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Putting the meat in meat-less?: A critical discourse analysis of corporate marketing of plant-based products

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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Samantha A. McIntyre entitled "Putting the meat in meat-less?: A critical discourse analysis of corporate marketing of plant-based products." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Sociology.

Lois Presser, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

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(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

Putting the “meat” in meatless: A critical discourse analysis of corporate marketing of plant-based products

A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Samantha McIntyre
August 2022

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ABSTRACT

The plant-based food industry has experienced rapid growth in recent years due to awareness surrounding environmental harms. Further, multiple corporations have either acquired or created plant-based brands due to the rise in the profitability of plant-based products. Texts concerning new plant-based food items produced by Tyson, Smithfield, Kellogg's, Nestlé, and Conagra Foods, are the focus of this project. These major corporations are also part of the industrial animal agriculture system, and garner profit from meat and dairy businesses. This study explores the way their marketing is embedded in ideologies of Western capitalism and patriarchy. I use critical discourse analysis to analyze 20 statements extracted from the specified companies' public websites. I found that the corporations constructed their actions and image through a populist framework that dismisses the vegan movement, and obscures their role in ecological, animal, and social harms.

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

Harm(s)

One of the dire consequences of economic expansion is irreversible ecological harm and social inequity, despite the mainstream understanding of economic expansion does not reflect these harms and inequities; the predominant view is that economic growth leads to increased benefits like more profits, greater pay, and secure employment (Hooks and Smith 2005; Pellow 2000). Therefore, the underlying logic, processes, and functions of the legitimacy of an ever- growing economy are rarely questioned (Hooks and Smith 2005; Schnaiberg and Gould 1994; Pellow 2000). Environmental justice is interconnected with social inequity due to the disproportionate impacts that climate change has on marginalized people because of their structural vulnerability (Mohai et al. 2009; Agustoni and Maretti 2019). There is significant evidence pointing to complacency in denying climate change, because it is rooted in very complex social and political processes and ideologies (Doan 2014). Furthermore, Doan (2014) explains that the genesis and effects of climate change cannot be understood without taking into account the histories of “the transformation and domination of lands and of peoples, under settler colonialism and other imperialist systems of rule, propelled capitalist imperatives of economic growth and white supremacist, heteropatriarchal social orderings” (634-635). The interconnected factors of environmental degradation, social

inequities, and economic factors that permeate the U.S. culture and orderings are explored throughout this thesis.

One of the extreme after-effects of economic expansion is the industrialization of animal agriculture. According to the United Nations Environment Program (2010) “Our use of animals as a food-production technology has brought us to the verge of catastrophe...The greenhouse gas footprint of animal agriculture rivals that of every car, truck, bus, ship, airplane, and rocket ship combined...Agriculture is a sector that spans a multitude of environmental problems”. In fact, Animal agriculture is the leading cause of deforestation and land-use (Parker 2018; Gray and Sigler 2017; Sexton et al. 2022). Animal agriculture occupies the majority of agricultural land due to the fact that more land is necessary to generate animal products as opposed to plant products (Parker 2018). Globally, agriculture takes up half of the habitable land on Earth, and over two-thirds of that land is used for animal agriculture, including grazing and animal feed production (Ranganathan et al. 2016). Additionally, plant-based agriculture generates half the losses compared to animal-based agriculture, while utilizing 69% of the land that animal-based agriculture requires (Gray and Sigler 2017: 6).

Moreover, factory farms are violent geographies where animal bodies are under surveillance (Belcourt 2014). Since commercial production methods and mechanization replaced traditional farming practices, animals are now bred, contained, and killed on a massive scale. Farm animal abuse is misperceived,

through the removal and concealment of slaughterhouses from highly populated spaces (Perry and Brandt 2008). Additionally, Fernandes et al. (2020) explain that workers in agricultural operations are incentivized to use insensitive methods that harm animals and deny basic needs for production purposes.

Kristiansen et al. (2021) document the lack of corporate or governmental reporting on the issues and effects animal agriculture as harmful. Animal protection organizations are shown to be the main sources of information and exposure for the general public surrounding animal welfare issues, much more so than U.S. livestock and poultry industries (McKendree et al. 2014). Issues are less represented by the industries because of stakeholder's interests in profiting and having to publically minimize perceptions of maltreatment (McKendree et al. 2014; Fernandes et al. 2019).

Despite the lack of reporting by corporatized institutions, according to a survey conducted by ASPCA in 2020, social awareness around mistreatment of farm animals has increased; the organization found that 89% of Americans showed concern about industrial animal agriculture, citing animal welfare as a concern. So, one of the ways industrialized animal agriculture has come under contention is through concerns of farm animal welfare by harm concern organizations, such as the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and the Farm Animals Rights Movement (FARM). Research has further explored sentience in animals (Broom 2014) and understanding the extent to which they "are aware of themselves and their environment and their ability to experience

pleasurable and aversive states” (Fernandes et al. 2019: 131). “Farm animals are sentient beings and have sophisticated cognitive capacities to deal with their physical and social environment. We shouldn’t treat them with less care than we want to have treated our pet animals” said Christian Nawroth about animal cruelty promoted by industrial agriculture (Pachniewska 2019).

Recent research increasingly presents veganism as a solution to the health impacts of meat consumption, and to the impacts of livestock production (Sexton et al. 2022; Godfray et al., 2018; Poore and Nemecek, 2018).

Recognition of veganism as a solution media wise is documented, namely through controversial ad campaigns with celebrity spokespeople and sexualized imagery such as the PETA campaigns (Parker 2018; Malik 2014; Greenebaum 2017). Organizations such as the Good Food Institute, The Humane League, and the Albert Schweitzer Foundation promote diets that promote the incorporation of more plant products into the diet as an act of sustainability.

Therefore, the animal rights movement includes issues surrounding vegan consumption practices. Therefore, the push to go “plant-based” has become a more commonplace phenomenon in the U.S. According to Global Data, there was a 600% increase in people identifying as vegan in the U.S. in between 2014-2017. Plant-based meat products are becoming more and more widespread in the consumer market. In 2017, according to the Good Food Institute, the plant-based food market profited over \$3.9 billion, and in 2019, profited over \$5 billion, resulting in a 29% increase over the course of just two years (2021).

Veganism and Capitalism

The consumer market for products perceived as environmentally friendly is growing, and multinational, multibillion-dollar companies promote sustainability initiatives and “green” merchandise, and large food companies are taking part (Rotman et al. 2020: 418). Food is increasingly industrialized, and produced and marketed in order to uphold interests and values of those involved in the profiting (Leach et al. 2020; Vivero-Pol 2017). Food’s value is less based in its propensity to provide security and health, but in the “tradable features that can be valued and priced in the market” (Vivero-Pol 2017: 2). Within this paper, I explore the way the co-optation and mainstreaming of veganism by big food corporations contributes to and affects the way their vegan products are marketed.

Scholars have highlighted the greenwashing of vegan products (Rotman et al. 2020; Siebertz et al. 2022; Paasslita 2021). Greenwashing is a company’s symbolic marking its products as reflecting concern for ethical standards, without actually changing their practices and regulations (Delmas & Burbano 2011). So, vegan mainstreaming consists of essentially advertising and selling products that are physical manifestations of associated liberation for profit means, with the “plant-based” label becoming a societal symbol of the liberation associated with the founding principles of veganism (Sexton et al. 2022; Scales 2017).

Essentially, the market infiltrates the movement, and core message and philosophies end up weakening and getting lost within the market, and political action then gets reduced to the act of purchasing a commodity (Munir 2021;

Kelpin 2020). The symbolic benefits that veganism yields are capitalized on to foster a sense of greater environmental concern.

According to Sexton et al. (2022), issues arise because big agricultural food corporations market vegan offerings through the commercial pathway of health veganism, which results in more expensive products targeted at “wealthier health-conscious consumers” (609). The corporatization of any movement also ends up being the argument against said movement. The corporatization of the environment and the greenwashing of corporate practices contributes to the growth of green capitalism, defined as: “a form of environmentalism that emphasizes the economic value of ecosystems and biological diversity and attempts to reduce human environmental impacts by ensuring that the importance of environmental services is reflected in the way that markets operate” (Scales 2017:1). The private sector's embrace of green capitalism is a method of avoiding true structural change, neutralizing a movement's anti-establishment aims, and partaking in green-washing that minimizes the consumer's perception of the effected harm (de Jong et al. 2020; Pistor 2021; Sexton et al. 2022).

In the mainstreaming of veganism, the foundations of capitalism are still upheld. Capitalism operates on the assumption that the private sector always has better answers, and that investing in new and improved technologies will effectively handle climate issues (Pistor 2021), and founded upon the ideology that solutions must be found through further development and through *progress*,

while continually pushing to withdrawal natural resources, create more waste, and extract labor at ever increasing rates (Schnaiberg and Gould 1994).

Geographies of Plant-Based Diets

Plant-based alternatives have been marketed in the U.S. since the 1960's, but have gained widespread popularity relatively recently (Storz 2021); 2019 was proclaimed “the year of the vegan” by The Economist based on the fact that sales of vegan foods in America in 2018, rose 10 times faster than food sales as a whole (Parker 2018). Despite it being a new lucrative concept in consumer marketing, plant-centric diets are quite popular and long-standing in other parts of the world. Early human cultures consumed predominantly plant-based nutrition (Leitzmann 2014). The consumption of plant-based proteins can trace back to ancient civilizations in Asia, and currently 19% of the Asian population adheres to a vegetarian diet (He et al. 2020). Currently, India is the country with the highest prevalence, with nearly 40% of the population adhering to a plant centric diet (He et al. 2020). The expansion of plant centric diets has been associated with religions such as Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Buddhism (Hargreaves et al. 2021).

Interestingly, in areas where Christianity dominated, plant centered diets decreased in practice significantly (Hargreaves et al. 2021). Researchers have related meat consumption to settler colonialism, where the natural world is understood and organized through domination, ownership, and private property (Montford 2017; Murphy 2021; Perkins 2021). Settler colonialist ideology is linked

to representations of heroic white men conquering “wild” land and in turn making them safe (Arvin et al. 2013: 12). Christian ideals and settler colonialist myths and narratives are roots of U.S. culture, so the acquisition, exploitation, and industrialization of non-human animal bodies are normative. Therefore, excessive meat consumption and big meat corporations are understood as normative. In the following chapter, I discuss in more detail the cultural symbolism of meat in the United States.

