

2016

Searching for Nature through Frames of Meat Production and Consumption

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Searching for Nature through Frames of Meat Production and Consumption

A thesis presented by

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to the Department of Sociology

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts

Connecticut College

New London, CT

May 5th 2016

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Abstract

The relationship between meat production/consumption and the permeable boundary of nature-society has been largely ignored. Because meat consumption and production is at the crossroads of environmental sociology, sociology of food, and sociology of animal ethics, elements of each field are necessary to fully understand the closely intertwined concepts of nature and meat. By drawing from each of these sub-areas and using Brewster and Bell's (2009) analytic 'Goffmanian' frames, this study explores how *natural* (unguided) and *social* (human controlled) frames of meat are used to separate modern society from nature. Semi-structured interviews (n=20), including image elicitation, were conducted with individuals at different locations relative to food production. These interviews were analyzed using a grounded thematic analysis. Participants viewed meat production as *social* and human controlled. Because meat consumption can be separated from production through *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological* distancing, participants oscillated between framing meat-eating as *natural* and *social*. This framing was complicated by the conflicting perceptions of killing agricultural animals through both a *natural* and *social* frame. Conflicting frames compounded by *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological* distancing left participants feeling disconnected to an ambiguous nature. Participants attempted to reconnect to nature by closing the *socio-psychological* and *socio-spatial* distance from meat production. However, the differing methods used to close this distance only re-affirmed the ambiguity of nature.

Keywords: environmental sociology, meat consumption, animal ethics, food production, nature-society

As we gaze into the mirror it holds up for us, we too easily imagine that what we behold is Nature when in fact we see the reflection of our own unexamined longings and desires.

—William Cronon, *The Trouble with Wilderness*

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all of the participants for giving your time and energy to this project, for trusting me with your words, and for encouraging me to write the best thesis I possibly could.

Thank you to Professor Campos-Holland for providing me with the skills, curiosity and confidence to pursue my intellectual curiosity through this honors thesis. This thesis is the accumulation of years of knowledge gained through a research process that you did not have to share with your undergraduate students, but chose to anyway. I am truly grateful for this invaluable knowledge and experience.

Thank you to my Connecticut College family for listening to my ideas and my rants while encouraging me throughout this process. Especially thank you to Avery for our many long conversations about animals and meat consumption and for helping to inspire me to conduct this research. Thank you to my partner-in-crime, Sebby, and my parents for always being supportive of everything I decide to do no matter what and for helping me through the tougher points of research.

Thank you to Professor Derek Turner for inspiring this thesis and for sparking my intellectual curiosity.

This research would not have been possible without funding from the Office of Career and Professional Development at Connecticut College as well as the Dean of Faculty through the Research Matters Faculty Grant. Thank you specifically to Christine Terry for your support.

Thank you to the Sociology Department of Connecticut College for being a supportive intellectual family. A special thanks to Ron Flores, Siri Colom, and Robert Gay for encouraging me to follow my intellectual curiosity and for always believing in my work. I also would not have had the courage to continue research and pursue an honors thesis without Gina Pol, Gracie Hall, Molly Bienstock, Brooke Dinsmore, Jasmine Kelekay, Sophie Sharps, Luis Ramos and Kevin Zevallos engaging in the research process beside me. Your research and your passion inspire me.

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Searching for Nature through Frames of Meat Production and Consumption

Over nine billion agricultural animals were slaughtered in the United States of America (U.S.) during the year 2015 alone (The Humane Society of the United States, 2016). While the number of slaughtered animals increases, Americans feel more and more disconnected with the meat production process. Danielle¹, a 25-year-old white female shopper, explained:

We don't generally see the cow being butchered in front of us...or the treatment of it beforehand. It comes in the form of a patty and a burger. You just go into the grocery store [and] see walls and walls of beef. After living 25 years around meat, I'm just desensitized to the fact that we kill these animals and eat them up.

This study explores this disconnect from meat production and connects it to an overall disconnect from nature using a qualitative approach. Semi-structured interviews, including image elicitation, with 20 individuals at different spatial and psychological (here and after: *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological*) locations relative to food production were analyzed using a grounded thematic analysis.

While the sociology of food literature and the ethics literature involving meat consumption have explored how *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological* distance from food sources has created fears and anxieties surrounding food, leading to social movements (Burton & Young, 1996; McIntosh, 2013; Mennell et al., 1992; Verbeke & Viaene, 2000), only limited research has explored the connection between meat consumption/production and nature (Hansen, Noe & Højring, 2006). In addition to filling this gap, this study contributes to the narrow literature exploring perspectives on meat consumption/production at different *socio-psychological* and *socio-spatial* locations from food production (Åsebø, Jervell, Lieblein, Svennerud, & Francis 2007; Francis et al.,

¹ Participants' legal names were replaced with self-selected pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality.

2005). This study also addresses the lack of empirical investigation into reconnecting to nature through food consumption and production (Winter 2005; Smith 2010; Gibson 2009; Gibson & Young 2014; Hansen, et al., 2006; Goodman & Redclift 2002). To do so, this analysis uses Brewster and Bell's (2009) 'Goffmanian' analytic framework, integrating the social constructionist perspective on the ambiguity that is 'nature,' a framing that environmental sociologists have failed to apply to perspectives on meat consumption and production (Tovey, 2003).

The findings show that while participants view meat production through a *social* or human controlled lens, meat consumption is viewed as both a *social* and *natural* phenomenon. The *natural* framing of animals as helpless and the apprehension towards killing animals enhanced by the media further complicated these frameworks. These conflicting frames and the *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological* distance from the meat production process left participants disconnected from a vague notion of nature. Participants attempted to close the *socio-psychological* and *socio-spatial* distances in order to connect to both the food production process and to nature itself. However, the differing methods used to close this distance revealed the ambiguity of nature itself.

This study will be grounded in the sociology of food, animal ethics and meat, and environmental sociology literature before discussing the methodology and detailed findings.

Background

Because meat consumption and production is an interdisciplinary topic, this study draws from the sociology of food, literature involving animal ethics and meat, and environmental sociology.

Sociology of Food: Distancing and Reconnecting

Sociological research on food is an emerging literature sparked by the globalization of food supply that explores food governance, decreased trust in food supply, globalization of the agri-food system, and food safety (Carolan, 2012; Ceccarini, 2010; Le Heron, 2003; McMillan & Coveney, 2010; Mennell, Murcott, & Otterloo, 1992; Ward, Coveney, & Henderson, 2010.) Food insecurity and lack of access, as well as individual food practices, are major sub-areas within the field (Bohle, Downing, & Watts, 1994; Chen & Kwan, 2015; Fram, Frongillo, Fishbein, & Burke, 2014; Gundersen & Ziliak, 2014; MacAuslan & Attah 2015; Makelarski, Thorngren & Lindau, 2015; Thomas, 2010; Waity, 2015). Within food practices, there is a strong relationship between social position and eating habits, individualism and food health, and demographic factors, attitudes, and perceived consumption of meats (Harvey et al., 2001; Lindsay, 2010; Lupton, 1994; Wills, Backett-Milburn, Roberts, & Lawton, 2011). Closely tied to this is food and identity, especially the construction of identity through local food movements and ethical food consumption (Bisogni, Connors, Devine, & Sobal, 2002; Broadway, 2015; Roos, Prättälä, & Koski, 2001). However, scholars have yet to link food identity to an individual's connection to nature and have not investigated how *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological* distancing from the industrial food production process influence individuals' identification with nature. By exploring participants' connections to nature at multiple locations relative to food production, this study addresses a gap in the sociology of food literature by connecting meat to nature, while simultaneously recognizing that participants link "reconnecting to nature" to the food production process.

A connection exists between food identity and the industrialization of agriculture. The industrialization of food has created *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological* distancing from the consumer and the food production process that threatens the symbolic meaning attached to food, a meaning that is central one's identity (Åsebø, Jervell, Lieblein, Svennerud, & Francis 2007; Carolan, 2006; Fischler, 1988; Francis et al., 2005; Rojas et al., 2011). This distancing process can be traced to a shift from many small farms to large corporate industrial farms, a product of the industrial era and the subsequent rapid rise of urban centers, globalization, and global capitalism (Dowler, Kneafsey, Cox, & Holloway, 2009; Mennell et al., 1992; Ward et al., 2010). This created separation between urban and rural, and consequently, a lesser percentage of Americans now participate in the production of produce or the raising of agricultural animals. The meat and larger food industry enhanced this distancing by separating meat-processing workers from consumers, drastically reducing individual food preparation through prepackaged food, and creating products that are uniform, safe, and predictable (Dowler et al., 2009; Mennell, Murcott, & Otterloo, 1992). Advertisements further distanced consumers from food production through the separation of agricultural animals from consumed meat by emphasizing the cuteness of agricultural animals, transforming meat into products that do not resemble an animal, and fetishizing consumption through manipulation that draws from neoliberalism's emphasis on individual choice (Gouveia & Juska, 2002; Grauerholz, 2007).

One result from this disconnect is a growing fear of food, including anxieties surrounding risk consumption, food safety, food technologies like genetically modified organisms (GMO), obesity, and food additives (Buchler, Smith, & Lawrence, 2010;

McIntosh, 2013; Mennell et al., 1992; Ward et al., 2010). While risk and anxieties have been heavily researched, detachment from nature as a consequence of the industrialization of food is limited to the recognition that there exists a growing disconnect between farm animals and meat (Grauerholz, 2007). Winter (2005) describes research on reconnecting to nature through food production or consumption as “embryonic at best” (p. 611), despite evidence that a human’s ideas about agriculture are closely related to that person’s ideas about nature (Verhoog, Matze, Bueren & Baars, 2003; Sagoff, 2001). This agriculture and nature connection was enhanced through industrialization of agriculture and urbanization, a process that emphasized humans as independent and in control of nature (Goodman & Redclift, 2002).

Because of this limited research, reconnecting to nature through food production or consumption is often ignored in the literature on ‘natural’ food initiatives, such as macrobiotics, the avoidance of GMOs and pesticides, local food initiatives, and the overall emerging trend of ethical consumption, as well as movements centered on meat like vegetarianism and veganism (Adams & Raisborough, 2010; Barnett, Cloke, Clarke, & Malpass, 2010; Cherry, 2006 & 2015; Greenebaum, 2012; Haenfler, Johnson & Jones, 2012; Liu, Cai, & Zhu, 2015; Mennell et al., 1992; Morris, Kirwan & Lally, 2014). Rather than looking at these movements as people attempting to reconnect with nature, they are often viewed as a countercultural reaction to the risk involved in industrial agriculture, responses to a media-influenced fear of not knowing what one is eating, and an attempt to recover a purity that is under threat by modern urban life (Belasco, 1989; Beck, 1992; Burton & Young, 1996; Connolly & Prothero 2008; Lockie, Lyons, & Lawrence, 2000; Mennell et al., 1992; Verbeke & Viaene, 2000).

While it is acknowledged that certain behaviors like visiting designated wilderness areas are an attempt to reconnect with nature (Smith, 2010), there has been limited recognition that individual food production and consumption behaviors, including hunting, small-scale farming, ethical consumption and organic food marketing, are also attempts to reconnect with nature (Gibson, 2009; Gibson & Young, 2014; Hansen, Noe & Højring, 2006; Goodman & Redclift, 2002). Within this limited literature, very few of these behaviors have been studied and compared collectively. This study addresses this gap by collectively discussing seven food approaches used to close the *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological* distance from food production and to reconnect to nature. These approaches were ethical consumption, changing one's diet, shopping at health food stores, hunting, cooking, slaughtering, and raising one's own food.

Animal ethics and meat

Although animal ethics involving meat have been extensively explored from a philosophical perspective (Gruen, 2011; Singer, 1977; Regan, 1987), sociology has neglected it. Instead, sociology identifies the influence of social status and behavior, such as gender, race, class, ethnicity and habit, on meat consumption and explores perceptions about meat related to health, the environment and social norms (Greenebaum, 2012; Gossard & York, 2003; Guarnaccia et al., 2012; McIntosh et al., 1995; Saba & Natale, 1998; Sumpter, 2015). Increasingly, however, animal ethics involving meat consumption is being explored from a sociology perspective. The findings of this literature demonstrate the importance of studying animal ethics through a sociological lens, including connecting the ambiguous definition of animal welfare to the treatment of agricultural animals (Bracke, De Greef & Hopster, 2005; Devitt et al., 2014; Ideland,

2009), recognizing abstinence from meat as an mechanism to combat mistreatment of animals (Fox & Ward, 2008; Jabs, Devine, & Sobal, 1998; Richardson, Shepherd, & Elliman, 1993), identifying the alienation of livestock (Stuart, Schewe, & Gunderson, 2013), and the controversial evidence regarding the concern of the public with the wellbeing of farm animals (Bock & Buller, 2013; Buller & Morris, 2003; Lusk & Norwood, 2010).

