emasculating diet is domesticity, the "taming" of masculinity by female partners. This dynamic is consistent with the discourses of the crisis in masculinity, wherein women and their "civilizing" and "moralizing" influences are blamed for men's emasculation (Ashcraft & Flores, 2000; Bederman, 1995).

The H3 advertisement not only cues anxieties over the crisis in masculinity through the symbols of meat and tofu, but also offers a resolution to the crisis. As the first (tofu-buying) customer avoids eye contact with the second (meat-buying) one, his eyes fall on a magazine advertisement for a Hummer. At this point, tofu-guy hurriedly leaves the store. He slams his empty shopping cart into the others; while returning the cart to its designated place indicates that he is still "civilized," this is in contrast to the needlessly forceful manner with which he returns it. From this point on in the advertisement, driving rock music is heard. He returns to his car (a midsize sedan: plain and practical) and leaves the grocery store parking lot with a screech of tires. Similarly, when he arrives at a Hummer dealership, he comes to an abrupt stop with another screech. His masculinity has been challenged and he responds, in part, by driving aggressively.

After purchasing the H3, tofu-guy places his groceries in the back of the Hummer and drives off the lot in his new vehicle. At this point, the message is clear: if your masculinity is threatened, a Hummer will restore it. But the advertisement offers some final complexities. Originally, the advertisement presented the phrase "Restore Your Manhood" in large letters across the screen. However, in response to criticisms received, GM changed the advertisement to read "Restore the Balance" (Stevenson, 2006). The final shot of the advertisement shows tofu-guy taking a bite of a carrot (with the greens still attached) as he drives his new Hummer. As an advertisement for a car, not food, it is not surprising that this advertisement does not suggest that "manhood" is best restored by eating red meat. Instead, the advertisement offers its (male) viewers a "balance": The apparently necessary emasculation involved in a vegetarian diet should not be rejected, but counterbalanced by driving a Hummer, a vehicle epitomizing hegemonic masculinity. Lack of meat is a manifestation of the crisis, but its resolution lies not in meat but an SUV. A metonymic shift occurs here,

as masculinity is reduced to the tangible act of driving a Hummer instead of eating red meat, but the shift still has the effect of reinforcing the “naturalness” of the meat-masculinity linkage.

This dynamic, in which meat manifests the crisis but is not offered as a resolution thereof, takes on added significance if vegetarian and environmental issues are highlighted. One reason to consume tofu and veggies as opposed to meat is environmental sustainability: The production of beef in particular is both inefficient and a cause of substantial environmental degradation (Heinz & Lee, 1998; Ogino, Orito, Shimada, & Hirooka, 2007; Rifkin, 1993). Yet this advertisement recommends that one’s (potentially) environmentally motivated avoidance of meat be counterbalanced by the purchase of a vehicle that both symbolizes and materializes environmental destruction. Therefore, this advertisement cues a connection between the crisis of masculinity and the symbolic emasculation/feminization involved in being environmentally responsible, be it through the consumption of food or of vehicles and petroleum. The “balance” that this advertisement restores is the dominance of hegemonic masculinity—not an environmental balance, as any benefits achieved through vegetarian dietary choices are “balanced” (counteracted) by the operation of the Hummer. At the end of the advertisement, the “restored” male is eating “rabbit food” but driving one of the most inefficient vehicles available.

Feminism, Class, and “Primitive” Masculinity

Burger King’s commercial “Manthem” celebrates meat and manliness, and is presented as a parody of Helen Reddy’s 1972 feminist anthem “I Am Woman.” However, this parody is not simply a trivialization of the women’s movement and a reiteration of the meat-masculinity connection—it articulates the contemporary crisis in masculinity and relies on the symbolism of meat as well as class codes to articulate a resolution to the crisis.

“Manthem” opens with a well-dressed young woman and unshaven young white man being served their entrées at a restaurant clearly coded as upper class. It is dominated by white space: walls, floors, table cloths, cloth napkins, plates, and servers’ aprons are all white and there are minimal decorations, such as a single flower in a small vase on each table. The camera focuses on a plate, which has a small but aesthetically presented dish on it (two tiny piles of food and a small amount of sauce), being set in front of the man by a well-mannered, effeminate white male waiter.