Populism

It is difficult to pinpoint one singular definition of populism, but for the sake of this thesis, I use the understanding of populism as it is functioning and exercised in the United States currently. Through this framework, society is separated into two uniform and opposing groups constructed as “the common, pure people” and “the corrupt elite” (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017: Roodujin and Pauwels 2011: 1273). Guriev and Papaioannou (2020) denote that, recently, the agenda surrounding populism focuses on “identity and morality rather than on economics” (8). Dovi (2017) explains that American populism is now “about exercising choice in order to gain status” (1), which coincides with consumerism and the emphasis on choice within that rhetoric. Choice in this sense is directly related to choice of purchasing.

Furthermore, the current US version of populism is understood as rule by a “unified people,” with unity achievable through exclusivity of values, ideas, and people (Dovi 2017: 1). Urbinati (1998) explains that populism in practice

transforms “a political community into a corporate household-like entity where class and ideological differences are denied and mastered in the attempt to fulfill the myth of a comprehensive totality of state and society” (110). Norris and Inglehart (2019) argue that the rise of populism coincides with the rebuff of “progressive” values and beliefs that “liberal elites” promoted and are associated with, such as women’s rights, rights for underprivileged/minority groups, and cultural globalization. Progressive values and movements are seen to threaten the identity and power of dominant groups: people with traditional values tend to support “populist” leaders who promise to contest the growth and integration of those values, movements, and those who hold or would benefit from them (Fukuyama 2018; Noury and Roland 2020;Guriev and Papaioannou 2020). Essentially, populism is a strategy to foster a sense of harmony among a specific group of people, through ideologies of choice and sovereignty.

Corporate Players in the Plant-Based Economy

Numerous companies are releasing “meatless meat” products and plant-based brands, and large corporations that have a heavy stake in the meat and dairy industry have bought and acquired plant-based brands, garnering a significant place within vegan capitalism. Specifically to this study, I will be looking at MorningStar Farms, Gardein, Sweet Earth, Raised and Rooted, and Pure Farmland. Kellogg’s bought MorningStar Farms in 1999, Conagra acquired Gardein in June 2018, Nestlé bought Sweet Earth in September 2017, Tyson

unveiled Raised and Rooted in June 2019, and Smithfield launched Pure Farmland in June 2019 (Byington et al. 2021). Collectively, these corporations are worth over 100 billion USD according to Forbes (2022), making them extremely powerful institutions not just nationally, but globally as well. The advertising and marketing budgets of these food companies are immense, according to reports run by Statista in 2021, Nestle spent over \$18 billion on advertising, Kellogg spent \$790 million, Conagra spent \$258 million, and Tyson spent \$246 million.

The Role of Discourse

Discourse is a key component of marketing and advertising (Caruana and Fitchett 2015). According to Van Dijk (1997), discourse is conceptualized in three dimensions: a form of language use, the communication of beliefs (cognition), and interaction in social situations (2), and studying discourse asks: “How does language use influence interactions and beliefs, or vice-versa, how do aspects of interaction influence how people speak, or how do beliefs control language use and interaction?” (3). Additionally, social context plays an essential role in the description and explanation of a text; context is understood by Van Dijk as “the structure of all properties of a social situation that are relevant for the production or the reception of the discourse” (1997:19)

Discourse is powerful because it legitimizes certain kinds of knowledge while undermining others, things in the world are rendered acceptable or unacceptable. Discourse normalizes particular beliefs that uphold harmful

hierarchies and ideologies (Townsend 2021). Critical discourse analysis is a methodological framework to “reveal more precisely how speakers and authors use language and grammatical features to create meaning, to persuade people to think about certain events in a particular way” (Machin & Mayr 2012: 1). Stibbe’s (2013) work on discourse and environmental harm is studied and known as ecolinguistics, which provides a way for analyzing how narratives and language uphold ecologically harmful ideologies. I analyze the linguistic features of big food corporations that uphold certain structures of capitalism and hegemonic patriarchal masculinity.

The Study in Brief

Due to the financial power and prevalence of these corporations in the U.S. food industry, the marketing drawn from these five sub companies (MorningStar Farms, Gardein, Sweet Earth, Raised and Rooted, and Pure Farmland) is the focus of this paper. The way these companies promote their products without disparaging meat simultaneously involves multiple discursive techniques. The promotional data provides a compelling focus because meat has deep roots as a cultural signifier in the U.S., so the acquisition of plant-based brands creates a conflict relative to meat consumption, and questions the long adopted normativity of consuming animal products. As a result, the marketing draws attention to alternative ways to plant-based eating and veganism. Huge meat corporations that operate through the capitalist economy have started marketing products that symbolize anti-hegemonic ideals. How do these

companies' discursively construct their actions and image? I used critical discourse analysis to analyze these questions.

My analysis also takes into account how these strategies are embedded in certain frameworks of American society. Corporations rely on certain cultural contentions surrounding veganism as feminine, unrealistic, and for the elite. The plant-based products are marketed employing a populist framework, which then keeps consumers in their fundamental relationship with meat, while subliminally perpetuating stances that are capitalist, therefore consumerist and individualistic. These corporations are not interested in actually dismantling the existing structures that induce harm and produce capital.

The Layout of the Thesis

The remainder of the thesis is organized as follows. Chapter 2 is dedicated to explaining some important factors that influence the marketing of the plant-based industry. First, I outline the harms of agribusiness as a whole in order to give perspective on the types of harm committed by the corporations studied. Second, I summarize veganism along with its manifestation and reputation in the U.S. to lay out the type of image these corporations are trying to resist. Subsequently, I delve into what meat represents in U.S. culture to explore why meat is considered so symbolic to traditional Americanism and map out its contrast to veganism. Then, I transition into a discussion of green-washing to lay out the environment in which the marketing is taking place, and bring up the concept of eco-linguistics and its function of narrative in relationship to

advertising. Lastly, I outline product symbolism because of the value of products in the greater consumer sphere, as well as product cannibalization because it provides a frame for understanding dissonant promotional messaging.

The remainder of the thesis consists of Chapter 4, where I lay out my research methods involving critical discourse analysis. In Chapter 5, I describe my findings of how the corporations construct their image and actions through their marketing strategies. Lastly, in Chapter 6, I connect my findings to an analysis of the broader social context, where I explain how the corporate marketing upholds and embodies hegemonic ideals.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORY AND INDUSTRY OF PLANT-BASED: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter considers previous research and frameworks for understanding the influential social factors that impinge upon the marketing of meatless products by large industrial agriculture corporations, including the context that is industrial agriculture. First, I discuss the harms of industrial agriculture corporations. Second, I discuss opposition to such harms and especially the vegan movement, contra the naturalization of meat consumption in the Western diet. Third, I consider product marketing and specifically marketing along lines of environmental good. In this discussion, I incorporate research on greenwashing to explain how plant-based products can be co-opted for corporate image. The field of ecolinguistics, which explores the role of language in ecological and animal harm, has important things to say on co-optation. Lastly, I focus on the symbolism of products to understand the commodification of food, as well as the role product cannibalization takes in the context of this paper.

The Harms of Agribusiness

Approximately 4.4 billion hectares of land is used for agriculture, which is over 50 percent of the earth's surface, which makes agriculture the foremost link between human society and the natural world (Kareiva et al. 2007). This section outlines the numerous harms for which agribusinesses are broadly responsible in the United States. Agribusiness can be defined as: "The sum of all operations involved in manufacture and distribution of farm supplies, production operations

on the farm, and the storage, processing, and distribution of farm commodities” (Zylbersztajn 2017: 114). This mode of production became more prevalent in the U.S. and well known in the 1950’s. The term agribusiness was coined in the 1950’s, by John Davis and Ray Goldberg, in their book *A Concept of Agribusiness*. Davis and Goldberg argued that agribusiness should be more responsible for “coordinating and stabilizing the agricultural economy” which was originally the federal government’s undertaking (Hamilton 2016: 2). This meant the privatization of farms, and private corporations and firms deciding things such as: where foods were produced and how much they cost, how they were transported to consumers, and who received the bulk of the profit being created in the supply chain (Hamilton 2016). Agricultural policies in turn moved in a more profit oriented direction (Dimitri et al. 2005). Agribusiness has negative effects on farmer’s rights, animal welfare, water and soil pollution, and deforestation.

Farmworkers face health risks due to chronic and acute exposure to pesticides in addition to high risk of injury on the job (HCWH 2018). The mass use of antibiotics in animal agriculture creates problems such as antibiotic resistance, which results in a level of ineffectiveness of these drugs for human consumption. On a community scale, the use of pesticides, nitrates, and phosphorus impact ground and surface water quality, which negatively impacts both urban and rural areas access to clean water (HCWH 2018). Injustices are brought upon farm workers and small-scale farm owners; these include: low wages for workers, unfair labor standards, and lack of safety precautions (FFAA

2021). The median farm income was \$29,614 in 2019 while the farmer's share of the consumers' food dollar hit an all-time low of 14.6 cents of each consumer dollar (FFAA 2021). In addition, it is important to put focus on what groups make up the majority of farm labor. Over 50% of farmworkers are undocumented immigrants, and 70% of farmworkers in the United States are subjected to the immigration enforcement apparatus as a form of labor control (Smolski 2019: 70). The surveillance and punitive control over people who are not legal citizens has fostered a power imbalance, and consequently the United States has a harsh system of criminalizing undocumented migrants and has made attempts to exclude undocumented workers from the labor force administratively (Smolski 2019).