There is very little qualitative comparison on the relationship between meat and animal ethics. such as comparing lay people and expert's perspectives on agricultural animal welfare (Galvin & Herzog, 1992; Herzog, 1993; Holm and Mohl, 2000; Kauppinen, et al., 2010; Lassen, Sandøe & Forkman, 2006; Shaw & Newholm, 2002; Yasmin, 2009). Despite findings that show perspectives differ depending on the individual's *socio-psychological* and *socio-spatial* distance from the food production process (Åsebø et al., 2007), there is a lack of sociological literature which qualitatively compares the perception of meat and animal ethics from different locations relative to food production. By interviewing participants at different locations relative to meat production, this work addresses the gap by exploring how *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological* distance influences perspectives on meat production, meat consumption, animal ethics, and connection to nature, and, in turn, shapes an individual's perspective on daily food practices.

Environmental Sociology of Nature

The expanding field of environmental sociology covers a wide array of topics that often critique anthropocentrism, including materialism and consumption, risk, inequalities, environmental stewardship, environmental behaviors and attitudes, and

environmental movements (Buttel, 2004; Dunlap, 1998; Drescher, 2014; Eder & Ritter, 1996; Lorenzen, 2014; O'Brien, 2015; Ramos, 2015; Yates, Luo, Mobley, & Shealy, 2015).

Conceptualizations of nature between realists and social constructionists in the environmental sociology discourse differ (Tovey, 2003). Realists view nature as an entity distinct from society, while often highlighting the interdependence of society and the natural world (Adam, 2013; Dunlap & Canton, 1979). Currently more dominant within the literature, social constructionists concentrate on the unsustainable and permeable boundary between the natural and the social through many perspectives including feminist critiques and ecological Marxism (Agarwal, 1992; Goldman and Schurman, 2000; Harvey, 1996; Spaargaren et al., 2000). This transparent view of nature draws heavily from historical environmentalists and geographers who emphasize humans' impact on all areas of the world and society's changing attitudes towards nature throughout history (Cronon, 1996; Nash, 1982; Smith, 2010).

However, this recognition of the transparency of nature is rarely linked to food production and has yet to be linked to perspectives on meat consumption and production, an omission that Goodman (1999) considers a major methodological weakness (Hansen et al., 2006; Tybirk, Alrøe, & Frederiksen, 2004). Agricultural animals, in fact, are often not discussed at all within the environmental sociology. Tovey criticizes this lack of discussion as "paradoxical," as it "contrasts starkly with levels of interest among the general public" (2003, p. 203). This study addresses this gap by actively reminding the reader of the nature/society dualism and the permeable definition of nature through a 'Goffmanian' frame.

Theoretical Framework

In order to address the lack of methodological recognition of the transparency of nature within research surrounding food consumption/production, this study draws from Brewster and Bell's (2009) application of Goffmanian frames, *natural* and *social*, to the environmental sociology of everyday life. The *natural* frame refers to a kind of determinism where events are seen as "undirected, unoriented, unanimated, unguided, [and] purely physical" (Goffman 1974, p. 22). This frame discourages social sanctions because *natural* occurrences are seen as excluding social responsibility. To the contrary, when viewed through a *social* frame, events are seen as controlled by human intelligence or agency. By constantly reminding the reader of the permeable divide between 'nature' and society, this theoretical framework fills a gap within the environmental sociology literature while contextualizing the participant's perspective.

Rather than statically viewed as either *natural* or *social*, single events can be viewed through multiple interchangeable frames. Drawing from the sociology of food literature, this study recognizes that distance from the food production process can threaten the symbolic meaning attached to food, and thus change the framing of aspects of meat consumption/production (Åsebø, Jervell, Lieblein, Svennerud, & Francis 2007; Carolan, 2006; Fischler, 1988; Francis et al., 2005; Rojas et al., 2011). To help conceptualize this throughout the findings, this study draws from Lieblein, Francis and Torjusen's (2001) framework of distancing from the food production process, which includes *socio-spatial*, *temporal*, and *socio-psychological* distancing. Specifically, *socio-spatial* distancing refers to the physical distance from the "soil to table", *temporal* distancing to the amount of time that food is stored or preserved before eaten, and *socio-*

psychological distancing encompasses an overall “distance of the mind” that results from a combination of the former and the latter (p. 67). Because *temporal* distance was not largely discussed within this sample, only *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological* distances will be employed in this analysis, with *socio-psychological* distance referring to feeling either mentally close or mentally far food production.

Methodology

This qualitative study uses semi-structured interviews, including image elicitation, and a grounded thematic analysis to explore the complex culture surrounding meat consumption and animal ethics in the U.S. As Creswell (1998) suggests, semi-structured interviews capture participants’ perspectives and experiences and embrace interviewees as participants in research, rather than subjects of research. Thus, semi-structured in-depth interviews were employed to capture the perspectives of 6 different locations relative to meat production: farmers who work with animals, workers in the meat packing industry, people who abstain from eating meat, grocery shoppers, animal rescue volunteers, and hunters/fishers.

Recruitment

Recruitment took place during the summer of 2015 after acquiring Institutional Review Board approval. The techniques used to recruit individuals for the study differed heavily among the 6 different groups of participants. While the majority of participants were recruited through Craigslist, fliers, and word of mouth, there was limited access to farmers and meat industry workers. As a result, small farms or meat packing companies were often directly called or emailed.

These techniques led to a specific recruited population. Most of the workers in the meat industry and the farmers worked in small-scale or generational businesses, and many of the participants who chose to participate in the study through Craigslist or fliers had pre-conceived beliefs about the topic. In addition, different groups reacted differently to the recruitment process. Those who worked within the meat industry, primarily owners and supervisors, were hesitant to participate because they feared the interviewer would be hostile to their work or were concerned that the interview might jeopardize their business or employment. Hesitant prospective participants were reassured that the interview was only meant to capture their perspective, that they would not be harassed, and that their identities would not be revealed. In one case, the interviewer signed a separate confidentiality agreement.

Sample

For the purpose of this analysis, the sample is a subset of a larger study involving 40 majority white adult participants recruited from Massachusetts, Georgia, Connecticut, New York and Rhode Island (see Table 1). This subsample (n=20) consists of 6 different groups: vegans, workers in the meat packing industry, hunters and/or fishers, shoppers, farmers who work with animals, and animal-rescue volunteers (See Table A1 for a list of participant pseudonyms matched with their identity).

This stratified sampling approach was used to explore different *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological* locations from meat and food production. While farmers, hunters, and workers in the meat packing industry are *socio-spatially*, and often *socio-psychologically*, close to the meat production process and/or agricultural animals, many participants who abstained from meat were also *socio-psychologically* close to both the

meat production process and agricultural animals. Animal rescue volunteers and shoppers were the furthest, both *socio-psychologically* and *socio-spatially*, from meat production and agricultural animals.

Table 1. *Sample Demographics (n=20)*

Identity	Gender	Age			Total
		21-26	31-48	50-62	
<i>Farmer</i>	<i>Woman</i>			3	3
	<i>Man</i>				0
<i>Meat Packing Industry</i>	<i>Woman</i>			1	1
	<i>Man</i>		2	1	3
<i>Vegan</i>	<i>Woman</i>			2	2
	<i>Man</i>				0
<i>Shopper</i>	<i>Woman</i>	3		1	4
	<i>Man</i>				0
<i>Animal Rescue</i>	<i>Woman</i>	2	1	1	4
	<i>Man</i>				0
<i>Hunter/Fisher</i>	<i>Woman</i>				0
	<i>Man</i>		1	2	3
	Total	5	4	11	n=20

Note. (a) Two participants marked “Animal Rescue” as well as identity with “Vegan.” However, one of these participants had not participated in animal rescue activities in many years, and the other participant mostly identified with vegan, only participating in animal rescue because it conformed to her vegan ideals. Therefore, these participants were only marked under the “Vegan” category.

Consent Form and Interview Setting

The interview settings varied considerably from interview to interview, including homes, libraries, offices, and restaurants. Generally, the interviews that took place in crowded settings, such as coffee shops or cafeterias, tended to be shorter, less personal, and more rushed. In contrast, the longer interviews with the more in-depth discussions tended to be in quiet places like libraries or private booths within restaurants. Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to over two hours. Once the participants and interviewer met at an interview setting, the participants were given a consent form that detailed the study’s purpose, requirements, potential risks, participant rights, and general overview of the study. Once the participant signed the consent form and all questions about the interview process were answered, the interview began.

Semi-Structured Interview

In order to collect demographic variables, a short survey was given at the beginning of the interview. These close-ended questions measured gender, race, ethnicity, age, and meat consumption practices. However, the most suitable research method to study different perspectives in depth on an underexplored topic is qualitative methodology (Creswell, 1998). As such, most of the study involved a semi-structured interview to address the complex and understudied culture surrounding meat consumption and production. Semi-structured interviews embrace interviewees as participants in research, rather than subjects of research, and capture their perspectives and lived experiences through narratives.

The semi-structured interview began with the image elicitation section in which participants were asked to organize 16 images of living organisms and 1 nonliving item in order of “importance” (see Figure 1). The images depicted a rock, an amoeba, a tree that bears edible fruit, grass, a fish, a rose, a snake, a robin, a chicken, a dog, a cat, a rodent, a human infant, an adult human, senior citizen, a worm, and a lion. After the participant completed organizing the images, the interviewer asked follow-up questions about the interviewee’s ranking system, the importance of animals, and the importance of humans. This approach encouraged participants to compare pre-selected animals to others, stimulated thoughts, and allowed the researcher to compare different participants’ responses to particular animals (Harper, 2002).

Figure 1. Image Elicitation Example



Note. Ann, a 55-year-old white woman, organized her cutouts in five categories from baby as the most important to rock as the least important.

The interview then moved to questions about pets versus wild and agricultural animals, including questions on treatment of and responsibility towards animals. The next identity section consisted of questions based on which of the 6 locations relative to meat production the participants identified within the initial demographic survey. The identity section was included to give participants a chance to discuss their own personal experiences that may have influenced their views on animals and meat consumption. Participants were then asked about shopping, meat consumption, livestock conditions, killing and suffering. Finally, the interviewer closed with questions about the future and overall thoughts about meat consumption.

In order to minimize bias and to increase participants' ease, several precautions were taken in both the interview design and interviewer behavior in the field. For example, since the overall research team included individuals with diverse eating practices, each question was reviewed to avoid bias, the interviewer demonstrated

understanding through verbal and body language, and the interviewer did not eat in front of participants in order to not reveal her food practices.¹

Data management and analysis

In order to ensure accuracy, each interview was transcribed by one researcher and then second-transcribed by a second researcher. While the first transcriber typed the interview into a Word document, the second transcriber re-listened to the audio and checked the transcript for accuracy. This data was then coded using qualitative software Atlas.ti through grounded thematic analysis. This study acknowledges the limitations of only one researcher engaged in the coding process, as several researchers could better account for bias and accuracy. The grounded theory approach developed by Glaser, Strauss, and Strutzel (1968) allows for the researcher systematically to develop codes that emerge from large, rich sets of data, rather than using preconceived hypotheses (Charmaz, 2003). Specifically, grounded theory was employed as the guiding approach to capture the emerging thematic codes within the interviews.

Results

Participants at different locations relative to the meat and food production processes explored 1) differences and similarities between humans and different kinds of non-human animals, 2) framing meat and greater food production as *social*, 3) reframing this production as *natural* through different *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological* methods 4) reconnecting with nature through meat and food consumption/production, 5) framing meat consumption as both *natural* and *social*, 6) whether or not it is *natural* to kill an agricultural animal, and 7) education as a reconnecting tool.

Animals and Humans: Importance, Similarities, and Differences

With 17 organism images laid out before them, participants were asked to organize the items in terms of importance. Anthropomorphism mixed in with a hint of biocentrism left the question of what to do with agricultural animal and pets. Participants both played into and questioned the narratives that agricultural animals are *naturally* products and pets are *naturally* companion animals. A disconnect from agricultural animals was then explored through intelligence level and emotional capacity as well as *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological* distances.

