A Beef With Beef: Why Meatless Mondays is an Educational and Viable Program

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE HISTORY OF THE MOVEMENT

The Meatless Mondays campaign was created by John Hopkins’ Bloomberg School of Public Health in 2003 to raise awareness of a growing health and environmental dilemma: meat-eating consumption. The concept of Meatless Monday is not new; during World War I, the U.S. Food Administration called for "Meatless Mondays" and "Wheatless Wednesdays" to aid the war effort and Presidents Wilson, Truman and Roosevelt have all promoted the movement during their tenure. Currently, Meatless Mondays has been implemented in over 40 colleges, 10 K-12 districts, 13 hospitals and over 100 blogs, including the Huffington Post, feature weekly meatless recipes; in 2009, the movement spread internationally to include cities like Ghent, Belgium, Tel Aviv, Israel, Sao Paolo, Brazil and Cape Town, South Africa. Celebrities like Paul McCartney, Mario Batali and Wolfgang Puck have also publicly endorsed the campaign ("The Movement Goes Global," 2010). However, this mainstream attention has drawn sharp criticism; news anchors like Lou Dobbs argue that the program is an environmental fad that will fade in time while many students defend a right-to-eat-meat
Specifically focusing on the success of collegiate programs, this paper will investigate how viable Meatless Mondays is on a short-term and long-term basis.

1.2 WHY MONDAYS

In 2005, John Hopkins University conducted a national research survey with over 1,500 adults over 25; in the study, participants were asked on what day they were most likely to begin healthy behaviors like quitting smoking or exercise (John Hopkins, 2005). Monday was favored by a factor between 8 and 10 and over half of the participants viewed Monday as a “fresh start” or a day to “get their act together” (Fig. 1). Another study confirmed that beginning healthy intentions on Monday will make the commitment more likely to last throughout the week. Participants who received weekly reminders as opposed to participants who received prompts every few weeks were more likely to engage in the target behavior of exercise (Fry and Neff, 2009). Using Monday can thus be a way to effectively promote the Meatless Monday message.

Is exercise a good model??

“\text{I see Monday as a day...}"

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\text{for a fresh start, to dream, to get my act together, like any other}
1.3 WHY MEATLESS

Going meatless for one day has tangible health and environmental benefits. For those seeking health benefits, Meatless Mondays is an initiative to help end chronic preventable diseases like type 2 diabetes; on average Americans consume 8 ounces of meat per day – 45% more than the USDA recommends, which increases the risk of chronic preventable diseases (Weber, 2010). Is type 2 related to meat consumption?

According to a 2006 Report by the United Nations’ Food and Agricultural Organization, animal agriculture is responsible for the production of 18% of greenhouse gases — more than the entire transportation sector combined. The report demonstrates how animal agriculture is a leading contributor to other serious environmental problems like loss of biodiversity, deforestation, air and water pollution and land degradation. In fact, 1 pound of beef equals 2,500 gallons of water, 12 lbs of grain, 35 lbs of topsoil and 1 gallon of gasoline (Steinfeld, 2006). Restricting meat consumption can help slow this trend and reduce our carbon footprint. (more by the time it arrives!) Although Americans are only 4% of the world population, Americans consume 25% of the total fossil fuels (Demas et al., 2010).

Given the alarming findings of these various studies, it is becoming clear that a change in practices is necessitated in the United States. Meatless Mondays is a unique opportunity to promote energy-conscious behavior at a grassroots level. Using social psychology, this paper will deconstruct the different discourses on Meatless Mondays at Williams College by analyzing posts on
Williams Students Online (WSO) and interviews with different members of campus. On April 18th, 2011, Meatless Mondays was implemented in Driscoll Dining Hall and the response was polarizing. Understanding the triggers to polarizing responses can help prevent them in future implementations of Meatless Mondays. Through opinion editorials and conversations with different sustainability programs, this paper will also analyze other college’s attempts at Meatless Mondays for a larger sample size. Ultimately, this paper will argue that Meatless Mondays is a sustainable and viable program that should be implemented on a long-term basis at Williams College.