The United States Department of Agriculture reports that in 2020 9.76 billion land animals were slaughtered: 9,346,660,000 chickens, 33,242,000 cattle, and 131,563,000 pigs. Between 1987 and 2002, the production increased by 60 percent in broiler chickens, 100 percent in cattle, and 2,000 percent in hog raising, and recent surveys have indicated that production has continued to expand since 2002 (MacDonald and McBride 2009: 36). Since commercial production methods and mechanization replaced traditional farming practices, animals are now bred, contained, and killed on a massive scale. The reality of farm animal abuse is somewhat diminished due to the public perception of farms still as simple, traditional family-centered operations (Perry and Brandt 2008). Many agricultural workers have to use insensitive methods that maltreat animals

in order to maintain a higher rate of production (Joy 2010). Additionally, Joy (2010) explains how “meat packing is the single most dangerous factory job in the U.S.” (82), and workers with no prior mental health issues often become “psychologically disturbed and sadistic” due to the high level of killing that takes place (81). Reproductive exploitation of female animals is a pressing issue as well, for example, hens who would normally lay approximately 24 eggs per year are manipulated to where they are producing around 270 or more eggs per year, and dairy cows produce ten times more milk than her calf would ever need directly impacting their natural bodily functions and cycles (Adams 2018: 4).

Safety measures have been implemented, but they are limited in their application and of questionable effectiveness. In the United States, the Humane Slaughter Act of 1978 states that animals need to be handled humanely at slaughterhouses, yet the Act does not apply to birds or chickens, rendering them highly susceptible to cruelty at slaughterhouses. Another law passed to attempt to implement humane measures is the 28-Hour Law; this law requires that animals should not be subjected to transport for more than 28 hours at a time, after which they must be offloaded from the truck, usually into pens or stalls. Companies can request to extend the period of transport for up to 36 hours, so animals are subjected to high stress due to transport methods. Additionally, mutilation is another form of violence inflicted. The de-beaking of chickens occurs in virtually all animal management systems (Nordquist et al. 2017) and tail-docking of cows and pigs (Halteman 2011: 125). Finally, at the end of the literal

line, the methods in which animals are killed often are often done in such a way that increases suffering due to the high volume, namely due to the ineffective use of stunning (Halteman 2011: 126).

Industrial agriculture's effects extend to the greater ecological sphere. According to Climate Nexus (2019), emissions associated with agriculture are about one-third of GHG (Greenhouse Gas) emissions worldwide. These emissions result directly from agricultural practices and indirectly from associated activities, including fertilizer production, packaging, and transportation. Animal agriculture specifically is responsible for 5% of global anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions, 44% of anthropogenic methane emissions, 44% of all anthropogenic nitrous oxide emissions, which makes up 75-80% of total agricultural emissions; livestock farming is the largest contributor to global water pollution, global deforestation, and one third of total biodiversity loss (Climate Nexus 2019). Widespread plant-based diets have the potential to combat biodiversity loss. Consuming plants instead of animals has the capacity to reduce the amount of land needed for agriculture, which would reduce deforestation and allow areas to evolve back to their natural forms (Parker 2018). The acknowledgment of plant diets as helpful has been brought veganism into mainstream discourse.

Veganism and Attitudes about Veganism

Veganism is “a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of and cruelty to animals for food,

clothing, or any other purpose” (The Vegan Society 2017: 1). Veganism is an alternative way of approaching food and consumption in the U.S. context. The demographics of vegans in the United States indicate a couple of factors. According to a 2018 Gallup study, 6% of Americans identify as vegans. The largest concentration of vegans was in the \$50,000 and under/year income range, the average age was 42, with marginally more vegans in the 30-49 age group (4%), and approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ (74%) of vegans identifying as women.

Historical Contexts

For historical context, the term “vegan” was coined in 1944, when the Vegan Society was founded by Donald Watson along with five of his contemporaries through extension from the already established Vegetarian Society. It was founded on anti-hegemonic principles and non-exploitation of sentient beings. The vegan movement gained popular headway during the 1960s counterculture era, which was a crucial time period in the onset of different types of activism. Critical social movements such as anti-war and anti-nuclear, feminist, LGBTQ+, and the greater environmental awareness movement were all coinciding. The reigning idea of this time period was that by changing aspects of one’s daily life one could in turn change the overarching system, and changing one’s diet became one of the more viable personal reforms people could make, and was less co-optable because it required more commitment and intention (Belasco 2007: 27). Belasco (2007) expands on this paradigm further: “The New Left had always insisted that the personal was political, what could be more

personal than food? And what could be more political than challenging agribusiness, America's largest and more environmentally troublesome industry" (29). Adhering to a plant-based diet can be a political expression in many ways; people are able to reform and protest mass modern food production by not consuming animal-based products (Boström & Klintman 2011; Lindkvist 2020). Veganism can serve as a form of resistance to a broad set of practices (Presser et al 2020: 714). In all, modern day veganism is rooted in anti-hegemonic principles and can serve as an anti-hegemonic practice.

There are many ways in which veganism contradicts principles of traditional American institutions, namely religion and the hard sciences. Christian principles hold humans above all other organisms including all nonhuman animals. According to work by Arthur Lovejoy (1933):

Thus Augustine, finding in it his answer to the old question, 'Why, when God made all things, he did not make them all equal,' reduces the Plotinian argument on the matter to an epigram of six words: *non essent omnia, si essent aequalia*: 'if all things were equal, all things would not be; for the multiplicity of kinds of things of which the universe is constituted - first and second and so on, down to the creatures of the lowest grades - would not exist' (67).

Traditional theories in ecology and other hard sciences support anthropocentrism due to the prevalence of the mechanistic mode of thought. According to Merchant (1980) "Mechanism substituted a picture of the natural world, which

seemed to make it more rational, predictable, and therefore manipulable “ and “objective, context free, value free knowledge of the natural world” (227). The mechanistic view transformed views of nature and by effect eliminated ethical and cognitive constraints against the violation and exploitation (Shiva 1988). The concept of rationality has been legitimized through hegemonic institutions. Another example of is the conception of HEP (Human Exceptionalism Paradigm), which centers humans and human culture as unique and dominant, and the progress of culture as inevitable (Catton and Dunlap 1978). So, it is evident how much of modern day values rooted in scientific and religious thought are influenced by placing humans above all other sentient beings. Shewmake (2012) explains that by reorienting the human centered hierarchy allows more space for “respect and kinship” rather than “domination and destruction” (18). Changing the relationship and norms to food consumption interrupts this type of hierarchy, and challenges long standing narratives.

Identity Distinctions

Since veganism is inherently anti-hegemonic, the diet itself and those that partake are associated with certain characteristics. The vegan identity is chosen, and in part for that reason it does not hold the same discrimination and stigma that communities of marginalized races, sexes, genders, and classes are subjected to. Veganism may be considered a type of boycott tactic, “a refusal to participate in exploitation as part of a political conviction and strategy of political change” (Rothman and Zimmerman 2019:5), with a focus on ideals of equity and

non-violent practices (Stepaniak 1998). According to the ecological dominance-social competition model in social ecology, “humans will not stop dominating nature and treating it as a resource until we stop dominating each other and treating each other as resources” (Stibbe 2013: 121; Flinn et al. 2005).

In the U.S., veganism differentiates individuals from others because of cultural norms of a meat-eating diet, therefore a certain amount of consciously other-ing oneself occurs with the diet (Stepaniak 1998), which becomes an embodied concept (Terry and Urla 1995: 2). Bodies have become social constructs under capitalism, rather than natural entities, partly due to the ways we are incentivized to consume and partake in the market economy through our physical being (Adelman and Ruggi 2015; Featherstone 1991; Shilling 2003). Every part of our body, what goes on it and into it, is shaped by consumer culture in one way or another. Identity and action are mutually constructive, so, in the case of meat-eating or meat-resisting application, identities are in the process of crucial formation of distinction (Presser et al 2020: 716). Identity is contingent on social forces, which makes the vegan diet so nuanced. As Ciocchetti (2012) puts it: “Each of us finds ourselves in a world where certain identities are available to us and others are not. To some degree, the social world offers us a “script,” really more like a broad outline, for how to live as a particular kind of person. We can modify it, of course, but we can’t just erase it and start over” (406). Identities are constructed through interaction with others, rendering them situational, relational,

and part of a constant process of negotiation (Greenbaum 2012). We construct part of our identity through food.

Perceptions

The vegan diet has tended to be constructed as a lifestyle available and realistic only to the upper classes (Aiswarya 2019). This conception is partly due to the fact it has been promoted by white celebrities (Skinazi 2019). The surge of the wellness industry, which is the growing market and promotion of health foods, supplements, and fitness (Edington et al. 2016), over the last ten years has contributed to the growing “trendiness” of the health focused vegan influencer lifestyle (Skinazi 2019: 104). This white woman-centered version portrayed by popular vegan influencers puts an emphasis on purity and avoidance of foods, foods that induce weight loss, and an “achievement of hegemonic beauty standards, devoid of political or ethical stance” (Parker et al. 2019: 72).

According to Harper (2012), “Popular media ...only centralize white socio-spatial epistemologies of veganism, reflecting the collective history of white middle class people's privileged relationship to consumption, space of power, and production of what is ethical” (159). So, the media representations most available predominantly center a rich white feminine experience, a proxy for aspirational, dominant aesthetic constructions.

In other representations, the mass media present the notion that meat, dairy, and poultry products are essential to a whole, healthy diet (Aiswarya 2019:28). This is due to partly that there is a relationship between the meat

industry, lobbyists, and the USDA (McMillan 2020). Research shows that conflicting goals exist within the USDA induced by financial incentives influence the lack of recommendations against red meat consumption in the available Dietary Guidelines for Americans (McMillan 2020). Capital interests of the meat industry in turn have shaped the dietary recommendations and overarching beliefs about how much we should be consuming.

Additionally, there is an underlying assumption that alternatives for meat are inaccessible to people in lower socioeconomic classes. Restaurants and processed vegan foods are seen as part of the problem because they are exclusive to those who are privileged enough to afford them (Chatila 2018: 21). Additionally, another factor is because some animal product alternatives, such as plant-based milks and cheeses are likely to be pricier than conventional animal products (Bryant 2019). The current status of such products as still “relatively niche” affects supply (Bryant 2019: 13). Broader issues too are the lack of healthful products in general located in vicinities in which the population is classified in a lower socioeconomic status, contributing to food swamps and the opportunity to even access healthier food (Cooksey-Stowers et al. 2017). So, there are multiple contributing factors to the assumed inaccessibility.