Levels of Importance. During the image elicitation involving the organization of organisms, the majority of participants placed humans at the top of the list from youngest to oldest. After humans, either domestic animals, ‘higher-level’ animals like lions, or food sources like chicken, fish, and apple trees were generally put next. Amoeba, snake and rodent were often put near the end of the list as many either thought they were lower level or disgusting creatures, especially the rodent and snake. The rock was most often put as last on the list because it was the only non-living image.

While this listing of organisms was generally the same for many of the participants, the reasoning for their organization was diverse, including level of intelligence, food chain, dependence level, importance to the human race, and importance to that particular individual. In addition, many participants, like an Indian-American 21-year-old female shopper named Danielle, felt that the exercise was difficult. She expressed, “It was like kinda hard to make a judgment call based on what living organism is more important than another.” Others like Stephan, a white 48-year-old male hunter

who relayed, “I could probably sit there and adjust these all day long!” did not feel strongly about their system of organization.

There was also considerable variation within these patterns. For example, several participants grouped the rock together with all images they considered ‘nature,’ and Stephan put rocks above pets and the flower because it had use for humans as minerals. Three of the participants’ organization was very different from the others because they listed humans as the least important. One of those participants was Zed, a white 41-year-old female animal rescue volunteer, who stated, “We’re parasites...As sentient human beings we’re supposed to take care of the planet, as much as we can, and we’re not...If we just take away the humans, and give the planet back to itself, everything would flourish again.” Zed listed humans as the least important organisms because she lost faith in the human race altogether and framed the *natural* world as completely human-free. The others were two female farmers who organized their images according to ecological benefits and each organism’s importance to their farm. For example, JoAnne, a white 59-year-old farmer, listed rock, grass, and amoeba first because they contribute to the soil that all other beings depend on.

Interestingly, two farmers and a hunter were the only participants to put pets near the end or not on the organization at all while animal rescue volunteers tended to put pets towards the top of the list. Thus, the location of some groups relative to food production and agricultural animals influenced the organization of images, as farmers thought of ecological benefits as very important, while animal rescue volunteers placed a high importance on pets.

However, there was also considerable organizational variation within these categories. For example, two participants with very different locations relative to meat production, a Taiwanese-American 50-year-old woman who worked in the meat packing industry named Gracie and a white 60-year-old woman who practices veganism named Sheila, were the only participants to believe that most or all organisms were equal in importance. When asked if her images were organized in order of importance, Gracie responded, “I never thought of it that way. Yeah, I thought it was equally important...I feel all the same.” Sheila held the same belief except she designated plants, the worm, the amoeba, and the rock as less important than all other beings.

Removing the location to food production-based groups from the analysis, there was a general similarity across most participants’ organization that agricultural animals are valued in terms of their utility for consumption and dairy products while pets are considered higher-level animals and valued for their companionship.

Wild Animals. Out of the categories ‘pets,’ ‘wild animals,’ and ‘agricultural animals,’ participants had the least to say about wild animals. When discussed, admiring wild animals for their beauty and independence in their *natural* state was a common theme, such as when Stephan explained, “In Panama City, we saw an alligator, manatees, stingrays, dolphin, sharks, you know. Thrilling. I love animals. Thrilling. And I love deer. I love to see ‘em.” Joe, a white 50-year-old man, described his fishing experience as partly a wildlife experience:

I love to get in the water, like in a salt marsh or even at a beach, with the birds, sometimes the seals swim up to you, and sometimes you can see the fish. I just love being immersed in all that life, in all that action. It’s just great! It’s like exhilarating.

Wild animals were thus mostly framed as *naturally* elegant beings; however, they were

also in danger of being framed as *social* due to human power and control. For example, Gracie expressed, “You shouldn’t have zoo over there! ... You just lock them...for your own convenience.” Several participants mentioned that zoos and habitat destruction were negative exertions of human control on *naturally* independent beings.

Pets. Similar to agricultural animals and, to an extent, wild animals, many thought of pets as helpless and dependent on humans. Unlike other animals, pets were framed as *naturally* close, companion animals with distinct personalities. Many, especially animal rescue volunteers, expressed strong relationships with these animals and considered them to be a part of the family. While two animal rescue volunteers only volunteered in their spare time, a white 55-year-old female volunteer named April rescued full time:

I remember even as a child, finding strays and coming home with a stray puppy, or a stray dog, or a stray cat, and my mother going crazy! For whatever reason, I was born with this God-given affinity for animals. And I cannot stand to see anything homeless, injured, sick scared, hungry, whatever. I just can’t stand it.

Like other participants with an affinity for animals, April’s strong relationship to animals is closely linked to the idea of compassion and empathy. There were however, some that did not think of pets as very close creatures. Two farmers, whose location is *socio-spatially* close to the food production process, considered their dogs and cats work animals with a purpose of herding sheep or chasing out rats, rather than companion animals. In addition, Cat Lady, a white 26-year-old female vegan, framed pets through a *social* framework: “We take random animals that we find to be particularly appealing and we bring them into our families. We assign them personalities, and we even do things like narrate their thought process or suppose our relationships with them.” By being skeptical that pets could reciprocate emotions to the extent most believed, Cat Lady questioned framing pets as *natural* companion animals. As the only participant who did

not grow up in the U.S., Gracie from Taiwan similarly saw pets through a *social* lens:

You shouldn't treat a dog like a human being or people. They are not people. [In] Asia, they don't think the dog is your friend. They eat them. They treat them like the cow or the pig...For me, it's kind of they are equally...And why you identify dog? You cannot eat dog? I don't understand that part...[Pets] rely on you so much...Dogs most of time, they will stay till you come home and have you ever think about they are very lonely? Whole days. So, I don't like it. I'd rather they be just a dog as a dog, cat as a cat. They have their own life... And I always think there's something wrong because you don't want to communicate with other people and you turn all your patience or whatever in your dog, and that's unfair. It's not equally. Because you are different. So, you kind of control your pets. That is about control. That is not about love.

Because her perspective is very different from the average American, Gracie reflected that she did not like to bring up her views to Americans because they have such strong views on pets as *natural* companion animals.

Many U.S. born participants associated eating dog with countries in Asia or the entire continent of Asia. Several participants, especially animal rescue volunteers, viewed this practice through a *social* lens by condemning the mistreatment of dogs in Asian countries and associating eating dog in Asia as both inherently wrong and closely tied to poverty and desperation, all while highlighting their euro-centrism. April demonstrated this while talking about eating dog in Asian countries:

There are a lot of cultures that don't respect animals...It means nothing to them to kick a dog, or to kick any animal, or to beat it, or just for fun or pleasure or whatever. They're just considered nothing! And it's mind boggling to me that there is that mindset in a lot of different cultures around the world. There is no respect given, or compassion or anything...Yeah, I think that we [Westerners] do tend to, gosh for lack of a better word, and I don't know what this may reveal about me, but just be a little more civilized about things. I think we respect life in general.

Like April, several participants made generalized statements, such as all Asians eat or mistreat dogs, and viewed eating dog as an unnatural and *socially* controlled phenomenon that needs to be stopped. However, others took JoAnne's *natural* framework, "Asians eat

dogs. Culture. Different cultures,” emphasizing that they respected the culture of eating dog in parts of Asia and viewed it as a *natural* phenomenon.

Agricultural animals. Ann, a white 55-year-old woman who practices veganism, summarized, “There’s a disconnect with the animals that are raised for consumption. I think there’s been something that’s disconnected and they’re not even seen as living things.” Many participants reflected that people care less about agricultural animals than other animals, especially pets. Whereas pets are viewed as companions and even family members, agricultural animals are mostly thought of as a *natural* food or product. A disconnect between participants and agricultural animals was mostly mentioned by shoppers, those who abstain from meat, and animal rescue volunteers, all of whom were located the farthest away from agricultural animals *socio-spatially*. Participants gave several explanations for this lack of care for agricultural animals including not connecting meat to agricultural animals, giving more value to animals that they are *socio-spatially* and *socio-psychologically* closer to, and objectifying agricultural animals.

Cat Lady described the disconnect that many Americans feel when they eat meat, “There’s probably a decent percentage of people who eat meat through suspension of disbelief. Like, they see a chicken breast and they don’t actually associate it with a chicken.” Callie, a white 22-year-old female shopper, explored how this disconnect between meat and animal ties directly into the *socio-spatial* distance between most Americans and agriculture, “If you have meat on the table, it’s hard for many people to think about the animal it originally was just because I didn’t grow up on a farm, so you don’t really get that other connection.” A white 24-year-old woman who was an animal rescue volunteer named Drea explained how *socio-spatial* distance leads to the creation

of a *socio-psychological* distance by stating, “Someone is gonna value something closer to them versus something that is objective. Like, someone is gonna value their dog more than they are gonna value some random pig that’s about to get killed for slaughter.”

Because more value is placed on animals when they are both *socio-spatially* and *socio-psychologically* close, Jack’s Mom, a 55-year-old female shopper explained that this can determine how different kinds of animals are treated.

In addition to caring for pets more than agricultural animals, Sheila stated that people care more for animals in zoos and aquariums like elephants, lions and dolphins. John, a 51-year-old white male worker in the meat packing industry, explained his relationship to wild animals, “I’m not really an outdoors guy. But you see things on T.V., certain shows and stuff, and I like to watch ‘em. And they’re just great.” While these animals may not be *socio-spatially* close to many people, they are *socio-psychologically* close through the romanticization of these animals in wildlife television programs, zoos, and aquariums.

Several participants also referred to routine objectification to explain the lack of care for farm animals, such as Zed who explained, “You have to consciously make that divide between things that you eat for meat that somebody kills somewhere else and ships in carts versus my cat.” JoAnne explained how this distinction can be harder for those who are *socio-spatially* closer to the food production process because *socio-spatial* distance also influences the *socio-psychological* closeness of agricultural animals:

[Farming] meant a major attitude change towards animals because I was going to be eating what we were raising and they were going to be around for longer than three days. Some of ‘em will be around for two years. So in a sense, you get to know ‘em, but you have to say, “No, they’re not going to be pets.”

If the framing of agricultural animals is questioned, then meat must be viewed through a

social lens. Thus, in order to keep the concept of meat within a *natural* frame, conscious objectification is employed to ensure the framing of agricultural animals as *natural* food products and pets as *natural* companion animals.

In addition to this first-hand experience, Danielle speculated that objectification occurs within slaughter plants and factory farms, where workers only see livestock as dollar signs:

There's no time to be compassionate. It's like, "I have to make this much meat and give it to McDonalds by tomorrow"... They have to go through all the animals, butcher them, and not even think about it. There's no emotion whatsoever. It's an assembly line, or like a butchering line. Nothing is being assembled; everything is being broken.

Thus, objectification was identified not only on the micro level, but also on the macro level as a tool to keep meat production within a *natural* framework.

Animals versus humans. While it was agreed that humans and animals have similar basic needs and biological similarities, most believed that humans are *naturally* higher forms of life. One of the underlying themes behind this belief is that humans have a purpose or driving force. For example, Joe explained, "I honestly don't know if dogs have a soul. Or if dogs go anywhere when they die, or animals versus people, where I think they do. I think that's a big difference." A white 21-year-old female shopper named Rose described, "Humans are hopefully one day gonna cure cancer and find the end to global warming and stuff, whereas animals can't really contribute as much." Thus, both doubt of afterlife as well as lack of purpose were mentioned as reasons why animals are *naturally* lower forms of life than humans.

Colt, a white 31-year-old male worker in the meat packing industry used a *social* frame to describe why he believed humans are the most important beings, "We have built

this world that is dependent on humans and not so much dependent on animals...So I'd say these days, probably the importance is probably heavier on the people than an animal." While many others believed that animals and humans are equally important, equality in importance did not mean equality in all aspects. Participants pointed out a long list of differences, including intelligence, emotional capacity, and agency. In terms of intelligence, all participants claimed that humans have *naturally* evolved past all other animals to a more advanced state of being, as Danielle explained:

We are the most advanced. [Animals] still have a development of the barbaric kind of like survival of the fittest type of thing...So we have developed beyond that where we are not always prey, predator, looking who to kill next. We do other things. We drive cars, we build. But that's all that they do. They build their homes, maybe. So, they don't know anything. And can you blame an animal for not knowing how to do anything else? Like that's where their development stopped.

This more advanced stage includes having dreams and goals, having a deep understanding of how the world works, being able to detach from nature, self-actualization and dying happy.

