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**The Horsemeat Scandal and Corporate Food Crime Externalities: An investigation into the use of neutralisations by offenders and victims of corporate food crime and the negative influence of responsabilisation**

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**THE HORSEMEAT SCANDAL AND CORPORATE FOOD CRIME EXTERNALITIES: AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE USE OF NEUTRALISATIONS BY OFFENDERS AND VICTIMS OF CORPORATE FOOD CRIME AND THE NEGATIVE INFLUENCE OF RESPONSIBILISATION**

**ABSTRACT**

A study was performed into the use of neutralisations by potential offenders and victims of corporate food crime to either excuse offending or reduce a sense of victimisation. The study aimed to discover the attitudes that may allow incidents of food crime, such as the horsemeat scandal, to occur and what the wider societal environment may be that encourages these justifications. The study used participants primarily from the University of Glasgow and was completed online. The first part of the experiment tested for associations between offending decisions and neutralisations by using a hypothetical vignette, where participants had to imagine themselves as a CEO of a food company, and could either make an offending decision or non-offending decision. Participants then had to state their agreement with a number of neutralisations according to a five point likert scale. The second part of the experiment once again used a hypothetical vignette, this time placing the participants in the position of the victim of the horse-meat scandal, where they could either respond in a way which recognised a sense of victimisation or reduced a sense of victimisation. Once again participants then had to rank their agreement with a number of neutralisations. After both parts of the study, free response questions allowed for the disclosure of the wider influences on participant answers. Associations were tested for using a Mann Whitney U Test, while participant free response answers were coded for themes. The study found associations between a reduced sense of victimisation and stronger agreement with neutralisations, specifically denial of injury and denial of responsibility neutralisations, but did not have a significant number of individuals making an offending decision in the first part of the experiment. Analysis of the qualitative data further highlighted the influence of personal responsibility and responsabilisation on victim blaming. Based upon the findings the study argued that acceptance of responsabilisation has increased victim blaming for food crime and has been used by food companies to lessen their responsibility for offending. Meanwhile the lack of offending decisions suggested that there were unique influences within the food industry allowing offending to occur. Further research suggestions were made including investigating whether there is a crime facilitative business culture in the UK food industry and understanding the motivations of those who didn't victim blame.

**INTRODUCTION**

One of the biggest news stories of the last year was the discovery of horse meat in a variety of meat products which were labelled and sold as beef (The Guardian, 2013a). This scandal

brought to light a type of crime which is often under-researched and rarely the focus of international media and public attention, namely food crime (Croall, 2007). Food crime can occur at any stage of the food industry from food creation, to production and marketing, with consequences for the environment, public health, businesses and consumer trust (Croall, 2007). Offences can range from the abuse of fishing quotas, to the mislabelling of products or inclusion of dangerous ingredients (Croall, 2007). In the most recent case, the horsemeat scandal involved the discovery of horsemeat in a variety of ready-made meat products sold in a number of UK supermarkets. The horsemeat was unlabelled and of unclear origins leading to a large scale investigation attempting to discover culpability for the scandal (The Guardian, 2013). In light of this event and the growing acknowledgement of the significance of food crime, this research paper sought to bring further understanding as to what allows the occurrence of food crime. It looked specifically at the attitudes and neutralisations used to justify food industry related offending and to reduce a sense of victimisation when the victim of food crime.

A number of explanations have already been proposed for the presence of offending in the food industry with researchers such as Croall (2007) placing offending within “the context of the wider features of food production, some of which can be seen as criminogenic” (pg. 224). The features which Croall identifies include globalisation and food market dominance by a few UK retailers. Globalisation has created demand for goods which are out of season, and at a lower price than it costs to make them, which Croall (2007) argues has opened up pathways for illegal practises to occur. Pressure to increase profit margins can lead to food adulteration with Croall (2007) citing evidence from Mandalia (2005) of where the Sudan 1 spice scandal could be linked to a European push for low prices despite these prices actually being lower than the cost price of the ingredients. As well as the impact of globalisation, market dominance has also been outlined as an area of possible danger. Wardle and Baranovic (2009) explored the consequences of food retailer market dominance on public health in Australia, finding that “product quality may be sacrificed to offer the prices demanded by major supermarket chains” (pg. 479) and that “decreased competition may result in less affordability, further limiting the accessibility of nutritious foods” (pg. 478). While market dominance in itself may not be the immediate cause of offending in the food industry it is clear that it can both limit the availability of choice for consumers and result in suppliers having to engage in dubious practises in order to secure enough funding for their survival. The UK itself has a food market share dominated by four major retailers (Croall, 2007) demonstrating the possibility of pressures on suppliers created by a lack of market competition.