The anti-hegemonic roots of modern-day veganism have influenced social perceptions. Meatless diets contradict many anthropocentric values that are intrinsic to the U.S. The pushback and niche-ing of veganism is in part to the predominance and power of meat industries, which have influenced health

perceptions and what constitutes a nourishing diet. The mainstream popularity of experiences of veganism from those who are white, rich, and effeminate erases other experiences from the public perception. So, veganism gets treated as niche, feminine, and elite, which makes it a good target for populist marketing in order to expand its appeal.

Meat in the U.S. Context

Through symbolism, the cultural history of America has been linked to meat. Willard (2002) discusses the symbols and themes that support this linkage: the myth of the cowboy/cattle rancher as the “steward of the land”, the myth of human’s dominion over animals that is rooted in the bible, and the celebration of consumerism as a “given right of all humans” (111:116). Christian ideology strongly reinforces human superiority because it is a very anthropocentric religion. Lynn White’s “Roots of our Ecological Crisis” maps out this ideal: “Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes” (White 1967: 1205). The development of Christianity rendered nature and all its constituents to be manipulated by man: “[Thus], distribution of land was based no longer^[L]_[SEP] on the needs of a family but, rather,^[L]_[SEP] on the capacity of a power machine^[L]_[SEP] to till the earth. Man's relation to the^[L]_[SEP] soil was profoundly changed. Formerly man had been part of nature; now^[L]_[SEP] he was the exploiter of nature. Nowhere else in the world did farmers develop any analogous agricultural^[L]_[SEP] implement” (White 1967:

1205).

Meat consumption is directly associated with consumerism, patriarchy, and individualism as a result (Willard 2002). According to Adams (2010) meat is “a symbol and celebration of male dominance”(58). Avoiding meat is feminine, thus men who decide to abstain from meat eating are deemed more feminine (58). Veganism is then a direct antithesis to these ideals, consequently rendering this dietary practice as symbolically un-American, oppositional to the patriarchy, and anti-Christian (Willard 2002; Adams 1990). Since research shows that meat has become metaphorically male, with meat eaters perceived as more masculine than vegetarians (Adams 1990; Ruby & Heine 2011; Stibbe 2013). The perpetuation of perceived masculine beliefs and traits is directly linked to eating meat. The consumption of meat affects the perception of farm animals because meat-eaters have to view them as unworthy lacking the capacity to suffer, resulting in dissonance reduction (Abbate 2021). Research on the factors of authoritarianism: the belief that it is acceptable to control subordinates and the legitimization of an unequal social hierarchy, showed that omnivores are higher in both of these elements in comparison to vegetarians (Loughnan et al 2014). This intersects with the dominating ideology of speciesism, which is “the idea that humans view their needs and desires as superior to those of other species” (Singer 2009: 9). Those who abide by speciesism prioritize the needs and interests of their own species over others (Singer 2009).

Outlining the significance of meat in American culture is crucial to this project because it uncovers how animal consumption is considered normative and natural, therefore affecting the framing of plant products. The next section is dedicated to delineating the marketing environment in which the corporations are situated.

Greenwashing

“Going Green” is popular discourse in the mainstream canon of advertising. Due to growing awareness about the depletion of the natural environment, it is common for organizations to advertise as going green. This has led to the incorporation of corporate social responsibility and green marketing of large corporate entities. Despite these efforts though, numerous organizations partake in the phenomenon known as greenwashing. Greenwashing is a descriptor advertising technique that brings together “poor environmental performance and positive communication about environmental performance” (Delmas & Burbano 2011) in order to create a corporate image of supposed environmental responsibility and action.

Parguel et al. (2015) identified three categories of green-washing advertising: using patently false claims, omitting important information that could contribute to evaluating environmental claim authenticity, and utilizing vague or ambiguous terms. Essentially, companies mislead consumers in regards to their environmental safety measures, and the ways their products and services supposedly benefit the environment. Greenwashing materializes in many ways in

popular discourse through use of nature imagery and buzz words like “organic” and “all natural” in order to create associations with being eco-friendly and falsely represent the “greenness” of a company (Parguel et al. 2015). Research completed by Guide, Jayaraman, and Linton (2003) empirically shows that consumers are willing to pay a higher price to buy products that simulate respect for and preserve the environment. Additionally, manufacturers can exploit the potential of the profitability of green products to create new primary demand (De Giovanni & Ramani 2018: 342). Using products as a means to

Green advertising tends to make verbal and visual associations between a product and “nature”. Research suggests that green appeals can have a powerful impact on affect (Schmuck et al 2018). The use of affective persuasion techniques common within greenwashed advertising has been shown to increase positive perceptions of brands (Schmuck et al., 2018: 140).

Other aspects of greenwashing involve selective disclosure of divulging only positive information about a company’s environmental performance, without full disclosure of negative information on these dimensions, so as to create an overly positive corporate image (Lyon and Maxwell 2011: 9). According to Guo et al. (2017) greenwashing involves aligning with actions that are “symbolic environmental protection behaviors” with no actual environmental protection change occurring, which is pertinent to this analysis because the term “plant-based” has become a symbol of ecological awareness. Although, there are no formal requirements or guidelines around labeling a product as plant-based.

Greenwashing as a whole has seen increased use in recent years since companies are trying to meet a growing consumer demand for greener products and services. According to TerraChoice Environmental Marketing, 2,219 products made “green” claims in 2010, which was a 79% increase over the company’s first report two years prior. This marketing ploy ends up causing harm because the general public is not well equipped to discern what is genuinely eco-friendly versus what is false advertising, resulting in people buying wasteful/harmful products (Dahl 2010).

The corporations analyzed each have a significant stake in meat and dairy production, in turn taking part in contributing to the harms of agribusiness. Therefore, their marketing strategies involve elements of green-washing that minimize the consumer’s perception of their role in harm (de Jong et al 2020). Co-opting the term “plant-based” associates the brands with a certain level of environmental consciousness despite the actual actions taken. Accordingly, there is a need for understanding our relationship to nature as a whole and what our part is in harm, which starts with deconstructing the discourse set out by green-washed advertising that are broadly recognized.

Ecolinguistics

Green-washed discourse produces helpful perceptions of companies’ actions. Previous research utilizing ecolinguistics as a theoretical framework to study green-washing revealed that large corporations reproduced narratives in

their advertising which influenced social conformity to environmental damage, downplayed the urgency of the effects of climate change, and that industrial and economic development would be most effective in dealing with ecological issues (Fernández-Vázquez 2021: 2695).

Ecolinguistics analyzes how humans' role in nature is symbolized, consequently (Steffensen et al. 2014). The International Ecolinguistics Association conceives of its task as: "exploring the role of language in the life-sustaining interactions of humans, other species and the physical environment" (2021). According to Arran Stibbe (2013) ecolinguistics is crucial to the environmental movement because it causes us to question and expose a multitude of stories that are contributing to the inequality, instability, and unsustainability of our current world, in the promise of "finding new stories that work better in the conditions of the world that we face" (117). Furthermore, Stibbe's work heavily focuses on the presence of *stories* in society, which he defines in this way:

Stories are cognitive structures in the minds of individuals, which influence how they think, talk and act. *Stories we live by* are stories in the minds of multiple individuals across a culture (2020: 6).

Stibbe (2020) emphasizes that through language and stories, identities are constructed in the direction of consumerism and the natural world is objectified (2). Stibbe (2020) also stresses that, "stories are not just transparent descriptions

of reality, but instead shape how we perceive reality” (21). Therefore, many culturally, historically embedded stories are presented as fact. Developing different stories that position humans closer to nature is rare, because historically, humans are placed at the top of a metaphorical hierarchy. This hierarchy has its roots in philosophy and religion. The hierarchal man-nature relationship is referenced in the Great Chain of Being, which was a belief adopted by medieval Christianity (Lovejoy 1960). Anthropocentric beliefs influenced long-standing ideologies, so we can see how identity has been formed in adjacency to these beliefs.

Understanding that identity formation is set up in a way that promotes ecological destruction but also involves dissonance from such destruction provides a frame for analyzing how then behaviors and practices are normalized (Stibbe 2013). Evidence from psychological studies gives evidence that “people take action, or formulate their personality based on their ecological worldview” (Thomashow 1995:4). Crompton and Kasser (2009) examine how the two factors of environmental identity and connectedness with nature interact with each other and have established that “connectedness is strongly correlated with environmental attitudes and behaviors” (12). The actions people partake in are influenced by their identity.

Glenn’s (2004) research observes that discursive strategies used by the commercial farming industry facilitate practices that are “cruel and environmentally dangerous” (65). Her research uncovered linguistic tools that

commodify and objectify animals, for example referring to the raised animals as “inventory” “items” and “units” (69). These aid in people’s disassociation from non-human animals’ needs and ecological welfare.

Therefore, ecolinguistics provides a helpful framework for understanding how language reinforces ecologically harmful behaviors and identities, for example how objectifying language is used to diminish farm animal sentience. Nonhuman animals are rendered as products under the current capitalist economic system, as food is generally. It is important to consider how products themselves are symbolic and in turn create significance of consumption patterns, which shape identities.

Product Symbolism

Corporations have honed various products as outlets for personal expression. According to Leach et al. (2020) incentives of the food system are rooted in individualist and rational choice perspectives, which can be found in neoclassical economics. Under a capitalist and consumerist framework, food’s value is based off of the “tradable features that can be valued and priced in the market” (Vivero-Pol 2017: 2), rather than its value in terms of nourishment and health. The construction of food as a commodity leads to a disregard of its nutritional properties in favor of its “tradable features” like shelf life and appearance (Vivero-Pol 2017: 4). So, food, like other natural entities under U.S. capitalism, is approached and managed in terms of potential profit.

Products are deemed symbolic because they have been shown to affect people's identity and sense of self-regard, especially if it plays an important role in everyday life, such as food (Khalil 2000). Consumer products are a vehicle for reproducing and repackaging certain ideals. The social representation, or shared perception of an object (Moscovici 1984), of products has been utilized in many fields of marketing (Trelohan 2018; Huotilainen et al. 2006; Stewart and Lacassagne 2005). Social representation is constructed in daily communication and action, and oftentimes used as reference points in communication within a society (Trelohan 2018). Consequently, it is difficult to buy any product to which particular identity symbols have not been affixed (Todd 2012). And it is essentially impossible to have an identity independent of consumption because the role of consumer has been forced on all of us (Perelman 2013). It is a crucial subject position in the developed world.