It was also generally agreed that some high-level animals possess intelligence, such as whales, dolphins, monkeys, pigs, lions, elephants and dogs. Contrarily, animals like chickens, sheep, and fish were not considered smart animals. Jack's Mom recognized that animal intelligence level influences her treatment of animals, "The closer relationships are with the higher intelligence. I have no trouble swatting a mosquito or screaming at a rodent." Similarly, Cat Lady linked intelligence level to killing agricultural animals for meat:

Maybe animals we don't consider to be quite as human get more often channeled into that food pipeline. Like a chicken. People might not consider [it] to be quite as human or emotional because typically they're not that bright. I've seen chickens do a lot of stupid things. So people feel okay eating them because maybe

they don't have quite as much consciousness or they suppose the chicken isn't that important to the fate of the world. In addition to lack of importance due to limited intelligence, Joe described agricultural animals as, "They're dumb. They're gonna be eaten. They're only value is food or they have no value other than how they taste." Thus, because of the limited capabilities of agricultural animals, their only *natural* purpose is to be eaten.

More controversial of the differences between human and animal intelligence is the ability to rationalize. While Zed claimed, "You can't rationalize with them," a 57-year-old white male hunter named Pound Cake countered, "People say that animals don't have the ability to reason. They react. I'm not sure about that. I spent most of my life in the woods hunting with driven animals and chasing ones, they're pretty smart." Others did not pick a side and instead believed that society does not have enough scientific information to determine animals' intelligence level. Complicating the determination of intelligence, Colt explained, "The main barrier is that you can't sit down and have a conversation with an animal. You can't get into their head. There's no way to understand if that animal like knows what's up." In order to reconcile this uncertainty and continue viewing intelligence in a *natural* frame, several participants divided intelligence into two meanings: existential intelligence for humans and survival intelligence for animals.

In terms of emotional capacity, while many believed that animals feel emotions such as joy, fear, and pain, most agreed that humans have a higher emotional capacity than animals. This could mean that animals either experience fewer emotions or, as a 31-year-old white male worker in the meat packing industry named Bruce Wayne explained, "Even if they are afraid of something, they don't experience that fear the way we do." However, there was disagreement on emotional capacity when participants discussed

whether or not animals could form social relations. While some participants connected social relations as one of the similarities between humans and animals, others, like Cat Lady, believed that animals could not experience what she experiences: “a social connection with my family and understand[ing] each other’s motivations.”

Ann explained the effect of perceived animal emotional capacity as, “We associate that dog with feelings of ‘love’ and ‘loyalty.’ Whereas that earthworm is just an earthworm. It doesn’t have those same emotions. So we don’t relate to it.” Several participants believed the emotional capacity of an animal and its ability to form social relations were some of the reasons people relate to pets more than agricultural animals or other organisms. Jack’s Mom related this idea to agricultural animals, “Whether a cow or a pig can have the same emotional intelligence that people have with the dog, I assume there’s a reason why dogs become a tradition as a pet.” Thus, the lack of emotional capacity creates a disconnect between the agricultural animals and people.

In addition to intellectual and emotional capacity differences, participants believed that people have more agency and freedom while animals were described as helpless and dependent on people. This idea ties into the power dynamics of the animal-human relationship that Joe and Colt described as, “Humans use animals for their own nutrition and companionship,” and “Animals are there because we’re allowing them to be.” Danielle elaborated on this level of control that humans have over all kinds of animals:

We have some power in how each of those groups fares, how they survive. Our pets are completely dependent on us. We put wildlife at risk if we mow down their habitat, if we don’t leave them alone, if we shoot them, kill them. And then, farm animals, how we’re raising them, killing them.

Gracie complicates this level of control over animals by adding, “Some people, because they cannot communicate just like baby or minor, beat them up because you are stronger than them.” Thus, the lack of communication between animals and humans makes this power dynamic even stronger.

Moving from comparing different animals and humans, participants explored meat and other food in relation to agricultural animals.

Meat and Food Production as a Social Process

Socio-spatial and *socio-psychological* distance creates a disconnect to both the food production process and nature itself. While the past food production process is framed as *natural*, this disconnect has lead participants to view the current meat and greater food production process through a *social* lens.

“There’s a disconnect between how separate we are from the process and then what we get on our table.” Zed described a major theme throughout the interviews: the separation between consumers and the food production process. Danielle elaborated, “We can go into the Shaw’s [grocery store] over there and see piles and piles of beef, loads and loads of eggs, and you’ll never know when that chicken was killed or when the chicken produced that from where.” Both Zed and Danielle can easily relate to the daily disconnect between the meat and greater food production process because, as an animal rescue volunteer and a shopper, their location to meat production is both *socio-spatially* and *socio-psychologically* far from the meat production process. While some participants’ locations were *socio-spatially* and *socio-psychologically* closer than others, each participant had some level of distance from the agricultural food production process. For example, none of the farmers personally slaughtered their own animals and none of

the workers in the meat packing industry raised agricultural animals. Colt connected this *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological* distance from the food production process to the idea of being removed from nature:

You built a brick shack, a wooden house, you have your TV, you're so separated from the world around you, where like a thousand years ago, those dudes that were foraging and hunting, like you had a real, giant respect for the land because that's what provided you everything. Now, you go on Amazon and you order your frickin' snacks. You get everything you need. You play your video games. You're just removed.

Likewise, Zed framed the past food production processes of either hunter and gatherer or small-scale farming as a *natural* process:

"I think the hunter-gatherer societies were probably the most close to nature...Having people that were close to the land and working the land as well as people who could know the animals. The Native Americans, perfect example, they use every part of the animal. They didn't waste anything. I think the spirituality was, "Thank you to the animal, to the spirit of the animal!" And having that connection with it, realizing that that is part of the food chain. Right now we're not really part of the food chain. We're outside of it.

While the hunting and small-scale agriculture of the past were considered purely *natural* and symbolized as a connection to nature, most participants framed the current meat and greater food production process through a *social* lens. Only Jack's Mom thought of the meat production process through a completely *natural* frame mostly because, as she relates, "I don't worry about it too much to be honest with you." Jack's Mom's location as a shopper signifies *socio-spatial* distance from meat production that, over time, results in *socio-psychological* distance, allowing the *natural* framing of meat consumption and production to not be questioned.

Through a *social* framework, participants cited the level of control that the government, major corporations, and agri-business has in food production. Because of this level of control in the hands of large interests, distrust of the food production process

was very evident, especially the meat production process. Rose explained, “I just really don’t buy deli meats because those oftentimes like have mystery ingredients in them, and like they aren’t always what they say they are.” Distrust that related to health considerations included the chemicals, antibiotics, steroids, an excess of bacteria, preservatives or hormones thought to be in the meat, suspiciously long shelf-lives and unhealthy animal feed. A 54-year-old white female farmer named Amy voiced some of these health concerns for industrial meat production:

When you open up the [chicken] package and all this water runs out, it’s like, “What the heck is that? There shouldn’t be no in my chicken.” [*Makes gagging sound*]... That’s not what a chicken breast looks like, those neat little rectangles... The sell by date is like a week and a half away. So now it’s already been killed, slaughtered, packaged, and I still have a week before I can eat? You have to have done something to it!

In addition to health concerns, others like Danielle expressed distrust of the ethical practices within the meat industry, “You really don’t know what you’re getting. You can only hope that for seven dollars, this cow was alright when it was butchered. That’s the shame of it. People can say anything that they want.” Mixed with the distrust of the ethical treatment of agricultural animals and the healthiness of meat produced in an industrial setting was a general distrust of the marketing of meat that Colt described:

The Whole Foods type establishments use a lot of marketing slang to play up their stuff to be better than it really is. So that they can justify charging you three times what you get at Stop and Shop for it. “Oh, farm fresh!” “All natural.” Most of that is B.S. [*bullshit*].

Both deceptive marketing and overpricing were common reasons given for the distrust the labeling of meat, especially meat labeled as sustainable or humanely treated.

Distrust also emerged when participants discussed meat that could be grown in a lab. Lab-grown meat was heavily intertwined with the ongoing debate of GMOs and the

'pink slime' in many fast food industries. Most distrusted that this product would be safe to eat or that scientists would not hurt animals in creating the product. For others, like Rose, distrust was neither based in health or animal ethics concerns, "That just freaks me out. It's not natural, it's not organic." Participants who framed meat production through a mostly or completely *natural* frame switched to a *social* frame when discussing the hypothetical lab-grown meat. Many participants did not like the idea of people controlling something that is considered *natural* because this takes away from the validity of the construct of nature, such as a 62-year-old white female farmer named Jessica who expressed, "Stay connected with our roots in terms of where our food comes from. Don't get so technically advanced that we're growing it in laboratories. Stay more natural in what we're eating." Recognizing that lab meat creates the need to frame meat through a *social* lens, Jessica attempts to preserve the *natural* frame for meat by opposing the creation of lab meat. John describes this process as such: "People are funny with that kind of stuff. They might not wanna see you play God." Because of this reaction to lab meat, several participants mentioned how lab-grown meat would not sell in the supermarket. This was similar to the responses to any GMO discussion brought up.

About a quarter of the sample, however, saw the potential in lab-raised meat, including April who, when she learned about this possibility, expressed, "My gosh, I think that would be great. Then you're satisfying the hunger in man without having to kill or slaughter an animal in order to do so...That would be a wonderful solution. If that were possible." In addition to recognizing the potential to not kill animals through lab meat, others like Drea saw this idea as a "big answer to world hunger."

When asked what meat consumption might look like in 1,000 years, those who did not believe that humans will be extinct by that time believed that food will be processed and produced in a lab setting either because resources will run out or because humans desire less killing of animals. Therefore, many believe that lab-meat is inevitable, despite their distrust of the idea.

When participants like Joe were asked what they thought of when they imagined livestock conditions, a conflicting tension was apparent between the *natural* image of small farms versus the *social* reality of the large-scale presence of factory farms:

I picture cows and sheep kind of in wide open spaces and grazing. So, it's kind of a pleasant environment for these animals. I'm sure what I just said probably is totally different than what reality is. They're probably all jammed together in a factory in miserable conditions. But my perception is that they're out on a big farm with plenty of space...Maybe I've seen some documentary on TV about the way, or a PETA [People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals] film or something about the way animals are raised. Maybe that's the ugly reality of the way animals are raised. But, when I see farms, I see cows and sheep out in wide open spaces. So, it doesn't look so bad. So it's kind of like conflicting information.

Cat Lady elaborated on how this perception of conflicting information is influenced by meat industry marketing:

When meat products are marketed, they usually are associated with an image of the cow in the pasture or the chickens roaming the green, or the sheep in their nice little furry patch up on the hillside. But then when you learn that actually, all of these animals are in warehouses. Or if they're outside, they're on barren stretches of land that have just been trampled and they're full of feces. So I consider them to be falsely represented in the mainstream media because I think people are deceived. People have this impression that it's really not that bad, but it really is.

Cat Lady's observation of the prevalence of farming misconceptions is true. In reality, about 99% of all agricultural products in the United States come from factory farms (Foer, 2010). However, at least one participant from each locational group first thought of a local small farm when asked what came to mind when they thought of livestock

conditions or believed that small farms are more prevalent than they actually are. For example, April stated:

I think of it as being on a farm, they're in a pasture or in an open room barn part time or free to roam around or whatever, and hopefully live a nice, happy, carefree life...When I see these pictures of chickens crammed into these buildings...I hope that that's the exception.

Because no participant's locations were *socio-spatially* close to factory farms, many like April either believed that factory farms are the exception or account for about half of total farms in the United States.

According to participants, the idea of small farms is very appealing because they allow animals to have good lives and be respected while supporting local farmers. While some participants believed that more small farms were necessary, others noted how this is not practical in the long-term due to the increasing human population and limited farm space. Most participants who knew about factory farms, including Bruce Wayne, collectively thought of them as terrible places ethically, environmentally, and health wise:

I hate factory farms. They're so bad on every single level: whether it's the employees who are so frustrated, the animals that are so frustrated, the environment that's so abused, the ecology that's abused, and the false sense of security to meat that's given the broader public. It just fucked everything up in every way.