The man who has just been served looks down at the sparse food on his plate and starts to sing the advertisement’s parody of “I Am Woman”: “I am man, hear me roar. In numbers too big to ignore.” At this point the man rises from the table and continues, “And I’m way too hungry to settle for chick food.” As he walks through the restaurant, he throws his white cloth napkin over his shoulder in a rejection of what it symbolizes: taste, class, civilization, and etiquette. He then grabs a piece of food from a plate carried by a passing waiter and at the phrase “chick food” throws this over his shoulder as well, symbolizing that it is effete, inadequate. His female companion can

be seen in the background with head bowed, hand to her forehead in embarrassment at her companion's crass behavior.

The man throws open the restaurant's doors, revealing a city street in a business district, and continues to sing: "Cuz my stomach's starting to growl, and I'm going on the prowl." Prowling is associated with predatory animals or human thieves, the nonhuman animals being more relevant here because of their link to hunting as well as the trope (utilized by Del Taco) of men as "beasts" and the song's reference to roaring. Wild animals and hunting contrast starkly with the setting of the advertisement: upscale restaurant, city street, and business district. Urbanization is a key element of the crisis in masculinity—the move to the city (and accompanying changes in work and family) is often identified as a civilizing/feminizing force and a central factor in the discourse of the crisis in masculinity (Bederman, 1995; Rogers, 2007). "Nature," however, remains absent except through its reduction to certain acts of predatory animals (prowling and roaring), thereby highlighting certain traits of hegemonic masculinity while backgrounding masculinity's reliance on nature.

The man heads toward a Burger King as he sings the next line, "For a Texas Double Whopper, man that's good." A black man in front of the Burger King joins the singing, raising the whopper he holds in his hand above his head in a sign of victory and enthusiasm. Four men exit the Burger King: one is apparently Asian, dressed in business attire; the other three (apparently white) are dressed in more working class or casual styles (e.g., "wife-beater" undershirt, baseball cap, and jeans). The four men walk down the sidewalk, whoppers in hand, singing "Oh yes, I'm a guy. I'll admit I've been fed quiche." The black man who began singing earlier runs to join the group. Two young, casually dressed white men, each of whom is shown eating with a woman at a sidewalk café, also react to the singers marching down the sidewalk: One pushes his food away from him in sync with the singing of the word "quiche" and another leaves his table to join the march.

This segment continues to play off the coding of certain foods as not just upper class, but as specifically feminine. The invocation of quiche references "women's food," specifically the 1980s backlash book and phrase "real men don't eat quiche." The narrative is clear: Women have emasculated men through the ingredients as well as the preparatory and presentational style of their preferred food. That this emasculation has to some degree been forced upon unwilling men is indicated by the men's choice to abandon their female partners as well as the food they are sharing with them when offered a better option: a food that features red meat, is produced in a low-brow establishment (a fast-food chain), and is explicitly coded as working class and masculine through its labeling as a "Texas double whopper" (cueing images of cowboys and cattle). Significantly, these men do not just reject their female partners' food—they abandon women's company in favor of a homosocial gathering of men.

The song continues, "Wave tofu bye-bye. Now it's for whopper beef I reach." In this line, the binary codes in operation are not simply masculine versus feminine and blue collar versus white collar but now explicitly include meat versus nonmeat. As this line is sung, other men begin hopping over metal barriers (the kind used for crowd control) to join the march. Most of these men are young, white, and casually dressed.

Significantly, one young man comes onto the sidewalk from a storefront, clothed in a hairdresser's cape and a cosmetic mask/treatment on his face. Here the advertisement cues yet another threat to traditional forms of hegemonic masculinity: metrosexuality (Sender, 2006). The drive by female partners and the cosmetics industry to get men to pay more attention to their physical appearance (dress, hair, skin), consuming products and services conventionally associated with women (and gay men), represents another facet of the contemporary crisis in masculinity. This man's choice to leave the salon and join the marchers represents another rejection of the feminizing forces bombarding men from multiple directions.