Human beings constantly compare themselves to other people as part of the socialization process, and income and consumption are critical ways in how we compare ourselves socially (Goodwin et al. 2019). The products one consumes express "symbolic group membership" (1) because people can express their commitment to a certain social world they want to be a part of, or social group they aspire to be a part of, despite their own actual income or resources (Lindblom 1999; Goodwin et al. 2019). Social comparisons relative to consumption have especially changed since the 1980's due to higher production rates (Schor 1999), and the process of consumerism makes it feel as though it is

possible for a person to transcend their social group. The concept of making or transforming into a new “self” has become an important part of consumerism and advertising (Todd 2012). Stromberg (1990) points out that advertising proposes the image of a transformed self, and by consuming that transformation is made possible. Products are a channel for self-expression purposes and can express self-esteem and personal accomplishments (Mihalcea and Catoiu 2008). Therefore, it is shown that the social connotations behind products, including food, have a lot to do with consumer patterns.

As previously mentioned, each of the companies whose texts are data for this study heavily relies on products containing meat and/or dairy for the survival of their business, creating a tension within their traditional advertising and branding strategies. So, product cannibalization is a relevant concept. The cannibalization of products is the process by which a new product takes a share of sales away from an existing product (Laruccia et al 2012: 990). It is originally defined as “the fraction of demand that comes from consumers switching from the other brands marketed by the new brand’s manufacturer” (Albuquerque & Bronnenberg 2009; De Giovanni et al. 2018). There are multiple types of cannibalization effects, De Giovanni and Ramani (2018) map out: cannibalization within and between category, brand switching within-and between-category, and primary demand (342). So, it becomes evident that fostering new appeals to new consumer markets is important because it quite literally “avoids eating one’s own

market share” (Laruccia et al 2012: 990). Consumer interest in plant-based products has captured the attention of agribusiness. But their relation to meat-centered food production – their dependence in that context – leads them to a unique marketing approach that is different than those of brands and companies that are solely plant-based.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS: CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Foundations of CDA

To carry out this project, I used critical discourse analysis. CDA is a form of discourse analysis. Language contributes to and shapes ideology, and CDA is interested in the connection between language in relation to social and cultural processes and structures by which dominance is achieved and maintained (Machin and Mayr 2012: 4; Fairclough 2013). Richardson (2006) defines it as “a perspective on critical scholarship: a theory and a method of analyzing the way that individuals and institutions use language” (2). According to Van Dijk (1997) studying discourse helps understand the role of language in influencing interactions and beliefs, and how beliefs control language use and interaction. Word choice has the capacity to imply identities and values, because words can be embedded with more than one level of meaning (Hodge and Kress 1988).

Additionally, critical discourse analysis takes into account how social context plays an essential role in the description and explanation of a text. Critical discourse analysis operates in a way to “expose strategies that appear normal or neutral on the surface but which may in fact be ideological and seek to shape the representation of events and persons for particular ends” (Machin and Mayr 2012: 5). I was interested in the embedded social norms that these companies are upholding through their representations.

Procedures and Analysis

I examined texts from Gardein, Pure Farmland, Sweet Earth, MorningStar, and Raised and Rooted. These are brands that have introduced vegan meat products to the public consumer basis, while being owned by larger umbrella corporations (Conagra Foods, Smithfield Foods, Nestlé, Kellogg's, and Tyson Foods) that market commercial meat and dairy products. I examine content from the companies' specific published websites the main mode for presenting the brand to the greater public. I was concerned with how companies' construct their actions and image.

Data/Collection

I chose texts from these specific companies: Gardein, Sweet Earth, MorningStar, Raised and Rooted, and Pure Farmland because these are sub-companies under larger food conglomerates that also have very profitable enterprises from meat and dairy products. I wanted to explore any tensions that arise when between marketing vegan products while also producing and marketing non-vegan products. Additionally, I chose the specific quotes based on their availability to the public because I felt that would best represent the way the companies want to appear to the public. The data was collected from the "About" and "Home" pages of each company's respective website, compiled in 2021. I filed for IRB exemption because the information I collected did not involve contact with or involve human participants at all.

Analysis

The specific foci I evaluated via critical discourse analysis were quoting verbs, nominalization, transitivity, representational strategies, metaphor, and presupposition in order to examine constructions of actions and identity.

Quoting Verbs

According to Machin and Mayr (2012) quoting verbs are verb processes that connote certain meanings about what is being said. For example, compare the following sentences: “The girl said she was tired” versus “The girl screamed she was tired”. The first sentence is an example of a neutral construction, while in the second sentence, “screamed” connotes more emotion and volatility. By examining quoting verbs we can analyze how a text is encouraging us to interpret or feel about a message.

Quoting verbs can legitimize or delegitimize participants (Machin and Mayr 2012). For example, compare the following sentences: “The supervisor demanded we follow instructions” and “The employees muttered about their issues”. “Demand” gives off the impression of having power and assuredness; “mutter” gives the impression of having less power and assuredness. Quoting verbs can also define roles for certain sets of participants that “might not be explicitly stated” (Machin and Mayr 2012: 60). In the example above, “demand” sounds more formal and official, and “mutter” is less well formulated and less coherent, which indicate a lack of power or formal standing.

In my analysis, descriptive quoting verbs were prevalent. Descriptive verbs denote characteristics like loudness, pitch, and emotion. For example: “The girl yelled that she did not want dinner.” “Yelled” denotes more complex emotion behind what the girl expressed, as opposed to “The girl said she did not want dinner.”

Nominalization

Fairclough (1992) defines nominalization as: “the conversion of a clause into a nominal” (27) and the “conversion of verb processes into nominals” (179), nominal being a noun or pronoun. Nominalization obscures agents of harm and their targets by making actions appear as an entity rather than the result of a series of decisions (Machin and Mayr 2012: 138). Billing (2008) provides an example of the process of nominalization: “Instead of talking about actual people buying and selling commodities for various prices, economists might talk about ‘market-forces’. The nominal term ‘market-forces’ can then be used as the subject for verbs that denote agency: ‘market-forces’ dictate/demand/forbid” (786).

Fairclough (2000) states that “nominalization backgrounds questions of agency and causality, who or what causes change” (26). Nominalization can have eight significant social effects; paraphrasing Machin and Mayr (2012: 140-144) they are: responsibility for the action is removed, the agent and the affected party are concealed, sense of time is removed, causality becomes a secondary

concern, nominalizations can turn into common usage, specificity is avoided, and details of events are reduced.

Representational Strategies

Representational strategies in CDA are also relevant to this project. By representational strategies I mean reducing a group of people to one word. For example, look at the sentence: “Everyone dreams about driving this new car.” Using “everyone” reduces the actual quota of people interested in this car in order to make it seem as though this car is much more appealing or desired than it may actually be.

Representational strategies can “highlight aspects of identity we wish to draw attention to or omit” (Machin and Mayr 2012: 77). Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) created an inventory that outline the ways people are classified and represented, which include:

1. Personalization and impersonalization
2. Individualization versus collectivization
3. Specification and genericisation
4. Nomination or functionalization
5. Use of honorifics
6. Objectivation
7. Anonymization
8. Aggregation
9. Pronoun vs. noun: the ‘us’ and ‘them’

10. Suppression

Transitivity

I examined transitivity in the data in order to analyze verb processes that uncover power dynamics within a text (Machin and Mayr 2012: 136). Transitivity is concerned with a verb relationship to a direct object in a sentence structure. Transitivity helps understand “who does what to whom?” (Beji 2016: 327). Transitivity consists of three components: the process itself, the participants in the process, and circumstances associated with the process (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004).

Halliday (1978) presents the six processes of transitivity to look at all types of discourse. These processes include: material, mental, behavioral, verbal, relational, and existential. Figure 1.1 Types of Processes on the following page is from Halliday & Matthiessen (2004: 172) and provides more specific examples of each of the processes.

Presupposition

I examined the use of presupposition throughout the examples. Presupposition has to do with collectively assumed, underlying meanings of concepts that are not explicitly defined in a text. Presuppositions present things as: “taken for granted and stable when in fact they may be contestable and ideological” (Machin and Mayr 2012:137). For example, “I stopped by the mall on Monday and it was so busy.” This sentence presupposes that the reader knows



Figure 1.1 Types of Processes (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004)

what a mall is. Using presupposition in CDA examines what information is presented is made important and what information is made less important or known (Machin and Mayr 2012).

Presupposition in particular helps connect the companies' discourse to embedded societal values and norms. The companies' discourse operates under the assumption of certain shared values, for example: "Trick your taste buds with 100% plant-based protein that looks, cooks & tastes like meat." This sentence presupposes that consumers like the taste and look of meat.

Metaphor

Metaphors are one of the principal discursive ways for understanding our physical, social and inner world (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 159). This is done so by 'mapping' conceptual structures from a familiar 'source domain' onto a more abstract 'target domain' (Lakoff 1993: 209; Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 160). Relatedly, Musoloff (2012) explains that analyzing metaphors through CDA shows how users can "(dis)qualify political developments, social groups or even individuals as threatening the identity or continued existence of a nation state" (303). Analyzing the presence of metaphor in following texts is important because discourse related to the representing and legitimizing American identity is present and important to the analysis.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

How do these companies' construct their actions and image through discursive strategies, and how is the construction representative of frameworks in American society? In the following chapter, I elaborate on the findings of my analysis, which address these questions. The overarching message that is being communicated is rooted in populist appeals, by constructing their image and actions that are in the interests and values of the everyday American people. Populism is entrenched in relatability and communicating in a way that appeals to and identifies with "the people" and has been a common political approach for right-wing platforms (Jagers and Walgrave 2007: 322). Populism as a marketing strategy here is especially interesting because it is an inherent contradiction; a claim to be working in the interests of the people, but these interests are in actuality interests of corporations in order to uphold profit and therefore the existing capitalist economy, thereby misleading the people it claims to be acting *for*.

During my analysis, I encountered four overlapping themes present that support the populist approach of the marketing: countering gendered assumptions, paternal consideration, agents of progress, and anti-elitism. I argue that the collective discourse of the companies' construct's the company's image in a way that creates a distinct image, separate from traditional veganism (countering gendered assumptions and anti-elitism) while diminishing the perception of overall harm actually committed (paternal consideration and agents

of progress). The corporations rely on the principles of veganism, which holds the promise of dismantling corporate dominance over food and nonhumans, to simulate a sense of greater ecological awareness. The discursive strategies used in the marketing, though, maintains values of hegemonic patriarchy and capitalism that are ideologies that promote increased harm and maintain the status quo. In the following pages, I will present findings for the presence of these themes.