2. SETTING

2.1 WILLIAMS COLLEGE

Because Williams only had one Meatless Monday, the results from Meatless Monday do not offer conclusive evidence of how much money could be saved and if the number of people who swiped was a significant amount. Moreover, the event occurred during Previews and the unknown variable of prospective freshman skewed the results. Additionally, Dining Services considered the dinner a special dinner so the meal as a whole was more expensive; next year’s Meatless Mondays should test how viable the program (what program? Everyday?) is on an everyday dining schedule. Zara Currimjee, another student researcher on Meatless Mondays, did not give me the specifics, but she informed me that the college spent more money for the meatless dinner per student than on regular meat dinners.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 APPLYING SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY TO REAL LIFE
Over 40 colleges have implemented Meatless Mondays programs but this study only focused on programs deemed especially controversial or successful. Analyzing the language, tone and content of opinion editorials in collegiate newspapers and discussion boards, this study will determine the logic behind the reactive responses. Interpreting defense mechanisms and persuasion techniques, this paper will determine why certain students had hostile reactions. At Williams College, Meatless Mondays was discussed with student advocates, Amelia Simmons ’13 and Zara Currimjee ’13. For oppositional responses, I read WSO posts (how would you characterize this as a source of info?) and I interviewed two Lehman Council members who refused to endorse the program. I also emailed or had phone conversations with various collegiate sustainability programs. Unfortunately, because of different schedules, a meeting with Dining Services’ directors could not be arranged in time for this paper. (that’s most unfortunate)

4. NARRATIVE

4.1 ANALYZING RESPONSES AT WILLIAMS COLLEGE

Denial is a defense mechanism that protects us from confronting unacceptable realities of global environmental problems. People may use a denial of self-involvement to displace the responsibility of energy-conscious behavior onto others (Giffords, 2009). Denial and anger were the principal emotions featured in the Williams Students Online posts displeased with the event. Really??

Overall, the students who were most displeased were the ones who felt that their meat-eating views were “being vilified” and “presented as an evil.” The general discontent stemmed from a perceived lack of choice, or as one student bluntly put it: “We pay good money so we should be free to choose.” By emphasizing the privilege of paying
for the college, the poster, like many other students unhappy with the event, displaced the responsibility of environmental action onto the school. Others were more derisive and dismissive about the implementation; one poster believed Meatless Mondays was a “patronizing diet restriction” while another believed it was the “once-per-week meal-swipe equivalent of Animal Planet’s ethical agriculture history month” (“WSO Discussions,” 2011). In the context of Meatless Mondays, defense mechanisms arose when people were confronted with uncomfortable information and this action created social anxiety within the person. So let's assume this is actually a way to accumulate information...how many people said what—do some categorization!

The Lehman Council members I interviewed were resistant to the idea of going meatless, saying they do not like the idea “being shoved down their throat” and thought the flier was too “aggressive.” It appears that the advertising flier’s hard language of “myth” versus “fact” was unpersuasive; several WSO posters lambasted the flier, saying “correlation does not imply causation” (“WSO Discussions,” 2011). Using language that would be perceived as less confrontational is suggested for future endeavors of Meatless Mondays. In an influential 1986 psychological study, the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) was developed to understand how attitudes are formed and changed. In ELM, there are two routes to persuasion: the “central route,” where a person considers an idea using reason and the "peripheral route," where a person uses superficial qualities and preexisting biases to be persuaded (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). Based upon the negative reactions, people reading the flier relied upon the peripheral process: deciding their attitude based on the aesthetic value of the flier.
Isn’t it possible that considering the flier using reason could produce a negative response? In order for Meatless Mondays to be received more favorably, the central route to persuasion must be accessed. Face-to-face interaction with students is recommended over advertising fliers because it allows for more debate and logic to be used.

4.2 ANALYZING RESPONSES BEYOND WILLIAMS COLLEGE

Beyond Williams College, many colleges and universities have been implementing meatless programs of their own. Studying the viability of these programs may offer insight into making successful environmental programs at Williams College. Regardless of the method used to implement Meatless Mondays, student discontent was expressed in every college, but more discontent was expressed if meatless was compulsory in every dining hall. Different marketing methods have produced varying degrees of success in each institution of higher education.

Barnard College experienced a noticeable change by institutionalizing Meatless Mondays in one dining hall; According to Director of Operations Goldi Juer, Barnard’s Hewitt Dining Hall typically serves between 100 and 150 pounds of chicken at an average dinner, so the savings from eliminating meat on just one day each week are “not just a drop in the bucket” (Kilian, 2010).

The University of South Florida and the University of Central Florida use monetary incentives like vegetarian discounts to make Meatless Mondays more appealing. Meanwhile, Yale University’s short-lived Meatless Monday program is a case study of how difficult instituting compulsory actions can be. Discussion with Sam Bendelli, the student involved with implementing Yale’s Meatless Mondays, reveals the...
shortcomings of the program. Yale students quickly resorted to their defense mechanisms, creating negative Facebook groups and writing angry posts on discussion boards. The majority of the opposition relied upon their peripheral processes of preexisting biases; the students were not persuaded to change their attitude and go meatless. (not sure what you are saying here—what were the objections—is it possible they were rational?) As a result, Meatless Mondays was stopped. To make it more successful, Bendelli recommends “emphasizing the number of other good schools that have undertaken similar initiatives,” since students want their institution to look good in a comparison.