The next line, "I will eat this meat," is followed by its logical (following the hegemonic articulation of meat and masculinity) consequent: "til my innie turns into an outtie." The leader of the march raises his whopper-holding hand to emphasize the empowerment signified by a man's "innie" turning into an "outtie"—that is, this common reference to the configuration of one's belly button is used as a metaphor for female becoming male. This line specifically evokes the long-standing association of eating red meat with male virility (Adams, 2003; Rifkin, 1993), implying that the eating of red meat allows one to grow a penis. An "outtie" signifies the phallus, the symbol of male strength, power, and prestige that will be restored by eating meat.

The class and occupation codes so prevalent in this advertisement, codes closely linked to the advertisement's preferred definition of masculinity (primitive, blue collar, hegemonic), manifest themselves visually in conjunction with the next line of the song, "I am starved." The marchers walk by three white men striking a common pose: they flex their upper arm muscles and put their whoppers toward their mouths in a choreographed movement that combines a classic performance of masculine physical strength and the eating of a whopper. While one of these three men is dressed in business attire (slacks, white shirt, tie), the other two are more casual (jeans and t-shirts), pointing out that while class is key, *all* men have a desire to return to "real manhood"—defined by the rejection of small portions, bourgeois aesthetics, quiche, and tofu, as well as by eating meat and performing acts of physical strength.

This emphasis on blue collar performances and physical strength—the loss of which are key elements in the symptomatology of the crisis of masculinity—continues in the next scene, featuring two white men holding whoppers. These men are wearing hardhats and sleeveless shirts, have tanned skin and well-toned muscles, and have leather work gloves tucked into their belts—they are construction workers, icons of the blue collar. One of the men also has a large tattoo visible on his upper arm, further signifying "primitive" masculinity and a rejection of bourgeois respectability. One of the men punches the other in the stomach, though there is no sign they are fighting. Again, the advertisement cues the popular book and film *Fight Club*, in which men cooperatively, voluntarily, and in a homosocial setting inflict physical damage on each other with their bare fists. "Primitive" masculine performances involving risk, pain, and the infliction and reception of unarmed physical violence are one recurring response to the crisis in masculinity.

The advertisement returns to the crowd of protestors marching down an empty elevated freeway in the midst of the city, carrying signs reading "I Am Man" and "Eat

This Meat.” A minivan drives down the freeway, skidding to a stop in front of the marchers. A pudgy, bespectacled, middle-aged, polo-wearing white man gets out, takes a whopper handed to him by a marcher, smiles, and triumphantly lifts the whopper above his head while other marchers respond with raised fists. Here, as the advertisement nears its climax, the main “enemy” has been “named” in the form of a minivan: suburban, thirty- to forty-something, middle-class, familial, and feminized domestication. The minivan is a kind of anti-Hummer, representing family, responsibility, practicality, domesticity, and femininity in contrast to the Hummer’s associations with individualism, adventure, excess, and hegemonic masculinity.

The marchers then collectively lift the minivan and toss it over the edge of the freeway, where it falls into a large yellow dump truck on the street below. The advertisement then cuts to a shot of an older, heavily muscled man wearing tights and with a shaved head (a classic circus muscle man) who is harnessed into a set of heavy chains connected to the dump truck. In front of him stands a woman holding a shovel with a whopper on it; she is dressed in pink and appears to be taunting him with the reward he cannot quite reach. Here the advertisement highlights the theme of women controlling men through their “manly” desires. While pulling the truck does demonstrate “primitive” aspects of hegemonic masculinity in its portrayal of physical strength, this act is framed as slavery due to the woman’s control of the man’s desired food and through the connotations of being in chains. As with the beginning of the advertisement, in which a man is trapped in a feminine, upper-class environment that offers only “chick food,” this scene emphasizes women’s negative role in the contemporary crisis in masculinity. The homosocial quality of the march, as well as its embracing of primitive and blue collar masculinities, serves as a counterbalance to the men’s enslavement by women, fashion, class, and profession. Finally, a deep-voiced male narrator closes the advertisement: “Eat like a man, man.”