Anti-Elitism

The presence of anti-elitist rhetoric is a prominent finding, because anti-elitism is a core component of populism, an ideology that is hinged on the separation of “the people” versus “the elite” and argues that policies should express the needs of the people (Roodujin and Pauwels 2011: 1273). Anti-elitism is additionally concerned with the a centering of and appeal to “the people” and an attitude of opposition towards the elites (Roodujin and Pauwels 2011; Berlet and Sunshine 2019). Merkley’s (2019) research explains anti-elitism as “a worldview and a rhetorical strategy employed by politicians that emphasizes conflict between the people, imagined as a collective, and political elites or the establishment” (4).

Historically, food has been used in political campaigns to “create, reinforce, and challenge” narratives about a politician’s perceived connection or disconnection from “average” Americans (Perelman 2013:21). Using food to mark social groups is particularly relevant in constructing an anti-elitist image,

because the discourse here moves away from vegan as restrictive and politically left. The following use representational discursive strategies and presuppositions.

We see this rhetoric used to create a connection to what is constructed as an average American. Gardein states:

- “Gardein makes food for everyone and every diet – vegan, vegetarian, flexitarian and anything in between,” said Clint Mickel, director of marketing at Boulder Brands.

In another example, MorningStar states:

- “Over 40 years of spreading plant-based love through everyday food for everyday folks. No futuristic Franken-food or all-or-nothing activism.”

The presence ‘everyday’ and ‘everyone’ is a representational discourse choice that collectivizes a group, and therefore highlight the notion that the companies are appealing to consumers that may not identify with left leaning political beliefs or non-hegemonic values. Stating their position as a negation of involvement in “all or nothing activism” relies on the presupposition of veganism as divisive in a political activism sphere and removes their position from this category. They are maintaining that they do align with the “average American”. MorningStar does this in another example:

- “Just uncompromisingly delicious vegetarian and plant protein takes on

America's favorite foods, for every appetite and every part of the day. That's why we continually produce some of America's most-loved and most eaten plant-based foods. Burgers to bacon, pulled pork to corn dogs, vegetarian to vegan; MorningStar Farms is plant-based goodness made for everyone."

MorningStar references America directly is an explicit semiotic strategy to align with the idea of the "average American". Additionally, this example classifies their products under ones that are stereotypically consumed in the American diet: "Burgers to bacon, pulled pork to corn dogs". This association once again attempts to bridge the gap by making plant products appealing, by presenting and aligning them with meat products, and displaying a collective understanding that to be American is to partake in and eat meat, insinuating that *not* eating meat is anti-American. The last sentence employs a relational transitive process, MorningStar "is" in connection to "plant-based goodness made for everyone" has several connotations; this is relational because there are no material implications to this claim, but it has symbolic value because they are claiming an image of "goodness for everyone" that aligns with a populist viewpoint.

The following demonstrate individualism, through representational discursive strategies and transitive processes that emphasize the customer's agency. Individualism is a component of anti-elitist ideology (Perelman 2013).

- Raised and Rooted: “Today’s consumers are seeking more protein options so we’re creating new products for the growing number of people open to flexible diets that include both meat and plant-based protein,” said Noel White, president and CEO of Tyson Foods. “For us, this is about ‘and’ – not ‘or.’”
- Gardein: “Vegan? Vegetarian? Flexitarian? You don’t have to commit to a food trend or strict way of eating to enjoy the nutrients, taste and convenience of a meatless meal”
- Raised and Rooted: “DON’T CHANGE WHO YOU ARE TO IMPROVE HOW YOU EAT. Everyone deserves to eat well.

The second finding: “You don’t have to commit to food trend or strict way of eating” employs a transitive material process. Material processes are concerned with action (Machin and Mayr 2012). Gardein is offering an action, or *lack* of an action, regarding a “strict way of eating” that works to symbolically empower the consumer. This has material implications too, because by not adhering to a strict diet, this frees up the consumer to continually partake in buying other non-vegan food products.

The first segment of the third finding: “Don’t change who you are” are specifically effective examples of the transitive relational process; the goal of this

is to show that action of who does what to whom, that the company is not asking or forcing a personal shift that has social implications. Using a transitive relational process also removes a perceived amount of “power” from the company when framed as offering choices, so the receiver of the message is then free to make that individual decision.

The last sentence of the third example relies on collectivizing strategies, the choice to consistently use the word “everyone” is used often, which simulates a sense of unity with all types of diet choice, and removes a sense of hierarchy and power. Collectivization is used to omit aspects of identity, thereby omitting reference to other parts of identity that might affect one’s eating practices, like political or ethical beliefs.

Reinforcing consumerism and encouraging people that there is no need to change ones’ lifestyle practices continues to frame high capital consumption as expected and normative, as well as downplaying and patronizing associations with *activism*. It is very important to justify patterns of high purchasing and consumption as guilt-free in order to maintain high profit margins. Furthermore, dividing the corporate image from one of *activism* discursively relates the corporate image back to that of a more traditional ideological standpoint.

Agents of Progress

Throughout the discourse, companies are presented as agents of progress. The concept of progress is important here because it is inherently capitalist (Nelson 1990), in a sense that progress is understood as productivity

improvement and in turn an increase in profit (Strauss 2008). These companies are reliant on the functioning of the capitalist system that supports consumerism. In a capitalist economic system, peoples' needs are met through specific products and brands, and the market provides an infinite variety of such products and brands (Schmitt et al. 2021:). The ideological system of U.S. consumerism is based on assumptions that consuming provides benefits and will meet all human needs, and these assumptions are then enforced through social institutions (Schmitt et al. 2021:6). Coccia and Belitto (2018) explain that the concept of progress is based on economic development and made manifest by increases of wealth and capital, however these are disbursed. Increased wealth is taken as increased social good (17).

Consequently, the integration of the mass production of goods has had detrimental effects on the social good, including damaging the environment and causing injury and disease. Progress has become synonymous with evolution, despite its being driven by scientific advances and technological changes (Coccia et al. 2018: 2). Embedded narratives of inevitable progress are present and critical to the understanding of structure and harms of U.S. capitalism.

The marketing analyzed for this thesis consistently uses language rooted in the ideology of consumerism. Referencing Sweet Earth Foods:

- "...the Awesome Burger is a natural evolution of our work in this space," said Kelly Swette, CEO of Sweet Earth Foods.

- “Sweet Earth is focused on continuously innovating vegetarian foods that are delicious above everything else.”
- MorningStar: “See, we’ve been making and innovating better-for-you, better-for-the-planet veggie foods since the very beginning.”
- “That’s why we’re revolutionizing what plants can do in delicious and nutritious ways.”

In the first example, Sweet Earth’s use of evolution is interesting due to the fact that these are, after all, chemically altered processed products. Evolution implies change that is natural, linear, and superior (Johnson 2021). In the second and third examples, the words innovation and innovating are used. In a sociological context, innovation is mostly associated with technology, namely in the form of products (Hill 2010). The “product centric definition of innovation” (4) has remained, seen in the use of patents as a measure of innovative activity (Hill 2010). The choice to use words like innovation implies the product is superior in nutritional value and taste-wise due to corporate manipulation of the ingredients, that their products are better for you than untreated, unprocessed plant-based foods.

In the third finding: “we’ve been making and innovating better-for-you, better-for-the-planet veggie foods” is a material transitive process because MorningStar is expressing a concrete action through the verbs “making” and “innovating”, that their foods are better for the planet. This example has

perceived implications that MorningStar is taking action that is ecologically conscious.

The perception of innovation and progress are utilized to make it seem as though harm is minimal because of these words' association with sustainability practices. Each of these corporations are still slaughtering animals at high rates, underpaying laborers, and contributing to ecological harms in multiple ways as discussed in earlier chapters. Naming progress and innovation is ultimately vapid, there is no definite description of how their products are inventive or different. New products are then understood as the constituting advancement over what came before, fostering the notion that through manufacturing and economic growth a society is improved. The construction of corporate actions as progressive here works to greenwash their actions by using abstractions and word association.

Countering Gendered Assumptions

Throughout my analysis, I found multiple instances where gendered assumptions of plant-based foods were channeled and countered. The cultural conflation of meat and masculinity – and that not consuming meat marks someone as effeminate – is upheld here. Studies have shown that men who express a vegan identity in social group settings are mocked and have their sexuality or sexual orientation and masculinity called into question (Modlinksa 2020: 6). Research done by Piazza et al. (2015) reveals that men are more likely than women believe that they will not enjoy the taste of plant-based meals; also,

men are more likely to view plant based foods as unappealing and of low nutritional value and to associate a healthy diet as one that contains meat (76-77). There is also evidence that vegan men often make a concerted effort to perform masculinity (Adams 1990), evidently on the notion that “real men” do not eat meat (Greenebaum 2017: 365). According to Greenebaum and Dexter (2018) “vegan men often threaten the concept of a stoic and domineering view of hegemonic masculinity”. As previously mentioned, the majority of vegans identify as women.

There is a need for companies that would draw mass appeal to counteract these associations, and they do so through discursive techniques including metaphor and presupposition. Looking at MorningStar:

- “PLANTS. A WHOLE DIFFERENT ANIMAL. Trick your taste buds with 100% plant-based protein that looks, cooks & tastes like meat.*(Shh! It'll be our secret.)*”

By aligning this product closely to meat products visually and palatability through the verbs ‘looks, cooks, tastes’ this minimizes the association of plant foods as tasteless or unappealing. Utilizing the presupposition of meat as tasty and a defining part of a “whole” meal, their product can be included in this category and separate from male assumptions of plant-based foods and meals as void of these characteristics.

Next, I want to look at MorningStar:

- “WE’VE BEEFED UP YOUR FAVORITE FOODS WITH PLANTS. And they taste oh so good. Whether it’s our blended patties or plant-based nuggets, we’re bringing the power of plant protein to everyone.”