While these factors may explain the criminogenic environment which allows food crime to occur one theory which may be of interest in explaining the reasons food crime can continue is Sykes and Matza’s (1957) theory on rationalisations used by offenders to justify their offending. Their theory on the techniques of neutralization has been used to explain how individuals can absolve themselves of blame for criminal acts whilst still being

committed to the dominant norms of society. Although originally applied to the justifications used by juvenile offenders the techniques have now been used to explain justifications used by a host of different offending types, including explaining crimes of the white collar (Maruna & Copes, 2005). The original neutralisations proposed by Sykes and Matza (1957) were denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of the victim, appeal to higher loyalties and condemnation of condemners. Denial of responsibility referred to excuses that absolve the offender of responsibility using explanations of circumstance, the offender doesn't feel blame because offending had to occur due to something perceived as beyond their control. Denial of injury excuses revolve around the idea that there was no real harm caused by their actions. Denial of the victim justifies offending by claiming that the victim somehow deserved the offence happening. Appeal to higher loyalties justifies offending as necessary for a greater good, for instance for the protection of family or friends. Finally, condemnation of condemners points the blame at those who judge the behaviour, as hypocritical or worse in some way. These techniques can be widely applied in order to lessen the possible damage of offending on an individual's morality. Sykes and Matza's (1957) theory gives an idea not of how offending first occurs, which can be explained by other theories and circumstances, but how it may continue without causing damage to how involved an individual feels in society's norms.

Food crime has yet to be analysed to discover whether offenders justify their actions using neutralisations. As neutralisations may help the continuation of crime it is of interest to see which particular neutralisations may be associated with offending in the food industry. For this reason the first research aim of the current study would be to test whether there were particular neutralisations associated with white collar food offending. In order to do this a similar research design would be used to a study performed by Vieraitis, Piquero, Piquero, Tibbetts, and Blankenship (2012), which attempted to explore whether there were differences between the neutralisations used by men and women when committing a hypothetical white collar crime involving pharmaceuticals. Their design involved getting participants to read a hypothetical scenario as if they were a CEO of a company and then choosing the action they would take in light of the evidence provided. Participants were then asked to rank their agreement with a number of justifications which corresponded to the techniques of neutralisation. Through the use of this method an initial understanding of the specific neutralisations associated with food crime may be obtained without requiring actual food crime disclosures. It was hoped that by exploring this idea information may be garnered of some of the reasons why the wide scale food offending associated with the horsemeat scandal occurred. Similarly, as neutralisations are theorised to be used to help retain an offender's feeling of belonging in society, discovering these justifications may be of use in attempting to understand how wider societal attitudes to food and food production may contribute to offending in food companies.

The previous point regarding wider societal attitudes to food and food crime was also explored using a second part of the experiment which examined food consumers' feelings of