“Manthem” contains almost all of the major themes identified in analyses of the crisis of masculinity. It identifies femininity, family, metrosexuality (fashion), urbanization, white collar work, middle- and upper-class aesthetics, “women’s food” (tofu, quiche, and gourmet food), and women’s control over men as symptoms and/or causes of a crisis in masculinity. It also clearly identifies male homosociality, a blue collar aesthetic, physical strength, utilitarian manhood, the ability to inflict and take pain, the eating of meat, and men taking control over their dining and other habits as central to restoring a “primitive” hegemonic masculinity. While the advertisement’s use of Helen Reddy’s “I Am Woman” and other references to the women’s movement clearly identifies feminism as a source of men’s emasculation, the advertisement’s solution is not simply a rejection of feminism but a rejection of what it is understood to have ushered in: men’s subordination to women’s values and tastes. The consumption of red meat, a whopper specifically, is articulated with symbolic meanings of “resistance” and the restoration of men’s “authentic” masculinity. Eating beef is both rebellious and a reclaiming of privilege lost.

Backlash Discourse and Environmental Movements

Commonly identified sources of the contemporary crisis in masculinity are important social movements from the 1960s and 1970s: the civil rights, women's, gay rights, and antiwar movements. Each of these movements challenges the supremacy of the dominant male identity: hegemonic masculinity, defined as white, heterosexual, economically productive, socially valued, and both dominant and dominating (Faludi, 1999; Hanke, 1998; Jhally & Katz, 1999). Few commentators, however, add—let alone highlight—what seems obvious: the environmental movement (an exception being Connell, 1990). Many pro-environmental ideologies, goals, and practices challenge the privilege and ideological position of the white, straight, dominating male (Connell).

Each of the advertisements analyzed above is obviously about masculinity, and feminist critiques are an appropriate response to such backlash rhetoric. But the references to the crisis in masculinity each contains are not simply mechanisms to sell products or, more generally, to perpetuate male privilege. These advertisements are all anti-environmental. Only the Hummer advertisement is generally interpreted and responded to as such due to the Hummer's environmental, as well as masculinist, symbolism, but the Burger King and Del Taco advertisements are not just anti-feminist advertisements—they are also deeply anti-environmental and anti-animal rights. As Adams (2003) points out, any time meat is consumed or symbolized, the “absent referent” is the suffering, exploitation, and slaughter of animals, as well as the interconnection between not just the oppression of women and animals, but also systems of power structured around the dualisms of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and nature/culture. These advertisements not only support systems of privilege and oppression structured along gendered lines, they also support the abuse of animals and the degradation of ecosystems. A primary dynamic used to legitimate and normalize such practices is gender, the crisis in masculinity specifically.

Vegetarianism, whether motivated by concerns over individual human health, environmental sustainability, or animal rights, is a threat to hegemonic masculinity (cf. Baker, Thompson, & Palmer-Barnes, 2002; Heinz & Lee, 1998). Eating meat not only metonymically manifests class privilege and male privilege, and is not only used to symbolize virility and primitive masculinity—its association with hunting and the outdoors, as well as the obvious (though generally hidden) domination of animals involved in its procurement or production, make the eating of meat a central symbol of human control over nature (Baker *et al.*), of “power-over” (Warren, 2000) and the “master identity” (Plumwood, 1993). Just as Plumwood has identified the simultaneous domination of nature and denial of dependency on nature as central to the master identity, these advertisements manifest the reliance of hegemonic masculinity on the symbolic and material act of eating meat while obscuring the animals and natural systems exploited in its production and consumption. Nature is not a backdrop in these advertisements (Corbett, 2006), it is their absent referent (Adams, 2003). The most explicit representation of nature in these advertisements is the vegetables and associated greens used to symbolize “women's food” in the

Hummer advertisement; the absence of nature obscures the oppositional relations between hegemonic masculinity and environmentalism and perpetuates the objectification of nature enacted by the dominant ideologies and practices of both masculinity and commodity capitalism. This analysis, therefore, adds to Corbett's existing catalog of how nature is represented in advertisements: nature as the absent referent. Nature is present in each of these advertisements, but it is reduced metonymically to a concrete manifestation of a "natural" (primitive, hegemonic) masculinity: the eating of meat. This reduction and de facto erasure of nature itself (i.e., animals, ecosystems, etc.) allows hegemonic masculinity to symbolically and materially draw energy from nature (meat) while simultaneously backgrounding or erasing nature, and therefore any dependence on it.

