

## Chapter 59

# Understanding Gender Identities and Food Preferences to Increase the Consumption of a Plant-Based Diet With Heuristics

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter discerns existent food preferences and their correlation with women and men, and gender biases, in America. It then proposes a strategy to test the most efficient heuristics to nudge those more averse to a plant-based, sustainable diet. By understanding how negative biases can be reversed through the application of behavioral economics, the plant-based industry and American government can most effectively build marketing procedures to be employed in campaigns, menus, packaging, and media to portray sustainable diets as appealing for men and women, and important for environmental wellbeing. The study recognizes and navigates the irrationality of human preferences as actors in the food market. By accounting for gender norms, cultural roles, and subconscious behavior, it will effectively produce insight on the best heuristical approaches to cognitively orchestrate a wider acceptance, and consequent consumption, of plant-based foods.*

### INTRODUCTION

As the world's population climbs at a faster rate than ever before, global temperature levels mount with it. The emission of greenhouse gases produced directly and indirectly by individuals is the pivotal source for change, be that either positive or negative. Before the 1960's, society was not fully aware of the dire damage with which their overuse of finite resources and livelihoods could cause upon planet Earth. Since discovering that these overused resources, which are relied on for the majority of human

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-5354-1.ch059

functions, are limited and being depleted, it became a global issue to minimize their use, and optimize energy efficiency. As a foundational phenomenon of global warming, greenhouse gases trap substances in the Earth's atmosphere, cause sea levels to rise, disrupt ecosystems, eradicate species of fauna and flora, and may render human existence in this planet infeasible.

Numerous attempts have been made to curb our intervention with nature, however many of the already proposed issues lack accountability for being much too broad in dimension, and consequently unlikely to be attainable on a daily basis for the average individual. Others view the tackling of the environmental degradation issue with a financial priority, as opposed to a behavioral one, and tend to overestimate the time of environmental consequences, underestimate their costs, and ignore countless externalities. In addition, classical behavioral insights overlook the human tendency for individuals to respond illogically, emotionally, or in a way that does not maximize their utility.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE**

It has been found by Pew Research Center that men who do not eat meat are perceived as approximately 40% less masculine than women. There are no hormonal imbalances, data or behavioral traits to support this observation. Moreover, it has been found that women are significantly more likely to try, adhere to and buy sustainably-produced foods, especially plant-based diets. It is theorized that strong ties between the public's perception of a vegan diet and sexism exist. This is likely the case due to media representation. If this is found to be true in the analysis, it will be crucial to identify potential instances of sexism and gender representations to understand the behavioral triggers they activate, and propose heuristic strategies to alter the outlook of a plant-based diet from one of "unmanliness", "fragility" and "under-nutrition", to a more all-encompassing gender outlook that appeals to the participation of all people.

Moreover, beyond neutralizing the potential sexist cognitive biases revolving around veganism in the media, this proposal aims to suggest heuristic nudges to inspire and animate individuals towards a sustainable, plant-based diet as a symbol of personal empowerment based on responsibility and an interconnectedness with humanity. It may contribute to the goal of sustainable practices, illuminating the symbiotic nature of social circles and their environment. By harnessing behavioral pushes to perceive vegan diets as nutritionally complete, tasteful and empowering, public cognitive biases that hold no factual basis will become unfounded, unsustainable. Thus, individuals can be positively nudged to follow diet choices that benefit themselves, their peers, the ecosystem, and future lives. The study will discern the most effective heuristics, alone and in combination, focused on American target audiences, to create these nudges.

## **Research Question**

How can heuristics most efficiently be used to nudge the American public to positively perceive vegan food and livelihoods, accounting for different gender preferences and gendered food biases?

## **Hypothesis**

It is hypothesized that men and women will react differently to different heuristics. It is theorized that men will react more strongly to heuristics, colors, anchoring and such that reinforces their already existent, preconceived masculine ideals. Similarly, women will also strongly respond to heuristics that

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