While most concentrated on the negative health effects, Sheila specifically criticized the treatment of animals within factory farms, "They never see light. They live on concrete slabs. The gestation crates are terrible...They are castrated without anesthesia. Their tail is cut off...It could be thousands upon thousands of chickens that can't even move. The conditions are horrible." Horrible conditions

for animals and negative health impacts on food was all viewed within a *social* frame of capitalistic control, as Cat Lady described:

To produce meat in such an inhumane way, and an unhealthy way, so that the meat that the people are eating is not nourishing them. It's putting chemicals and hormones into their bodies. The animals have a bad life. The workers on the farms are potentially marginalized. Like the whole system just seems pretty shady and it also seems pretty contrived. I think the government controls a lot of these things. And it just doesn't seem like it's a representation of supply and demand and free enterprise. It seems like something that the USDA [United States Department of Agriculture] cooked up in their food regulations to appease certain stakeholders.

Through this *social* lens, several participants described factory farms as run by greedy people who do terrible things to make excessive profits. Only two workers in the meat packing industry believed that factory farms were not inherently bad, such as Gracie who expressed, "I think in the end it's all we consume. So, it's all the same." Because workers in the meat industry are the closest *socio-spatially* to factory farm meat production, this process is more normalized and is thus viewed through a *natural* frame.

While traditional food production processes like hunting and small-scale agriculture are framed as *natural* and equated to nature, the current food production process is mostly viewed through a *social* frame because of the *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological* distance to food production. However, participants attempted to reframe this process as *natural* so that the idea of nature was no longer in question.

Reframing the Meat and Food Production Process

In order to decrease the disconnect from agriculture and thus solidify a conceptualization of nature, many participants used both *socio-psychological* and *socio-spatial* methods to reframe the food production process from the *social* towards the *natural*. However, the diversity of *socio-psychological* and *socio-spatial* methods used to

achieve *natural* food expose the ambiguity of this sought after ‘nature.’

Socio-psychological Reframing. In order to reframe the food production process as *natural*, mostly women attempted to become closer to the meat and food production process *socio-psychologically* through ethical consumption, changing ones diet and shopping at health food stores.

For vegans, ethical consumption involved not eating dairy and meat. However, some participants who did not identify as vegans also abstained from certain animal products, such as shopper Danielle who described how she switched to drinking almond milk after she saw documentaries of large-scale dairy farms as “a way to have to not deal with that dilemma.” Those who identified as vegan did so for a mix of health, environmental, and moral reasons. Some ethical reasons included not having a moral right to use a sentient being, decreasing their carbon footprint, and disagreeing with the practices of commercial agri-business. While vegetarianism and pescetarianism was generally well accepted, several participants viewed veganism as extreme, malnourishing, or an inaccurate viewpoint. Joe explained, “If you eat no honey and no milk and everything, so I would say that might be too extreme.” In addition, some participants stated that they have known vegans to be judgmental or preachy, such as Zed who when asked about people who abstain from meat said, “You do you, I’ll do me. Just don’t preach at me ‘cuz I will fire it right back to you.”

The vegans within this sample such as Cat Lady were acutely aware of this stereotype: “It’s sort of like, ‘Oh, you’re a snot?’ kind of attitude....When you talk about your own food preferences, everyone always thinks that you are saying theirs are bad.” Cat Lady, Ann, and Sheila all made active attempts not to be stereotyped. Sheila

explained, “I don’t really discuss my view with many people ‘cuz people would think I was crazy.” Thus, in addition to the label of “snot,” vegans like Ann also actively attempted not to be labeled “crazy”:

They think, “Oh, well, you’re an extremist, you don’t know what you’re talkin’ about, and that’s just a crazy idea.” And so, it’s a fine line knowing when to open your big mouth and share your views with someone and when you should just keep your mouth shut. Because I don’t want to come across as a ‘know it all’ or judgmental...And I try to guard myself from sharing it too freely with everyone. Not because I think there’s somethin’ wrong with it, but because not everybody’s ready to hear it.

Thus, vegans within the sample had to find a balance between sharing their knowledge and views and actively avoiding stereotypes.

In addition to reducing meat consumption as a means of ethical consumption, younger, mostly woman participants, stated that ethical consumption in form of buying food with specific labels was personally important to them. These labels included grass fed beef, local, pasture raised or range free meat, organic, and humane treatment of animals. Despite many participants’ actions demonstrating that they took part in buying goods that are labeled as ethical products, many were critical of aspects of ethical consumption, such as Callie’s distrust of labels, “If I don’t buy organic beef, I’ll try to get something that says grass fed just because it’s better for the environment, for you, for the animal. But then again, it’s still like hard to know what’s actually true.” Often the reasoning for buying these products despite participants’ distrust of the labels was that they felt that was the best action they could take in that situation.

Colt also pointed out feeling guilty for buying ethically, “It almost kind of makes me feel bad, like, ‘Oh, this was a humanely raised pig, great, now cut it up and grill it and eat it.’ It’s kind of like a weird disconnect like that.” Others were very skeptical of the

idea that ethical consumption made a difference at all, as Zed believed “we’re socio-psychologically fooling ourselves into thinking that we’re doing something better” than actually helping the situation. Danielle also described how buying ethical products ties into socioeconomic status, “Unfortunately, that price disparity will kind of change the decision making of even the most caring human being for animals. Just ‘cuz money is money.” Cat Lady broadened the ethical discussion of socioeconomic class and food choices to reducing meat consumption:

I think the world would benefit if every person could consciously reduce their meat consumption, or attempt to make responsible meat consumption choices, such as choosing humanely treated meat sources or local meat sources. But I also am really aware that for a probably the majority of people in the world, the luxury of choice is just not there... Economics influences people to make food choices out of necessity, and it’s really hard to take an ethical stand in those situations because people need to survive and they need to do the best they can for their families, and it’s just not equitable in our society.

While several participants like Cat Lady and Zed had mixed feelings or were hesitant, many others highly valued ethical consumption through grocery store labels.

Those who were drawn to this idea thought positively of health food stores for promoting ethical practices, such as Drea who relayed, “Stores like Whole Foods and Trader Joe’s, I feel like they’re making a moral choice, which I like. And they’re making like a conscious effort to move towards that sort of stuff.” While some specifically valued these stores for their treatment of animals or environmental record, more participants were ethically drawn to them because they sold local produce.

Yet, these ethical motivations for choosing certain foods and grocery stores were small in comparison to the draw of health through consumption. Colt explained, “Is it nice if it was humanely raised? Of course. But am I more concerned about a humanely raised pig or a pig without crap in it? I’d rather have the pig without crap in it.” This

points to the greater emerging trend of attempting to control one's health through consumption of a diet that is framed as *natural*. For example, Rose explained, "I buy things that are gluten-free and just a lot more like natural...Just like keeping it like as close to the original form as possible." This trend is an attempt to reframe food consumption from the *social* frame of processed and industrialized food to the *natural* frame of purely original food with limited human alterations.

While the goal of reframing food and the food production process as *natural* is the same, the specific diets that are thought to achieve this goal are endless and often contradictory. The food health opinions within this sample were vast: a farmer heavily researched the health benefits of raw milk and grass fed beef, a vegan recited several studies, books and movies that indicated that dairy and meat is unhealthy, a nutritionist thought that vegans do not get enough protein, another farmer believed growth hormones in meat cause adolescents to reach puberty sooner, and a shopper believed that eating gluten caused health problems. Despite the conflicting information on many of these diets, several participants pointed to how their specific diet can help to cure or treat illnesses and diseases, even permanent diseases like autism and arthritis:

[A home school mom] adopted an autistic child, and she used her nutrition knowledge to try to help treat some of his deals that he had. And she kept saying, "You need to do something about your gut. You need to try raw milk kefir"...And I did it and within 20 minutes things changed...This woman came into my life, and shared what she knew, and gave me my life back. ~JoAnne

My biggest pet peeve is those stupid multi colored goldfish. They dye them purple, red, orange, green...I work with kids who have autism and sometimes I look and say, "What are you doing to their diets?" I'm not saying it's causing it. I don't know that much about that, but I'm just saying are we helping it by feeding them all this crap? We're not helping matters any. ~Amy

I was almost gonna have an endoscopy because I kept having pains in my stomach. But once I changed my diet, it all went away. It's amazing...All the

antibiotics in meat and the sugar and the flour causes inflammation, so then you're riddled with arthritis. And then when you change your diet, it all goes away.
~Sheila

These recounted stories of healing oneself through consumption ties into the idea that if one can only find the true *natural*, original food then one can be at a *natural* state of being. Where, then, do people find this pure food? Most participants agreed that health food stores offer healthier, fresher, and overall better quality foods than regular grocery stores. Thus, health stores have become an avenue to find health, become closer to the meat and greater food production process, and reconnect with nature.

There is was consensus among participants that health food stores charge more than regular grocery stores, with a diverse range of participants specifically identifying health food stores as overpriced. While Pound Cake criticized, "It's a shame that it costs more to eat healthier," others like Zed reflected on the macro socio-economic implications: "The 99% can't afford to eat healthy. How stupid is that?" Because shoppers at health food stores often are of a higher socioeconomic class than shoppers at regular grocery stores, Amy explained, "Not everybody's in that position to feed their kids healthy foods...I feel badly when it's not a parent's choice. It's what they can afford. You're doing the best that you can, but your kid's still getting all this crap." The intersection of socioeconomic class, food, and health forced many participants to view the food production process through a *social* lens, which conflicted with many participants' *natural* framing of ethical consumption and health foods.

Because of the recognition of these socioeconomic barriers, only one farmer, JoAnne, believed that everyone, no matter their background, must invest in ethically raised meat and dairy. Amy, another farmer encouraged, but did not demand, ethical

consumption: “I think people need to look a little bit further into they buy and what they eat and what they do.” Cat Lady called on only those who have the resources to engage in ethical consumption on the basis that “maybe others making ethical choices would lead to more availability of choice for other people.”

In addition to the socioeconomic status of individuals, several participants noted how the socioeconomic status of an entire community affected the ethical consumption choices of a consumer, noting the locations of health food stores, the willingness of stores located in certain areas to accommodate a customer’s request, and even differences between food choices in the Southern and Northern United States. However, sometimes these generalizations of entire regions led to stereotyping, such as when Danielle stated, “If you went to Alabama or Mississippi, they’ll be like, ‘Why do you need Whole Foods? I’ll just make you some soul food.’ Whereas here [Northeast region], we’re like, ‘We have to be healthy’ ...It’s the mentality of the community.” Thus, communities and even regions of the world are stereotyped as not caring about their health. Some participants pointed to how the issues of socioeconomic class and food come together to create a major food justice issue that stems from lack of education and unjust food distribution. At the same time, however, this idea was lost under layers of classism when these same participants later inferred that those who do not seek out the ethical food options or health food stores do not care about those issues.

Classism was very prevalent in discussing health food stores, especially when consumers were referring to their pleasant atmosphere. For instance, farmers stated that people were nicer at health food stores than people at regular grocery stores. Similarly, Danielle commented on the “air of arrogance and affluence” affiliated with shopping at a

health food store. Amy compared a regular grocery store experience with a health food store experience:

There's people screaming and the people aren't nice. And you have to watch your carriage, it's just like a city...And I hate to sound like stuck up and I don't mean to be that way, but it's a more pleasant shopping experience...It has nothing to do with money. It's just the way people act. It's like, ridiculous. You can still be not wealthy and act human.

Classism is thus closely tied to the idea of unpleasant, more crowded chain grocery stores compared to pleasant, open health food stores.

Another aspect that heavily contributed the pleasant atmosphere of health food stores was marketing. Through the creation of a specific atmosphere, health food stores attempt to reframe food as *natural* by closing the *socio-psychological* distance from the food production process, ultimately bringing the customer *socio-psychologically* closer to nature itself. Danielle described, "The packaging at Trader Joes is very attractive because it gives you that earthy, natural feeling like, "Yeah! We're growing the food basically in our backyard." But they're not...It feels so in touch with the food creation experience." Because of this marketing, participants felt they could reconnect with agriculture and reframe food as a *natural* entity by shopping at health food stores.

Conversely, Bruce Wayne described his experience of a regular grocery store through a *social* and contrived frame: "I shut down when I go into a big box store. I get anxious, I feel uncomfortable and gross. It's like the least appetizing experience like there could be. Everything's so anesthetic and bright...It makes me cringe." Compared to health food stores, Callie felt that regular grocery stores are "Very factory produced...It just feels like there's a bigger disconnect than when you're buying something that's hopefully more local or sustainable." In addition to aesthetically pleasing, clerks at health food stores

were also said to be more knowledgeable than other grocery stores. This search for knowledge and *natural* marketing schemes points to the level of *socio-psychological* closeness these participants would like to have with the food production process and the desire to reframe the food production process from *social* to *natural*.