victimisation. One of the earliest studies which analysed attitudes to food crime was conducted by Newman (1957) who looked to explore whether the public would want harsher sentences for those involved in white collar food offending. The study compared the actual sentence handed down for notable food crimes with what the sample of the public would desire and found that the public would have punished more severely. This early study shows that attitudes to food crime may have at least in the past been harsh. However it is unclear whether individuals still view food crime in this light and whether, even if they do, they see consumers as innocent victims of such actions. This point leads onto an interesting element of current research, whereby researchers are exploring the use of neutralisations not just by offenders, but also by victims themselves in order to reduce their sense of being a victim. This use of neutralisations has been most commonly explored in cases of sexual and domestic violence to help understand the rationalisations that lead to victims feeling responsible for, or explaining away the actions of their abusers. For instance Ferraro and Johnson (1983) found that female victims of domestic violence tended to use six rationalisations to reduce their sense of victimisation. These rationalisations included ones which were very similar to the rationalisations used by offenders, for instance the denial of the victimiser, which tried to explain violence as out of the control of the offender for reasons such as them being intoxicated, and the denial of victimisation, which involved elements of feeling responsible for starting the violence. In turn, these rationalisations are similar to both denial of responsibility and denial of the victim, tactics employed by offenders when resolving self-blame issues. Similarly, a later study by Weiss (2011) who looked at the justifications victims of sexual crimes used to not report offences found that the ways victims denied themselves a sense of victimhood reflected justifications used by offenders, and also importantly, reflected dominant norms within society for instance on how a woman should behave or what a classical victim of sexual victimisation is. With these studies in mind it was hoped that by investigating whether there are any specific neutralisations used when reducing a sense of victimisation related to being a food consumer, information would be garnered on firstly, neutralisations that may be leading to a reduced recognition of corporate food crime, and secondly, offer insight into the wider societal attitudes which may lie behind the use of specific neutralisations. Finding neutralisations used by both offenders and victims for instance could be useful in indicating the common explanations for why a food consumer is not a victim, despite being exposed to harm, and then allow further exploration as to how such ideas have formed.

Some studies already conducted may offer clues as to the attitudes that may lie behind any neutralisations discovered. Jacobsen and Dulsrud (2007) explored current ideas surrounding the ethical and responsible consumer and the perception that consumers should be voting in response to these values at the checkout. They comment on how "Consumption, and in particular the act of shopping, have been politicized and made into the subject of individual moral judgement" (Jacobsen and Dulsred, 2007, pg. 479) with rhetoric switching from "consumer rights to consumer duties" (2007, pg.479). Their articles talks of how the



perception has become pervasive throughout many bodies, from companies to NGO's, that consumers should be shopping responsibly and changing practises by voting at the checkout. This rhetoric firmly places responsibility in the hands of the consumer, rather than on the individuals who make products available and decide upon how these products will be sourced and made. Jacobsen and Dulsred (2007) note how the consequence on consumers can be that they end up in battle with ethical aims and the needs of their family, being unable to afford to buy the ethical products whilst still feeling the pressure to do so. While their study concerned the rhetoric of the ethical consumer, their findings allowed predictions to be made about the attitudes that may be present concerning food safety. For instance, it was of interest to see whether the duty of consumers expands to protecting themselves from food scares rather than a focus on companies and governments to regulate food safety. When harm is not a physical one, but a deception, such as in the horsemeat scandal, could attitudes towards whom is at fault reflect ideas of individual responsibility prevalent when it comes to ethical consuming. Similarly, could consumers recognise a feeling of responsibility for food purchases, similar to the desire to shop responsibly shown in Jacobsen and Dulsred's (2007) study, but also struggle with the cost of this and the balance of other needs, leading to an acceptance of victimhood alongside agreement with neutralisations.

Another study which may also give an indication of when notions of individual responsibility may interfere with the perception of industry responsibility is one performed by Kwan (2009) into the effect of moral models of fatness on perception of industry responsibility. Kwan (2009) explored the battle between perceptions of individual and corporate responsibility in relation to obesity in the USA using questionnaires and interviews. Kwan (2009) interestingly found that even where industry responsibility is acknowledged, for instance in creating the demand for unhealthy food products through advertising, blaming the victim still occurs. At the heart of the reasoning for this appeared to be a capitalist sentiment, an emphasis on individualism and the encouragement of being able to control every aspect of one's own life. Kwan (2009) linked this to the explanation and excuse put forward by the food industry, a market choice perspective driven by moral models of fatness and the ideology of American individualism. According to the market choice perspective "individuals have the right to consume whatever they want", the perspective emphasises "themes of choice, common sense and personal responsibility" (Kwan, 2009, pg. 483). Kwan found that this perspective was widely accepted by consumers in the USA, consistent with American ideology, resulting in a view that the food industry was not responsible as food is not forced upon individuals but bought by them. Rather than viewing corporations as creating the demand for such purchases, obesity was seen as a sign that individuals were "unrestrained and lack self-control" (Kwan, 2009, pg.487). The current research looked to find whether Kwan's discovery extended to victim blaming not just in relation to obesity but also in regards to the horsemeat scandal. It sought to see whether some consumers laid the blame not at the foot of corporations but with victims themselves

for not paying more for food, or researching where it came from. Findings such as these could then perhaps be explained by the capitalist culture and encouragement of individual responsibility present within the UK, and fundamentally, a trend towards responsabilisation which is now explained in further detail.