First, I want to focus on the verb phrase “beef up”, which historically is a slang term for muscle power or adding power to something, and is a popularized metaphor (Gallagher 2013). Using this phrase is telling because of the direct masculine connotations of adding power. Cutting out red meat may be seen as threatening to a man’s masculinity (Nakagawa and Hart 2019), so personifying the plant-based product with masculine descriptor verbs circumvents the loss of masculine characteristics. In the last sentence, the usage of “power” and “protein” add to the masculine characterization because power and protein are also words that are highly correlated with ideals of masculinity.

By highlighting the amount of protein in their products, the marketers show that these products can compete with meat products. That is, they supply a similar degree of nutritional value as meat, which aligns with the presumption that consuming meat is essential to a whole diet and irreplaceable. Framing the product in terms of masculine characteristics manages, paradoxically, to uphold the value of meat. Animal products are framed as the point of comparison, as the thing for other products to mimic, so the consumer relationship to meat consumption is still rendered normative. The marketing relies on the

presupposed beliefs of meat as vital that are entrenched in culture, as seen for example by the expression to “beef up,” and only gives value to plant-based foods because they are made in the image.

Paternal Consideration

The discursive strategies used in the following are descriptive quoting verbs and transitive processes intended to render a specific emotive response and construct their position (of power) as a paternal figure. Constructing certain emotive responses works to create relatability and trust, which is a component of populist marketing.

Positivity is associated with optimistic attitudes (Siuen et al. 2017). Positivity is a state but it possesses a particular affective tone that is present. Descriptive verbs have an influence on the perception of the message, and in this case specifically on affect. Affect is related to a person’s immediate response to stimuli or initial feelings (Siuen et al. 2017) and “crucial to the conscious experience of the world around us” (Barrett and Bliss- Moreau, 2009: 172). Affect serves as a primary motivator of consumption behavior (Ervelles 1998). Positive affect has been found to cue and enhance access to positive material in memory (Ervelles 1998). Research shows that Americans typically report happiness to feel uplifting and exciting (Siuen et al. 2017). The corporations in the following findings utilize quoting verbs that are perceived as positive in combination with transitive phrases that position the corporate entity as a trusting paternal representative. Paternalism (Suber 1999) is “characterized by action

taken by someone” in order to: “act to advance or protect the interests of a person” and “to act as one thinks best for others regardless of their expressed wishes” (632). Paternalism in discourse alters the intent of a speaker by a receiver of the message for “the speaker’s own good” (Townsend 2021: 338). Additionally, paternalism is closely aligned with binary gender norms because it is used to characterize fatherhood and a type of performance of masculinity (Rajan-Rankin 2016).

Providing an emotional message in publicity has been shown to be impactful because it increases the audience’s attention to the advertisement, therefore enhancing the product’s appeal and generating increased brand recall (Otamendi and Martin 2020). Of course it is in any business’ interest to appeal to the audience and elicit affirming responses, but these companies are maneuvering this strategy in relation to the broader context of the popularity of plant-based products, making sure to convey their approval and excitement of this growing popularity. Paternal approval and excitement are enacted through descriptive quoting verbs and transitive processes.

The following include phrases that are examples of descriptive verbs. Looking at Morningstar Farms:

- “Seems like everywhere we turn right now, people are talking about plant-based-this and plant-protein-that. And we couldn’t be happier.”

MorningStar is here highlighting the increased recognition and influx of plant-based products. They position their brand as supportive of those trends, with the descriptive verb phrase “and we couldn’t be happier”.

- “We’re proud to bring veggie lovers and meat eaters back together at the same table, where everyone is left feeling satisfied.”

MorningStar is using the descriptive quoting verb “proud” in connection with the remainder of the sentence, where they construct themselves as a mediator between groups potentially at odds. The company reduces major political dispute to one between people who like to eat different things, i.e. “veggie lovers” and “meat eaters”. This is an example of a material transitive process, because “we” (MorningStar) is shown as the active agent in the sentence, and they are constructed as the concrete action of *bringing together*, which is interesting, because it displays power but in a less authoritative manner, acting out of consideration.

- “We’re incredibly proud of the delicious, meaty taste of our new Gardein Ultimate Plant-Based Burger”.

Gardein describes pride in the taste of their new product, which signifies their satisfaction of their new product. *Proud* is a word heavily linked with parenting. Stein et al. (2019) explain that pride is an emotion associated with the fulfillment of family obligations and expectations (190). Pride serves a social role because it is an emotion that motivates pro-social behavior and is linked with the “fulfillment of obligations and sacrifice associated with familism” (Stein et al. 2019: 190).

This is a transitive relational process, “we” (Gardein) is the actor with power, and using proud in conjunction as a means to present the corporation as representatives of familial consideration.

There are other affective expressions present that are more intense, and convey more dynamism of the actions. Dynamism is associated with movement and progress (Ulrich 2020). These can render strong emotive responses from a consumer audience. For example, Gardein and Pure Farmland exhibit these types of dynamic verbs:

- "Regardless of your reason for going meatless, Gardein wants to make sure you don't miss out on a single thing, and we are excited to expand our product offering..."
- "We're thrilled to announce the launch of this new product portfolio under our Pure Farmland brand."
- "We're excited for people to find out why we call it Awesome!"

The overarching interpretation of the descriptive quoting verbs (excited, thrilled) is of enthusiasm, which works in conjunction to create a positive connection with the audience, and garner a positive brand association with the expansion of plant-based industry. Marketing such optimistic messages also works to foster an avoidance of negative attitudes companies might hold about their profits from meat and dairy commerce being potentially threatened, consumers to not conceive of them as being upset, which contributes to a neutral stance in terms of diet choice, and thus works as appealing to multiple consumer bases without

taking too strong of a viewpoint. In the following, the text includes nominalization discursive strategies, specifically personification. The continual use of “we” is a discursive personalizing tactic, which amalgamates an entire corporation into one pronoun, making the companies seem more personable.

- “Gardein wants to make sure you don’t miss out on a single thing”

Here, Gardein uses a transitive material process; the verb “wants” is structured in relation to “you” as the object of the verb’s intent. This is indicative of paternalism because Gardein is enacting a form of unique responsibility over the receiver of the message (the customer). You are being thought about, the company cares for you. The company acts as a considerate agent, the corporation is on the side of the customer.

To sum up, the findings here show a strategy to construct positive reactions to awareness around plant-based trends, and displays a strategy to construct corporations as considerate through quoting verbs and transitive processes that change the perception of the power dynamic between the consumer and the corporation as paternal.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Throughout my reading and analysis of online statements of corporations marketing non-meat products, I discovered marketing through populist appeals, constructions of corporations and corporate actions as in the interests and values of the 'everyday American people'. The corporations created distance between their products and veganism – thus countering gendered assumptions and supposed elitism – while diminishing the perception of overall harm committed via suggestions of the company as agents of progress and projections of paternal consideration. Using critical discourse analysis helps connect their actions and image with broader principles of hegemonic patriarchy and capitalism. The analysis shows that the latter forces are reinforced discursively.

The construction of corporations as agents of progress is characterized by abstractions and word choice that implies advancement. As previously discussed in Chapter One, in other parts of the world, plant centric nutrition and dieting is more normative. Religions that are not as prevalent in the U.S., such as Hinduism and Buddhism, hold principles that reflect a diet sans meat. These companies did not invent plant-based proteins or alternatives; many other cultures practice more plant-centered diets and obtain protein from other sources. Only recently, since plant-based is lucrative in terms of capital, has it become a mainstream corporate interest. The products promoted are, similarly, highly processed and packaged. Processed foods are common in American diets due to factors and structures of convenience. The processed plant-based

products are marketed as advancement, due to entrenched capitalist ideologies that an entity is only made valuable due to human, in this case corporate, involvement (Mohai et al 2021; Arvin et al. 2013). This is in fact not innovative or progressive for society at all; excessive waste is being accrued due to over packaging of the products, and the inherent nutritional value is diminished due to the food processing measures and additives. Mass production of food accounts for 26% of global greenhouse emissions (Ritchie and Roser 2021). Incorporating progress and innovation into the marketing further upholds the capitalist notion that technology and products are an acceptable answer to the greater institutional problem. Corporate release of vegan, processed foods is not going to adequately address the institutional issues of industrial farming. Lastly, the discourse relies on the term “plant-based” as a proxy for concepts like sustainability and environmental consciousness, resulting in greenwashing. Plant-based is socio-culturally associated with environmental justice, so mapping it onto commodity items creates a false association of awareness or justice with the corporate entities dispatching these types of products.

Furthermore, the discursive construction of progress is adverse because of the perpetuation of the commodification of food, relating back to the notion of food as product. According to Zerbe (2019), the global food system has changed the value of food from an essential part of life into means for profit, which fails to benefit all parties, including the producer and the consumer. Therefore, exchange value is prioritized over food’s value to feed people (Zerbe 2019: 156).

Modifying and processing food contributes to the multiple damaging spheres of the global food system, and encourages the invisibility of the relationship between consuming and the labor and extraction it took to get the product into a customer's hands. Coff (2006) explains that "consumers are unable to look back on the food's production history, and consequently they are equally unable to see how their own food consumption influences nature and society. The relations are lost" (89). Harvey (2018) expands on the indiscernibility of labor relations further: "When you go to the supermarket you can see the exchange values [prices] but you can't see or measure the human labor embodied in the commodities directly. It is that embodiment of human labor that has a phantom-like presence on the supermarket shelves. Think about that the next time you are in a supermarket surrounded with these phantoms!" (59). Through this process, agribusinesses continue to strengthen their monopoly over "land and agroindustrial value chains" (Mckay et al. 2020: 347). Consequently, the processing, modification, and distribution of foods contribute to the monopolization of the food system by these broader corporations discussed.