Zed described health food stores as “smaller, so it feels like they’re not just...hoping that you buy something. They’re actually like offering stuff.” Smaller, more personal spaces contributed to the feeling that these kinds of stores are more down-to-earth, less money-driven, and thus more *natural*. Thus, even the size of health food stores reflects the idea that they can *socio-psychologically* reconnect people with the *natural* food production process and nature.

Socio-spatial Reframing. Hunting, cooking, slaughtering, and raising one’s own food are methods that simultaneously bring participants *socio-spatially* closer to the food production process and reframe the food process as *natural*. Women used cooking and growing one’s own food as a reframing and connection tool, and men, including some husbands of participants, used hunting or fishing to reframe and reconnect with nature.

While the only participants who identified as hunters or fishers within this study were men, this reflects a national average of almost 90% of all hunters and over 70% of all fishers being male (Wildlife Service, 1988). Because only one participant participated in the slaughter process, the role of gender in this method of reframing could not be concluded.

A wide range of women, including Callie, felt that cooking and growing one’s own food would bridge the *socio-spatial* disconnect between themselves and the food production process:

I think cooking engages the person with a better relationship with food understanding, whereas if you're eating packaged stuff all the time, you don't understand where the food came from to get here...Cuz it's easy to kind of get caught up in it and just like not really care where it comes from. But like if you're actually like cutting it up and buying the ingredients for a meal from different places, you kind of understand how you need to put a lot of effort into it to get a lot out of it...Like if we don't cook, if we don't harvest as much anymore and we keep losing those things, it would go in a really, kind of scary direction...like the more scientific world.

Cooking is seen as the opposite of the *social* framing of the meat production process as a scientifically controlled process, thus preserving a *natural* frame for food.

Less women participated in growing one's own food as they did cooking. Those who did discussed the health benefits and closing their *socio-spatial* distance from the food production process. For example, JoAnne believed that properly farming your own food is the healthiest nutritional option even compared to health food stores: "If you want meat that has the nutrition in it, the vitamins, the micros, the macros, the right fats in the right proportions, that's truly going to nourish you...you're going to have to put something into it." When women like JoAnne refer to their own food as the healthiest and most pure source of food, this demonstrates how closing the *socio-spatial* gap between agriculture and consumer can preserve the *natural* frame of food. At the same time, Danielle expressed doubt that this could ever be possible for everyone:

The gold standard, which nobody can do, most people, is grow your own food...The people who butchered their own animals, they're living the best life because they've seen what they've made and they know what they're doing with their animals...But that's like people don't do it anymore 'cuz they got other things to do. We have to take our kids places, we have to work, so can't raise the farm necessarily.

Most of the women who idealized growing one's own food did not take into account the realities that come with growing one's own food, including social stigma and hard work.

"They don't get it" JoAnne relayed after sharing what her family and friends thought of

farming: “‘If you’re smart, you shouldn’t be farming’ ... ‘It’s just the dumb ones who can’t do anything else that should be farming.’ ‘It’s too much work. You can buy it in the store.’” John who works in the meat packing industry confided, “Very, very, few people do this cuz first, it’s hard work and secondly, it’s kinda gross.” Despite the hard work and stigma, most of the workers in the meat packing industry and all of the farmers loved their job and way of life. For many including Bruce Wayne, this is because they feel they are *socio-spatially*, and thus *socio-psychologically*, closer to the food production process:

This avenue of being a butcher really made sense for me. It was very physical, hands on, I love meat. It allowed me to work directly with farmers and over the last three years what has become the most sort of exciting and engaging for me is the educational element of it...But, I love every part of it. The physicality of it, the getting my hands in there, the viscosity of it, and also the interaction with the customer. Being able to tell the story about the farmer, about the animal, about the product, and engaging the customer about that and being able to provide people with this really wonderful, delicious and, and healthy triple-bottom-line product.

The hunters, fisherman, and wives of hunters and fishermen interviewed all believed that hunting or fishing brought them *socio-spatially* and thus *socio-psychologically* closer to both the meat production process and nature in general. Stephan, a bow hunter, described how he felt close to both the food production process and to nature through hunting:

I enjoy the fact that when I take the animal, it’s me. I take it, I clean the deer, I skin the deer. I cut every piece of meat off that I can. I individually package it in freezer packs. I don’t go to a processor. It’s all mine. When I’m done with it, my hands have been the only ones that’s gone through it and done everything to it...When you’re bow hunting, it’s something else to have a deer come that close to you...I had one a couple years ago that, that came in and got right under my stand. And the only reason I really was able to shoot the deer was, ‘cuz the deer was sittin’ there lookin’ up and down, lookin’ at me like up in the tree, like, “Something’s up there,” “I can’t tell what it is, but something’s right there.” I was standin’ there just frozen. And a squirrel went across the top and swingin’ on the branches right above my head, I mean literally right above my head. And the deer looked at that squirrel and put her head down and I shot her and she ran like 30 yards. I heard her fall down. To have it that close and all that, there’s a lot of adrenaline flowin’.

However, many participants who did not hunt often did not see hunting as a reframing tool or way to connect with nature as Stephan had. Rather, participants either saw hunting as a violent action against innocent creatures or as an objective solution, such as a way to give animals more fulfilled lives before slaughter or curbing overpopulation. This lack of consensus on hunting shows how it has become unclear whether hunting is framed as *natural* or *social*. Some participants, such as Sheila, were very against most hunting:

I probably detest hunters more than people who eat meat because they've been brainwashed. I don't detest 'em. I shouldn't use that word, but I just I don't get it... Hunters, they use bow and arrow, that's a very painful death. That's never not painful. But they like to go with the bow and arrow. I don't know if they think they're Robin Hood or whatever. I don't know why they do it.

This hatred and misunderstanding of hunters may be due to the fact that when asked about hunting, most participants immediately thought of trophy hunting and killing animals without using their bodies for meat. Opposite to that stereotype, the hunters and the fishers in the sample all ate what they shot or caught.

Participants attempted to reframe the food production process from a *social* to a *natural* lens through *socio-psychological* and *socio-spatial* tactics, thus ending the ambiguity of nature as it relates to food. However, the diversity of tactics used to reframe this process highlights the very ambiguity participants set out to erase. On their quest to find the most pure and *natural* food, the participants have shown that no reframing tactic is the same because there is no single 'nature.'

Meat Consumption: Natural, Social, or Both?

Views on meat consumption oscillated between using a *social* framework, a *natural* framework, or both. Because of the *socio-spatial* distance between the consumer and meat producer, the production of meat can be *socio-psychological* separated from

consuming meat. Thus, unlike meat production, meat consumption could be viewed through a *natural* frame. Despite this, many participants chose to view meat consumption through a *social* lens.

Meat Consumption Framed as Social. No matter their location from the meat production process, women overwhelmingly used a *social* frame when describing meat consumption. The only group of women not critical of meat consumption were farmers, most likely because they were all small-scale farmers who did not interact with big agriculture.

Participants described meat as a major part of societal norms, the center of most plates, and a status symbol. Mostly women, including Danielle and April, reflected on how meat consumption is a major part of American culture from either the macro view, “We are completely dependent on meat, 100%, maybe even more than that,” or the micro view, “You just don’t question it. You just do it!” Several women discussed how meat is the center of a plate and others like Cat Lady pointed to how meat is a status symbol of wealth and masculinity: “You hear men all the time like, ‘We’re gonna go have a steak.’ It’s like a bonding experience.” Ann attempted to explain how meat became so prevalent in American society through a *social* frame:

The meat and dairy industry, they are hugely successful in making people think “I’ve got to eat meat to have my protein. I’ve got to drink milk in order to get my calcium to have strong bones,” and quite the opposite is true. Actually, consuming meat and dairy is gonna weaken your bones... It’s all very successful marketing from those who stand to profit from the sale of the meat and the dairy... People are brainwashed to think they’ve got to have the meat.

In addition to the meat and dairy industry purposefully marketing their products, others pointed to lobbying forces and the government as having contributed to the creation of a meat-driven society through advertisements and nutritional messages. Sheila commented,

“People don’t realize how corrupt our government really is.”

Only Sheila believed that all meat eating must be stopped because “it’s horrible for the planet, it’s horrible for the animals, and it’s horrible for people’s health.”

However, many others criticized portions of the culture surrounding meat and the meat industry rather than condemning all meat eating. While many directly criticized the meat production process, Drea called for customers to reduce their meat intake:

People, including myself, need to broaden our options and decrease our reliance on meat...I think that we just have to be smarter about it. I think that people have to understand that there are still terrible conditions for animals and they can either stop eating the meat where it comes from, and to try and change the system, or they can continue to do it, but know that if they continue to eat meat the way they have been, nothing’s gonna change.

However, Cat Lady reflected that while reduced meat is an ideal, “for the majority of people in the world, the luxury of choice is just not there.”

Meat Consumption Framed as Natural. A variety of participants viewed meat and dairy consumption through a *natural* frame, such as when Callie explained, “We evolved to do that as a species. I don’t know if it’s necessarily right, but it’s also like every part of the food chain kind of has this one eats that one, vice versa.” Of those who referred to humans as omnivores and expressed that humans have biologically evolved to consume meat, several participants like Colt expressed that that evolutionary history justifies why humans should continue to eat meat today: “We’ve evolved over thousands and thousands of years to eat meat. We cohabitate with them. It’s a codependent relationship. Domesticated cows couldn’t live without us and we couldn’t live without them.”

This *natural* framing of consuming meat extended to the health benefits of a diet that included meat and dairy. Because many participants framed meat eating as a *natural*

diet, diets that did not include meat and dairy were viewed in a *social* frame, as showcased in Zed's suspicion, "Vegetarians, they sneak in a chicken breast once in a while if you give them because I don't think humans were meant to herbivores." Several participants expressed doubt that vegetarianism or veganism could be healthy diets and only one participant apart from those abstaining from meat expressed that vegetarianism or veganism is healthier than other diets.

Finally, religion also tied into the *natural* framing of meat consumption. When asked about religion affecting food choices, all participants stated or implied that religion did not directly affect their food choices. Instead, participants described other religious practices they knew of such as abstaining from pork in Judaism, eating fish on Friday in Catholicism, and sacred cows in Hinduism. Many like Colt thought of the idea of religion through a *social* frame and believed it was a negative influence on the treatment of animals:

Halal slaughtering, they put it in a motorized like cage, and then it like lifts its head, and they slit the neck of the animal while it's still alive. It's freaking out, it's bleeding out, it's feeling everything... Like, damn, is it not okay anymore... If you can put a bullet in that cow's head and have him done in 0.3 seconds, then I would much rather that than lockin' 'em up, slicing his throat while he's still alive, because God, 4,000 years ago said to. Screw that! That's bull!

Because of the negative effects of religion on the welfare of animals, some participants heavily criticized religion as a whole, such as Sheila who expressed, "God, I hate Christians. They think that they have domain over animals 'cuz it says so in the bible... And then in Nepal, which is a Muslim country, they sacrifice half a million animals. It's like unbelievable." Similarly, Zed disparaged Hinduism, "In India, the Hindu religion believes that cows are reincarnated ancestors so they can't kill them. So

they let them wander around the streets, infested with bugs, sick and starving...Organized religion is a horrible, horrible, horrible thing.”

At first glance, religion seems to not affect the participants' food choices. However, Danielle observed, “As much as we want to say separation of church and state...religion really drives this world for people.” Because one's own religion is seen through a *natural* framework, participants' own religious views were not thought of when asked how religion influences food choices. Instead, personal religious views emerged subtly when several participants in their 50's reflected that God gave people authority over animals, such as when Pound Cake explained, “God put all these creatures on earth for us to utilize whether we wanna make a pet out of 'em or do you wanna pin 'em up and slaughter 'em for food?” John illustrated how religion not only can define humans and animal relations, but can also create categorizations of animals:

I don't think God put dogs here to be meant for food. I think that all dogs have a certain job or a certain usefulness...As far as a cow goes, I think that God put a cow here for two reasons: They don't do anything. There's really no purpose for the cow...The way that they're built, their meat is, and the way that their body is, it's for meat or for milk.

In addition to believing that humans have God-given dominion over animals, other participants brought in other aspects of religion to food consumption, such as referring to animals not having souls, being mindful about food choices through Kosher, and being compassionate towards animals through Buddhism.