Recognizing the mutually constitutive relationships between multiple forms of oppression is a now a well-established critical principle. Ecofeminism introduced the connection between the oppression of women and the exploitation of animals and nature, and broadened that to include race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, and other lines of difference (Gaard, 2002). Poststructuralist influences in critical/cultural studies similarly led to a strong emphasis on intersectional analysis in understanding systems of oppression and resistance (e.g., Bederman, 1995). But aside from ecofeminist and environmental justice work, little attention is paid to human/nonhuman as one of these lines of difference whose role in the larger configuration must be interrogated. Investigations of the crisis in masculinity will be limited until it is understood that the environmental and animal rights movements stand alongside the gay rights, civil rights, women's rights, and antiwar movements as real and perceived threats to hegemonic masculinity. Similarly, an appreciation of the barriers faced by the environmental and animal rights movements will also be incomplete without an understanding of the role of hegemonic masculinity in maintaining and defending the structures, ideologies, and practices those movements seek to change. The discourses of the backlash and the crisis in masculinity are not only about gender and feminism—they are very much about the ongoing domination of nature.

Poststructuralist methods of analysis have been important to the development of intersectionality as a theoretical concept and critical tool. Extending the poststructuralist critique of dualistic structures, intersectionality demonstrates how multiple dualisms operate in conjunction. Poststructuralist influences highlight the ways these interrelated dualisms operate as a kind of shell game in which multiple, intersecting categories operate to create the illusion of a priori foundations for systems of oppression (e.g., Bederman, 1995). The point of intersectional analysis, however, is not to deny the existence of real referents and material implications of symbolic systems (as with various forms of poststructuralism), but to show how symbolic systems are used to justify systems of oppression by obscuring the contradictions upon which master identities are based. For example, "civilized" masculinity is used to justify white male domination of working class and "primitive" others while "primitive" masculinity simultaneously justifies male domination of women and animals. In this sense, this analysis demonstrates an important corrective to some ecofeminist theory, which tends to posit long lines of parallel and relatively fixed

dualisms: male/female, culture/nature, civilized/wild, mind/body, rationality/emotion, et cetera (e.g., Plumwood, 1993). Yet, as both my analysis and previous discussions of the crisis in masculinity have shown, these dualisms are highly fluid and can be deployed in contradictory ways via metonymic reduction. While some ecofeminist criticism tends to reify the connections, such as masculinity with civilization and femininity with the wildness of nature, intersectional analysis calls for careful attention to the ways these linked pairs can be unhinged and rearticulated to suit the needs of the moment. As these advertisements make clear, contemporary forms of masculinity are dependent, in part, on “the wild” (untamed, uncivilized) even while erasing the presumed source of such wildness: nature. Thus, the deep contradictions in the logics of domination (Plumwood) articulate closely with the simultaneous denial and erasure of nature even while celebrating the master identity’s dependence on nature—in this case, meat and the eating of it. The artifice of the contemporary production and consumption of meat is recoded as both natural and inherently masculine; hegemonic masculinity’s oppositional articulation to environmentalism is enacted by promoting unsustainable food practices and dominating performances of identity and while also being obscured by the erasure of the underlying referent: nature.

Note

[1] Television advertisements analyzed:

Company	Advertisement title	Airdate*	URL	Date retrieved
Burger King	“Manthem”	July 2006	http://www.bk.com	August 6, 2006
Del Taco	“Feed the Beast”	April 2007	http://feedthebeast.deltaco.com/	May 18, 2007
Hummer (GM)	“Tofu”	August 2006	http://www.hummer.com/hummerjsp/tv_popups.jsp?spot=tofu	May 18, 2007

*Airdates are based on my observations and/or published information; actual airdates may have been over a longer period.

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