Underlying patriarchal ideologies are furthered in terms of paternal consideration. Western patriarchal paternalism "relies upon very narrow definitions of the male/female binary, in which the male gender is perceived as strong, capable, wise" (Arvin et al. 2013: 13). The companies, through discourse, manage to take responsibility over a movement (solely because it has become profitable) by constructing their approval and pride, which are concepts heavily

associated with paternal representations. Constructing corporate actions as considerate through transitive processes and representational strategies works to further perceptions of the companies' as caring for and thereby making decisions and products for people, not profit. The image of consideration works in favor of populist appeals, because trust and relatability are established. This is inherent to a populist ideological frame, because characteristics like trust are cited to be a part of populist rhetoric (Canovan 1999). The perception of the power dynamic between the consumer and the corporation is changed by discursive manipulation. The inherent contradiction of this marketing strategy is due in part to patriarchy being critical to legitimizing manipulation and ownership of othered bodies, which works to justify the exploitation of non-human animals for human consumption. Therefore, systems of violence, like industrial agriculture, are naturalized in the American imagination. Strategies of collectivization "we" are able to discursively minimize the labor relations that go into the product and corporation, by appearing more personable and aiding in mystifying the countless workers and processes that go into production; the entire corporation is amalgamated into one pronoun. Paternal consideration makes it seem as though their actions are altruistic; it mystifies their logic of control.

Additionally, the discursive strategies construct positive reactions to awareness around plant-based trends, and their role within them. Using positive language is particularly interesting because of the necessity to not alienate their consumer base for meat or dairy products, or create more negative attitudes

about animal based products. Using enthusiastic rather than disparaging language helps maintain neutrality about choice; ultimately conveying the notion that either way a person wants to eat is acceptable, they have options for all ways of eating. Once again, these are vapid claims, because acknowledgments of harm reducing ways of consuming/eating are not mentioned or even entertained.

By combating gendered associations with plant-based products, a distance is created from the feminized connotations of veganism. All this does is continue to perpetuate hegemonic masculinity. By upselling and highlighting the protein content, the ranking of masculine characteristics as more valuable than feminine is upheld, creating a detachment from the version of a thin white feminine vegan that is so popular in media. Addressing the protein content and using phrases like “beefed up” justify their products for male consumption, therefore making it acceptable for the hegemonic group. According to Johnson (2011) veganism has traditionally been marketed to men by emphasizing health benefits like sexual potency and fitness aesthetics, essentially communicating the notion that veganism can be a vehicle to achieving normative body aesthetic standards. There has been a lack in research regarding masculine perceptions and veganism, but it has been found that vegan men demonstrate “hybrid masculinity” by “expanding and altering the traditional definition of masculinity, yet they do not fundamentally change it” (Greenebaum and Dexter 2018: 645).

The discourse follows this precedent by augmenting the associations of masculinity with protein and power.

Stressing the product's similarity to meat is a way to reinforce a particular notion that vegetables and grains are inherently inferior, that meat is truly the epitome of taste and nutrition. Meat is able to maintain its marketable value. A more subterranean message is that masculine is inherently greater than the feminine, and the masculine to be sought after, imitated, and reproduced. Essentially, a plant has value when modeled after meat, which is beneficial for these companies, whose meat products generate these companies millions of dollars.

Finally, the use of discursive strategies to create an anti-elitist corporate identity is critical and telling of the corporate evasion of harm. These are big food corporations worth billions; they are acting in the interest of profit, not the average American, where the average income is right under \$35,000 annually (U.S. Census Bureau). Factory and farm workers are underpaid, forced to engage in violent practices, while non-human animals are still objectified and commodified, reproducing inequalities in multiple interlocking spheres. Phrases like "don't change who you are" and "you don't need to participate in all or nothing activism" tacitly criticize movements for animal rights, farmers' rights, and food justice, to just name a few. The discourse works to delegitimize activism and ideals that could undermine their existence as a corporation. Engaging with radical rhetoric concerning issues like animal welfare or corporate ecological

harm would then uncover and expose the very core issues these corporations are trying to hide from. Furthermore, the frequency of the message of *choice* contributes to the delegitimizing of activism. Purchasing alone is offered as a tool for change, which diverts attention from actual actions that could and need to be taken, as well as avoiding head-on discussion about degradation through current patterns of production and consumption. Additionally, choice is a vital part of American identity and integral to the application of populism in this framework (Canovan 1999). Anti-elitism is shown to be a framework corporations utilize to usurp symbols from a movement (in this case, food as the symbol), but create a campaign with those same symbols, that is diluted of the original values, in order to capitalize and maintain patterns of consumption.

In short, the discourse of the marketing allows for the corporations to obfuscate the extent of their role in ecological, animal, and social harms, while appropriating the values of a movement that itself holds the promise of dismantling corporate dominance over food and nonhumans. A 'neutral' stance on diet choices is projected, while the discourse counters the contentions of radical veganism and sounds themes of anti-elitism. These discursive strategies work together to limit the negative perceptions of meat for human consumption: meat consumption stays normative insofar as meat is positioned as superior and irreplaceable. Hegemonic patriarchal masculinity works to uphold the normativity of the violent nature of animal agriculture. The corporations construct their actions as considerate and protective through paternal associations: they

assume a role as a representative of trust and responsibility. These discursive strategies uphold traditional American values not only in order to appeal to more consumers, but to delegitimize opposing ideologies.

In all, the thesis showcases the ways in which multiple cultural logics interact with one another, and thus has a number of implications about corporate complicity in the status quo. Powerful agribusinesses are promoting ideologies and values that normalize their harms and tacitly invalidate ideas and movements that contest them. The discursive methods used to invalidate and disqualify anti-hegemonic values are nuanced and clouded.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This thesis analyzed the marketing of new plant-based products from five major food corporations: Tyson, Smithfield, Kellogg's, Conagra Foods, and Nestle. These corporations market plant-based products through discursive strategies that manage to avoid disparaging meat or the meat industry as a whole. These strategies construct the image and actions of their companies through a populist framework that vows to uphold the interests and values of a constructed group of regular American people. These regular Americans are cast as valuing traditional ideologies of capitalism and patriarchal structures.

In order to uphold capitalist concerns, the discourse creates associations between the new plant-based products and progress and innovation. The claims made were abstract and superficial though: there is no mention of actual sustainability practices or incentives to move in that direction. There was no acknowledgement of the mass food production system in which the corporations are actively participating in and perpetuating through their products. The lack of clarity or mention of implementing sustainability procedures or policies presents individual purchasing of their products as *the* environmentally conscious practice. The tenets of capitalism are upheld because products are offered as a solution to larger ecological issues. Moreover, the corporations maintain mass production practices and domination over global food systems via these products and brands. The product may be plant based rather than animal based, but that does

not mean it is exempt of harm and remains an outcome of a series of extractive processes.

Additionally, my analysis revealed discursive positions as anti-elitist and acting out of paternal consideration. The presentation of anti-elitist sentiment works to separate the companies' values from values of veganism that is construed as more radical and political. The analysis of transitive processes uncovered how agency is conveyed and placed onto the consumer, which is critical to upholding consumerism and individualism. Choice, or at least the impression of presenting choice, is critical to the theme, as having that freedom to choose and have options has been shown to be a factor of American identity (Miller and Stovall 2019).

Paternal consideration means that the companies act out of care, in the way of a powerful father, for the sake of the customer. Such consideration was conveyed through affective appeals. The analysis of transitive processes further showed how power was expressed through responsibility rather than harsh authority, which is more apt to produce constructive feelings about their marketing. Additionally, utilizing optimistic messaging works to avoid the perception of negative attitudes companies might hold about their profits from meat and dairy industries being threatened. Seemingly embracing this trend, and acknowledging plant-based foods on a marketing level, places the overall corporate image as neutral. Neutrality has the potential to be helpful in a marketing perspective because it does not alienate certain consumer bases.

Countering gendered assumptions works to uphold normative assumptions of the importance of meat, both culturally and nutritionally. Vegan diets are understood as effeminate and therefore incomplete. The discourse places masculine characteristics as superior; the products' intrinsic value is due to their similarities to meat products. Stressing these qualities is also indicative of the commodification and mystification of food; their commodities are plant-based, but do not appear at all like actual plants. It perpetuates the sanitization and purifying of raw foods, which rids the food of much of its inherent nutritional value and skews the notion of what food actually is. Additionally, masculinity is associated with power and domination, so certain hegemonic ideologies and exercises of power are sustained. The association allows the corporation to differentiate their image from femininity and traits traditionally associated with femininity. The dichotomy and hierarchy of "male" and "female" is upheld through language, and no deeper work is done to critique the gender binary.

The corporations in this thesis utilize public concern over ecological harms and increased vegan consumption practices as a means to combat the harms. The corporate interpretation of veganism is reductive though, and erases many of the values that ground veganism, as well as its political potential. The marketing allows corporate entities to remain neutral on the broader awareness of vegan diets reducing harm, by offering up mass-produced goods and framing it through rhetoric, associated with populism, of choice and identity values. Furthermore, the marketing operated on a superficial level, because there was

no mention of their complicity in a number of different societal problems, such as their large roles in contributing to ecological destruction by maintaining their role in mass production and industrial agriculture, animal exploitation by not addressing their animal based industries in any sort of thoughtful manner, as well as the exploitation of their own laborers. The silence on these issues is noteworthy, because silence is an instigator of furthering harms (Kymlicka and Donaldson 2014).

This thesis points to the role of discourse in the perpetuation of layers of harms through a critical discourse analysis. Issues brought into the cultural consciousness like industrial agribusiness's role in pollution, land extraction, animal abuse, overproduction, and consumerism, are known to yield disastrous effects that have worsened over time. It is in the interest of large food corporations to nullify and subside this awareness because profit would be at risk if they were truly held accountable.

Potential Directions for Future Research

Potential future directions of research to be taken could involve exploring public perception of these companies based on their exposure to the marketing, which could have helpful implications for understanding the impacts of this type of greenwashing on consumers. Gaining insight into this could help uncover tangible actions to hold corporate entities accountable, and identify how people are perceiving or aware of these types of harms.

Another potential direction for future research could involve analyzing public perceptions of the marketing's influence on their own diet choices and what that could mean going forward for the mainstreaming of vegan food products. This type of research would be pertinent because of how marketable vegan products are currently.

Limitations of this Study

I examined a limited number of marketing quotes that were present on the "Home" and "About" pages of the respective websites of each company. There were further links and pages present that I did not examine. The pages that I looked at were most relevant to the research questions of this project, but that does not mean that other pages could not add to the construction of corporate image and actions. Furthermore, my analysis was based on social constructs and values in the U.S. context specifically; analyses through the lens of another country and culture might bear different conclusions.

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