Meat Consumption as Both Natural and Social. Often, the *natural* frame of eating meat and the *social* frame of the meat industry were not reconciled because, as Drea explained, “Different people can consider things differently and sometimes hold the same belief even though they don't get along with each other.” Some participants kept

both frames by feeling guilty for eating meat or by avoiding thinking about meat production. Guilt allowed Gracie to acknowledge both frames while recognizing a contradiction: “Sometimes, I feel so bad that I eat them for my convenience... I saw video, I feel sorry for them.” Zed elaborates, “I do feel bad when I see the conditions that they’re kept in and the conditions that they’re slaughtered in. I just don’t know how to change it, so I have to kind of— I feel bad.” In addition to a feeling of powerlessness, Danielle ties the idea pleasure into the emergence of guilt: “It’s delicious, but you feel some guilt towards eating meat considering how they’re being treated now, and considering how your food was probably produced. Like, what that animal had to go through to become your meal.” Thus, through guilt, participants can acknowledge the *social* framing of meat while framing the consumption of meat in their everyday lives as a *natural* process.

Some participants also actively avoided thinking about the meat production process in order to not have to reconcile these two frames, such Colt who explained, “You try to put out that whole conflict in your head about how that cow was mooing and probably was scared as hell the minute before it got a bullet to its head.” Amy, a farmer, described her parental experience with avoiding the thought of meat production:

I used to try and shelter the kids, you know, our first lamb was Foggy and so, “Oh Foggy’s going to heaven.” And my husband’s like, “Oh Foggy’s in the freezer.” But they’ve grown up to it, and it just never seemed to bother them. But me, I’d be like, “Oh, my goodness! You can’t tell the kids we killed this animal!”

Thus, even parents and farmers try to increase the *socio-psychological* distance between children and the meat production process by encouraging them to not connect meat with a living animal.

In addition to actively avoiding thinking about meat production, Zed

acknowledged that agriculture and food production is not on the forefront of many participants' minds because they are *socio-spatially* far from meat production:

A lot of people just don't think about it. We're raised to it... Trying to keep your head afloat, you're tryin' to keep your job, you're tryin' to get ahead on your job, you're tryin' to mind your kids or deal with a spouse or something and so things like animal health and welfare fall off the plate.

Rose related this *socio-spatial* distance to *socio-psychological* distance between consumers and the meat production process:

There's a lot of mindless eating that goes on whether it's just snacking or buying whatever's the fastest to eat. I would like for myself to be more mindful with what I eat and more like considerate... I mean I've definitely like thought about it [meat consumption] a lot more, just like within this past hour than I have in like recent history.

This kind of *socio-psychological* distancing from the meat production process was common throughout the sample when participants referred to grocery shopping very quickly, stated that they did not cook often, and admitted to eating fast or pre-prepared foods. Bruce Wayne responded to this *socio-psychological* distancing:

That's one of the biggest disasters in the last 70 years. The industrialization from food [has] divorced us from food, from that relationship. We don't think about it, and that's at the root of a lot of these environmental and health problems that we're facing now in this country and worldwide... McDonalds is horrible not just because it's so bad for you and the environmental practices of the larger corporation are so bad, but it enables people to never think about their food.

In sum, the *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological* distance from the meat production process allows participants to easily keep both a *natural* and *social* frame for meat consumption by either feeling guilty and avoiding thinking about the meat production process.

The Complexity of Killing Agricultural Animals

While there were some outliers, especially from those who abstained from meat,

participants generally agreed that killing farm animals is acceptable if the meat will be eaten and if the killing was as painless as possible. Amy explained, “I don’t have a problem. That sounds terrible, I don’t have a problem with killing. I just think if it’s part of the food chain and the result is something good.” However, for the amount of participants who framed slaughtering farm animals and consuming meat as *natural* and a part of the food chain, there was a large amount of apprehension towards killing animals. April explained, “I can’t imagine plucking the feathers off my own chicken. When I see something it’s nicely packaged in a grocery store, and no longer resembles a live creature. Now that may be a hypocritical thing to say, I realize.” Several participants like April who eat meat stated that they could not kill or butcher their own meat.

There are two main reasons why participants were apprehensive about killing animals at the same time that they considered slaughtering farm animals a *natural* process. First, many participants image the general killing of animals through a *natural* framework when the food production process is *socio-spatially* and *socio-psychologically* removed. However, this framework switches to *social* when the media brings participants *socio-psychologically* closer to the inhumane killing of animals. Second, participants had a difficult time reconciling the two narratives that the food chain is a *natural* phenomenon and that all animals are defenseless and need our assistance.

Addressing the former, the *socio-psychological* and *socio-spatial* distance from the meat production process has left participants with a skewed image of killing animals that is often fed from the media. Many participants condemned the human race for inhumane and wrongful animal killing, leading some like Zed to nonchalantly express, “I’d like to think that if there were an apocalypse, enough people would die, that it

wouldn't be that big a deal. That would be my ideal." As April illustrates, the chief example of wrongful killing expressed in the media that is condemned by all participants is sport hunting for big game and trophy hunting:

The killing of that lion, Cecil [Minnesota dentist killed Zimbabwe's lion named Cecil that lived in a national park; was not charged, but a huge media coverage and public outrage from late July to October 2015], I have been horrified at all the photos I've been seeing now that have come to light as a result of this story, of people that hunt just for trophies, just to have that animal head mounted on their wall. I strongly feel that if you're not hunting for food, you should not be hunting.

Because of this type of media coverage, the main image that participants have in their mind of killing animals is people committing crimes and inappropriately killing animals for no purpose. Because participants are not *socio-spatially* close to the production process and meat production is rarely covered in media except for mistreatment cases, many participants think of wrongful killing and inhumane slaughtering rather than humane agricultural practices.

In fact, only participants located *socio-spatially* close to the slaughter process, which included workers in the meat packing industry, a hunter, and the only farmer of the sample whose husband butchered their own animals, specifically stated that painless killing can occur for agricultural animals intended to become food. Colt, a worker in the meat packing industry, bluntly stated, "They don't feel a damn thing." John detailed how the process occurs:

Everything's supposed to be calming, soft colors in the shoots as they dip down, cuz it starts off as 20 animals across and eventually, they go down to one into a single shoot and then their heads go into a slot, and then a captive bolt stunner [*otherwise known as Captive Bolt Pistol*] would come into their head and then they'd be rendered completely unconscious.

While some participants like a vegan and farmers who were *socio-psychologically* close to the slaughter process demonstrated an understanding of the slaughter process by

describing Temple Grandin's work², most participants *socio-spatially* removed from the slaughter process, even farmers, admitted to not knowing how the slaughter process works for agricultural animals. One such farmer, Amy, disclosed, "I really don't know how it's done, truthfully, I probably don't wanna know." The lack of knowledge by those *socio-spatially* far away from the process is confirmed by the fact that only participants whose locations were *socio-spatially* close to the slaughter process had extensive knowledge about killing agricultural animals. This ignorance points to how much of an effect the media can have on the views of killing agricultural animals.

Because of the dualist media representation of animal abuse, most participants saw the perpetrators of all forms of animal abuse as evil or inherently bad people. This created a dichotomy between the 'good' people who advocated for the humane treatment of animals and the 'bad' apples. Drea, an animal rescue volunteer, highlighted this when she explained, "Some people have so much empathy and I feel like there's people that have so little empathy. So I feel like it's almost like a black or white thing. There's no gray in the middle." JoAnne, a farmer whose husband slaughters their own farm animals, countered this view:

Cows have different skulls, so you try to get it in the right place, but maybe the skull is just a little heavier on that cow than it was on another one, and it's horrific. It's horrific. The cow before the last one that [the participant's husband] had to drop, took three shots and it was awful. It was horrible. So you can't always get it right even with the best intentions...So as far as humane, you just do the best you can.

From the slaughterhouse perspective, then, there is an ethical grey area when slaughtering an agricultural animal 'humanely.'

Because of the *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological* distance between consumers

² A famous consultant to the livestock industry who revolutionized the slaughter process to be more humane.

and agriculture, another farmer named Jessica described how customers ask for unreasonable demands and then demand that anything less than these standards is unethical. However, she explained, “A lot of humans treat all animals as privileged and feel sorry for them and, ‘Isn’t that person awful?’ They don’t understand the logistics of care.” In fact, many of these demands, such as keeping sheep in a closed environment year-round, are actually harmful to the animal.

Because most did not have a full understanding of killing animals in a humane agricultural setting and immediately thought of wrongful killing by terrible humans, especially through trophy hunting, participants were apprehensive about killing animals. This *social* lens used to view killing animals directly contradicts participants’ other *natural* framing of eating meat and killing agricultural animals.

In addition to not being *socio-spatially* and *socio-psychologically* close to the food production process, Zed highlighted a separate reason for apprehension towards killing animals, “Yes, I feel like all animals deserve our protection and our care, but at the same time, the natural order of things are whales eat minnows, we eat whales, you know, food chain. That’s how the natural world is.” Thus, participants struggled with balancing the two narratives: it is *natural* for humans to eat meat and people are required to care for all animals.

Sheila sheds light onto the reasoning behind the narrative that people have to care for all animals, “[Animals are] more innocent than a human being. They’re innocent with no malice and no hatred and anything bad that ever happens to them is just caused by humans. Unless, they’re eaten by another animal, but that’s terrible.” This narrative that animals are defenseless, pure, helpless and innocent beings is sharply contrasted with the

narrative surrounding human nature that Colt emphasized, “Animals in general don’t exhibit the disgusting things that humans do. As far as being evil and being heartless and just being selfish. Those are all qualities of people that are terrible, that you don’t really see in nature.” Participants relayed that humans are selfish, lazy, greedy, spoiled, virus-like, heartless and cruel. These opposing views of animals and humans led some to feel more sympathetic for animals than people. For example, animal rescue volunteer Drea stated, “I’m like one of those people that hates to see animals die more than people in movies, but I feel like if I put animals first, that makes me a sociopath.” Jessica acknowledged and criticized this mindset:

We do a lot more to minimize the suffering of animals, if you’re responsible, than we do in humans. We don’t deal with people in poverty, at least in this country we don’t deal with pain relief very well...I had her [participant’s dog] put to sleep and I just felt like she had a better quality of life with that than my mother who was in a nursing home had...I think that we just tolerate a lot more in human suffering.

Other participants similarly criticized ‘babying’ animals as a form of having more sympathy for animals than humans.

The apprehension towards killing animals because of the narrative that they are pure and innocent directly collides with the *natural* frame of animals killing other animals. While there is a consensus that animals killing animals is *natural* and part of the food chain, several participants located *socio-spatially* far away from agriculture and food production clearly felt uncomfortable with the idea. For example, shopper Callie expressed, “It’s part of the cycle...So like really not like against it so to speak, but just like I guess very unfamiliar with it.” Thus, the *natural* framework of the food chain is again in question. Likewise, Ann, a vegan, expressed:

When I catch the cat with a little chipmunk in its mouth—I chase that cat down and try to make it drop that little chipmunk. I don't like it. I feel like that little chipmunk has a right to live too. I understand nature's not that way. But personally, I don't want that little chipmunk to be caught by the cat. I don't want the cat to catch the bird and I don't want the meat producer to kill the cow!

At the same time that Ann described an uncomfortable feeling surrounding the killing of animals, she also believed that humans *naturally* evolved to eat meat.

Most of the participants in this sample who participated in killing animals, besides the euthanization of pets, did not enjoy killing. The only participant who did not mind killing was Bruce Wayne who was also the only participant to directly take part in the slaughter process of agricultural animals. Because slaughtering and butchering is a part of Bruce Wayne's everyday job, this process is framed as a *natural* occurrence. Other participants who participated in killing animals felt an uneasiness about the act, such as Joe who explained, "I have to admit that I actually do feel a little guilty sometimes when I kill a fish, when I catch it. I don't know why. Maybe it's an age thing." Farmers especially thought of killing animals, even very sick animals, as an unpleasant but necessary act.

In sum, both *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological* distance from the meat production process and the belief that animals are helpless and pure contributes to an apprehension towards killing animals.

Looking Forward

While many participants believed that meat consumption will not end, there is still some hope for reconnecting with the food production process through education.