Perhaps the most infamous example of Meatless Monday was at Bowdoin College that implemented meatless menus in every dining hall. The disgruntled students garnered national attention when they brought buckets of KFC chicken and cheeseburgers into the dining halls. For future implementations, Leah Greenberg, the Bowdoin student involved with Meatless Mondays, suggested the possibility of offering meatless options only at one dining hall, as well as serving only a "beefless" meal. While the production of all meats has a significant environmental impact, beef production requires the most water and releases the most carbon dioxide (Weber, 2010). Going beefless is an example of using another method of psychological persuasion: the foot-in-the-door technique. By committing the subject to smaller requests like going beefless or a pledge, the subject is more likely to commit to larger requests like going meatless every week (Freedman and Fraser, 1966). However, I do not recommend only going "beefless" because this action can be ignored by students in dining halls. In order to make the impact of Meatless
Mondays significant, a noticeable and conclusive change must occur in dining halls during Meatless Mondays. (why?? How do you know?)

Out of all the colleges that have implemented Meatless Mondays, UC Davis’ Meatless Mondays is regarded as one of the premiere pioneering programs. Discussions with Danielle Lee, the Sustainability Manager of UC Davis Dining Services, reveal why the program has been so successful. Starting in 2007, UC Davis launched Meatless Monday in its cafeterias with posters and bulletin board announcement. Although meat is never entirely pulled off the menu, more vegetarian options are offered on meatless days. The program evolved into a full pledge drive; students are able to sign up and pledge in dining halls or resident halls. In 2010, 450 pledges were raised and in 2011, 548 pledges were reached (Fig. 2). At the end of each week, the pledges are tallied; a poster is also created for each dining room that displays the new total and how much water, fossil fuels and carbon have been saved. According to Lee, peer-to-peer education with students tabling in dining halls is the most successful method to spark debate and long-term change. She recommends framing the language of meatless advertisements more as a celebration of food variety than as a limitation on meat.

Figure 2. UC Davis’ Meatless Monday pledge is posted in every dining hall for encouragement.
5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 FUTURE OF MEATLESS MONDAYS: THE NEXT GENERATION

1 in 3 U.S. citizens born after 2000 will contract early onset diabetes and among U.S. minorities, the rate will be 1 in 2 (Narayan, 2006). This alarming research only reinforces how nutritional food education needs to start as early as possible. Nearly 60% of students in public schools will eat at least one meal in school five days a week (Demas et al., 2010). Because of this statistic, school meals have the potential to address the major environmental and health issues. The Baltimore City Public School District (BCPS) addressed this health crisis; in 2010, the district adopted a Meatless Monday menu for the 80,000 students it serves without needing to raise the budget a single cent. More importantly, the new menu contained approximately half the sodium and calories, and more than 1/3 the fiber content. Table 1 compares a typical school meal that meets USDA nutritional guidelines with an alternative meatless meal that emphasizes USDA unprocessed food (Demas et al., 2010).

| Table 1. Meal Nutritional Analysis: Standard Meal Compared to Alternative Meal |
|-------------------------------------|-----|-----|
| Calories                            | 680 | 366 |
By teaming up with local distributors, the BCPS provided students with fresh, locally raised fruits and vegetables under a tight budget. The Baltimore Public School District is a successful case study of how nutritional programs like Meatless Mondays can function in conjunction with other educational, environmental programs. (So how did it work out—is it an experiment or ?) Williams College is not a public school district, but the implementation of Meatless Mondays at Baltimore should serve as a positive example of how Meatless Mondays can successfully work in conjunction with other sustainable initiatives at Williams. For Williams College, sustainability is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” By participating in Meatless Mondays, the college would be aligning itself with a movement that wants better nutrition (I thought, at the beginning, that we were talking about energy and CO2....for you to invoke diabetes and/or nutrition, you need to closely connect them with meat....or lack of meat) for the next generation.

Meatless Monday is not going to solve the health and energy crisis on a large scale, but it is a popular grassroots strategy that can change attitudes at a peer-to-peer level.

5.2 CIVIC VIRTUE
Williams College’s mission statement declares that, “Williams seeks to provide the finest possible liberal arts education by nurturing in students the academic and civic virtues, and their related traits of character” (“Williams College,” 2007). Participation in Meatless Mondays can raise the consciousness of an important environmental and health issue in a direct and meaningful way. Raising awareness of issues outside the Purple Bubble can fulfill the goal of nurturing “civic virtue” and creating a sustainable campus. Above all, Meatless Mondays is an effective educational strategy that can support members who desire sustainable food and also raise awareness with members of the community who may not have noticed otherwise. In conclusion, the unexamined food is not worth eating, and Meatless Mondays is an innovative way to make health- and environmentally-conscious behavior palatable to a wider audience.

M. I like lots of what you’ve written, but your research needed to be deeper and your connections more clearly made.)

David
Works Cited
16 May 2011.