Cannot End Meat Consumption

There is a consensus that meat consumption cannot be completely stopped. As a

John proclaimed, “It’ll be around forever. It’ll never stop...If there’s one thing I can say about 1,000 years from now, they’ll be eating meat.” Drea highlighted this viewpoint on the micro level: “I’d rather not eat meat, but, I do, and I hate to say it, but easier. Like than to shop as a vegetarian...I eat meat more than I would like to, just because it’s what I’m used to.” Several women shoppers and animal rescue volunteers revealed that they would rather not eat meat, but still do. April shed light onto this contradiction: “I eat meat primarily because my husband, who’s the cook, loves meat!...That sounds ridiculous to eat meat to keep my husband happy, but that’s sorta what I do...It does seem barbaric to eat any kind of an animal.” Giving up meat is too difficult for many participants in terms of preparing separate meals for spouses or searching out vegetarian meals.

For others, meat is too important to give up. Many participants either commented on how others like the taste, texture or appearance of meat or how they themselves enjoy meat. Overwhelmingly, people who were located *socio-spatially* close to meat production or agricultural animals expressed a preference or liking of the taste, texture, and appearance of meat. Colt, a worker in the meat packing industry, described, “Cutting into a steak is a frickin’ visceral, amazing experience!” However, there is a distinction that participants make between the enjoyment of meat and the reality that meat comes from a slaughtered animal. Rose struggled with these two realities: “It’s not great that we have to kill animals for human’s benefits, but at the same time I’m definitely like enjoying the benefits. So, I can’t like say anything without sounding like a complete hypocrite.” This again, points to the complexity of views on meat consumption. Because of the complex moral and practical aspects of the issue, many hold conflicting views or moderate views. For example, instead of supporting large-scale meat eating from factory farms or full-

fledge veganism, many participants believed that eating meat is permissible when the animals are properly raised and if one eats it in moderation.

Participants thought that meat consumption might have a chance of ending if people are more informed, consumer behavior changes or resources run out. However, there was serious doubt that this will ever take place. Several participants backed up these doubts with facts and suspicions that people would continue to eat meat despite variations in price, such as Gracie who recalled, “From last year, the [beef] price is double up. But do people still eat? They do. Yeah, it’s more than double, they still eat.” While many participants like Gracie did not believe there was hope that meat consumption will end, there was hope that we could reconnect with our food production system.

Education

There was a consensus that more people are becoming aware of and are combating animal abuse for pets and agricultural animals. At the same time, JoAnne explained that there is a general lack of awareness about the food production process:

You aren’t educated about your food and where it comes from and how the natural world works. They don’t even do home ec [home economics] anymore, how to cook it! Never mind how to grow it in the first place...Most people have absolutely no clue about what it takes to raise a healthy plant.

This lack of awareness was often attributed to the American education system that generally does not teach students about the food production process in depth. Amy described the benefits of education that includes food production:

[School gardens] teach the kids too that they can grow this stuff, and they kind of take pride in it and they eat better. They’re gonna try that salad that they grew...There’s just a little bit more ownership and take pride in the stuff that they’ve grown and that they’ve taken care of. It’s kind of cool. Teaching a new generation, a little time consuming, but it’s not rocket science. It just takes a little bit of time.

JoAnne explained her ideal education system that would incorporate both food production and health:

In preschool, you would start with decent education about nutrition, food, how things grow... You'd have kids growing food... They would be empowered enough to be able to raise food if they were inclined... There needs to be more people who know more about food and nutrition and the proper raising of all food. And that needs to be a number one priority almost above mathematics and languages and things like that... It's an absolutely crucial life skill. Know how nature works. Know where your food comes from. Know how to raise it, have raised some of it.

Ultimately, the education goal is for people to know where one's food comes from and to be more engaged with the food production process. By closing the *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological* distance, people will then be more connected to the food production process. Bruce Wayne explored the potential of effects of this goal:

This idea that food is just this thing that's just there and we eat it to survive or to keep going or whatever, we need to be more engaged with our food. And I think a lot of great things can come out of that. Not just environmental factors, or health factors, but even the whole community thing. It's like food brings communities together. That's what religious eating laws are about, right? Ultimately about bringing people together. I've often had this fantasy of what if every village had a bread oven like we did 1,000 years ago and people actually used that bread oven and that's a really powerful concept.

Participants believed this powerful connection to food created through education could actively dismantle *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological* barriers to the food production process and to nature itself.

Discussion

This study strongly contributes to the sociology of food, the animal ethics and meat literature, and environmental sociology by qualitatively connecting nature and meat production/consumption. This work provides the theoretical framework and foundation for future research to engage in any limitations of this study.

Summary of Findings

The meat and greater food production process has been framed by participants through a *social* lens due to increased *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological* distancing from this process as well as agricultural animals. By viewing the traditionally *natural* meat and food production as controlled and manipulated, participants questioned the very definition of nature. In an effort to remove this questioning and to ensure nature remained unambiguous, different mechanisms were employed to reconnect to nature by decreasing *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological* distance from food production. However, in attempting to solidify the definition of nature through very diverse approaches, participants revealed the very ambiguity that they attempted to remove.

Because of *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological* distancing from the food production process, meat consumption can be detached from the production of the meat. This separation allows participants to view meat consumption as *natural* without acknowledging the *social* control element of production. The *natural* framing of meat consumption draws on past ideas that are historically labeled as *natural*, such as the evolutionary classification of humans as omnivores and religious views. While this *natural* view and the *social* framing of meat production often collide in the form of guilt, participants actively avoid these collisions by avoiding thinking about the topic.

The contradictory narratives surrounding killing animals further complicate the framing of meat consumption. The narrative that humans need to save *naturally* helpless animals contradicts the dominant *natural* framing of killing animals for food. Adding negative media portrayals of killing animals to this tension created major apprehension

towards slaughtering farm animals, which opposed many participant's *natural* framing of meat consumption.

Participants looked to education to reconnect people with the food production process, and thus nature. While education could be viewed as another tactic to reconnect to an ambiguous nature, it could also be viewed as an exit out of the cycle of searching for a pure "nature" that does not exist.

Contributions to the Literature

This study has created major contributions to the sociology of food, to the literature on animal ethics and meat, and to environmental sociology.

Within the sociology of food, this work further develops the identity literature by linking perspectives on meat consumption/production and food identity to nature (Bisogni et al., 2002; Broadway, 2015; Ward et al., 2010; Roos et al., 2001).

Simultaneously, this study expands the connection between agriculture and nature within the literature to include all forms of food production, such as hunting and fishing (Albrecht, & Murdock, 1990; Goodman & Redclift, 2002). Addressing the gap Winter (2005) identified, this study also explores multiple processes of reconnecting to nature through food production and consumption (Smith 2010; Gibson 2009; Gibson & Young 2014; Hansen, et al., 2006; Goodman & Redclift 2002).

This study adds to the literature on animal ethics and meat consumption by examining perspectives from six locations with different *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological* distances from the meat production process and agricultural animals (Galvin & Herzog, 1992; Herzog, 1993; Holm and Mohl, 2000; Kauppinen, et al., 2010; Lassen, Sandøe, & Forkman, 2006; Lieblein, Francis, & Torjusen 2001; Shaw &

Newholm, 2002; Yasmin, 2009). Adding to the work by Åsebø et al. (2007), these levels of distancing increased the complexity of the discussion on meat consumption/production and made the findings more easily understandable.

Within the environmental sociology literature, this study addresses the lack of agricultural animal discussion that Tovey (2003) highlights by incorporating agricultural animals throughout the study. By continuously acknowledging the ambiguity of nature as it relates to perspectives on meat consumption/production, the ‘Goffmanian’ framing of this paper addresses the gap identified by Goodman (1999) of a lack of recognition of the nature/dualism within agro-food studies (Brewster & Bell 2009; Goffman 1974; Hansen et al., 2006; Tybirk, Alrøe, & Frederiksen, 2004). Finally, this study links social constructionists’ conceptualization of ‘nature’ as a permeable concept to agriculture (Agarwal, 1992; Albrecht and Murdock, 1990; Goldman & Schurman, 2000; Goodman & Redclift 2002; Harvey, 1996; Spaargaren et al. 2000).

Limitations and Future Research

While this study has made strong contributions to the literature, future researchers may benefit by exploring beyond the limitations of this study. One limitation is that most participants were wary of the image elicitation section because it felt more like a test than a discussion, which may have initially prevented honest conversation because participants felt guarded. Future researchers may find it beneficial to merely talk about the images in relation to importance in order to take away from the apprehension to the exercise. In addition, while the image elicitation section was a useful tool in analyzing participants’ perceptions of certain animals, the exercise could be improved if more comparative agricultural animals were included.

A separate limitation was the lack of diversity of race and socioeconomic class in the sample. Similarly, this study would have greatly benefited from participants who worked in factory farms, preferably on the killing line or in a large-scale meat packing facility. However, in this study, the farmers who were contacted were generally small-scale farmers because large-scale factory farms did not respond.

The link between using food production as a tool to reconnect with nature is a topic that needs further research. In addition to more qualitative work, researchers would also benefit from quantitatively exploring *socio-psychological* and *socio-spatial* distance to the food production process as well as attempts to reconnect to nature through food. Framing this topic through a feminist perspective is another way to further explore the complexity surrounding perspectives on meat consumption and production.

Social and Policy Recommendations

Through analysis of the results, this study has recommendations for policy makers, educators, and American adults. This study recommends that policy makers attempting to influence diet change relating to meat first invest in understanding different perspectives of the relationship between food and nature. Similarly, this study recommends that educators explore not only the relationship between nature and food, but also the construct and history of ‘nature’ itself through hands-on learning. Exposure to agricultural animals, farms, and gardening are methods that can decrease the *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological* distance between food production and youth, ensuring that the next generation will better understand the food-nature relationship. For American adults, this work recommends reflecting upon conceptions of *nature* in a critical way. Awareness of one’s use of *social* and *natural* frames to conceptualize meat, including the

oscillation between these frames, can aid this critical reflection. Finally, the recognition of one's own and others' *socio-spatial* and *socio-psychological* distance from meat and greater food production can help foster a better understanding of the views of others. This understanding will facilitate any structural change to the meat production and consumption system in America.

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Appendix

Table A1. *Participant Identities*

Name	Identity
Stephan	48-year-old white male hunter
Joe	50-year-old white male fisher
Jack's Mom	55-year-old white female shopper
Danielle	25-year-old Indian-American female shopper
Callie	22-year-old white female shopper
April	55-year-old white female animal rescue volunteer
Drea	24-year-old white female animal rescue volunteer
Zed	41-year-old white female animal rescue volunteer
Bruce Wayne	31-year-old white male worker in the meat packing industry
Colt	31-year-old white male worker in the meat packing industry
John	51-year-old white male worker in the meat packing industry
Ann	55-year-old white female vegan
Sheila	60-year-old white female vegan
JoAnne	59-year-old white female farmer
Amy	54-year-old white female farmer
Jessica	62-year-old white female farmer
Pound Cake	57-year-old white male hunter
Cat Lady	26-year-old white female vegan
Rose	21-year-old white female vegan
Gracie	50-year-old Taiwanese-American female worker in the meat packing industry

ⁱ At the time of the research design, the research team included Ana Campos-Holland, PhD, who grew up on a farm, is comfortable with killing animals for consumption, and consumes meat regularly, and Elena Klonoski, author of this honors thesis, who was a practicing vegetarian at the time. In order to take precaution against bias, Campos-Holland and Klonoski reviewed and revised all interview questions, negotiating over wording to ensure it would not present problems for individuals' of different food practices. Despite this effort, one of the 40 participants complained that the questions were biased because they made meat eaters feel guilty. In contrast, other participants, including many meat eaters, commented on the thoroughness and quality of the questions.

Some of the interview questions were controversial depending upon the participant, such as the question: "What is your relationship to the food you eat?" Participants either took this question seriously or laughed at the absurdity of the question. Because it became clear during the interview whether a participant would smirk at these types of questions, Klonoski, being the only interviewer, slightly laughed to suggest that she understood their absurdity. This left the participant feeling more comfortable and

open, rather than feeling obligated to convince the interviewer that these questions were absurd.

Finally, Klonoski took the precaution of not eating in front of the participants so that her eating habits were not given away. In spite of this precaution, many participants asked about her eating habits during the interview. When asked these questions, she was genuine and honest about her vegetarian practices. While disclosing this information, she emphasized commonalities between her and the participant, such as her hunting experiences to the hunter participant, and then quickly returned to the interview questions. While it is impossible to gauge the influence of this kind of disclosure, the strength of the participants' perspectives and the length of the interview created a setting in which it would be difficult for the interviewer's food practices to censor the participants' perspectives.