Responsibilisation was a term that emerged in response to a growing trend towards governing in a very different way. Garland (1996) described its initial appearance as “the central government seeking to act upon crime not in a direct fashion through state agencies... but instead by acting indirectly, seeking to activate action on the part of non-state agencies and organisations.” (Garland, 1996, pg.451). It was dominated by terms such as partnership, activating communities, inter-agency cooperation and creating active citizens (Garland, 1996). The main message of responsabilisation became that “the state alone is not, and cannot effectively be, responsible for preventing and controlling crime” everyone from a property owner, to a retailer and most importantly to the individual citizen “must be made to recognise that they too have a responsibility in this regard, and must be persuaded to change their practises in order to reduce criminal opportunities and increase informal controls” (Garland, 1996, pg. 452). The phenomenon filtered down into other aspects of governing and is described by some like Garland as a method of “governance at a distance” (Garland, 1996, pg. 453). Ultimately, the new style meant that responsibility for our own health and safety had been placed back in the hands of the individual and non-state elements of society. What the studies by Jacobsen and Dulsrud (2007) and Kwan (2009) may hint at is the appearance of responsabilisation in consumer culture. Therefore, it was possible that the current study would find rhetoric in participant answers consistent with an ideal of responsabilisation influencing how we place blame for acts of food crime and how we then justify these conclusions.

The current research would therefore explore victimisation alongside neutralisations associated with offending. Using a similar experimental format to that outlined for the first element of the experiment, participants would be given a short scenario to read about being the victim of the horsemeat scandal and their preferred response to it, and then asked to rank their agreement with a number of victimisation focused neutralisations. It was hoped that this would discover any neutralisations which are specifically associated with a reduced feeling of victimisation, as indicated by the participants preferred response to the scenario, allowing a first step in indicating what attitudes may lie behind victim blaming in the food industry. Participants were able to make a choice out of four actions, two corresponding to a response which places blame on the wider food industry and two which are more focused on victim actions or a reduced amount of blame placed on the food industry. In the first offending scenario the four choices corresponded to two clear offending decisions and two non-offending decisions. The main hypotheses of the study to be tested were that those who made an offending decision after reading the hypothetical scenario would show a stronger agreement with neutralisations. Secondly, that those who expressed a lower sense of victimisation by agreeing with statements which placed less blame on corporations for

the horsemeat scandal, would also show stronger agreement with victimisation neutralisations. Finally, it was hypothesised that the neutralisations used by those who hypothetically committed an act of food offending would be similar to the neutralisations used by those who demonstrated a reduced sense of victimisation by placing less blame on corporations. The experiment also gathered information on the reasoning behind participant's responses to statements using two free response questions after the two parts in the hope that some wider clues to the reasons for the use of the neutralisations may be garnered.

Ultimately the study found evidence of victim blaming in relation to food crime associated with acceptance of responsabilisation ideals. It also found a lack of offending decisions within the participant sample possibly indicating the existence of a crime facilitative food industry environment necessary to enable initial offending decisions. The study would eventually argue, as outlined in the discussion, that the discovery of victim blaming associated with responsabilisation indicates the presence of a food industry externality, whereby the use of rhetoric associated with personal and societal responsibility has been exploited to excuse the harmful effects of food industry behaviour.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology chosen as most appropriate for the study aims was of a primarily deductive focus as it was required to test for associations between neutralisations and offending, and neutralisations and a reduced sense of victimisation. However, as well as the deductive element there was also a smaller inductive research technique utilised in order to appreciate and further understand the wider environment the results were placed within. A combination of deductive and inductive methodologies were deemed appropriate for the study as the deductive element would allow for a test of whether there are specific neutralisations associated with food crime while the inductive element would hopefully bring to light evidence, or pointers towards the wider societal and individual reasoning which causes or allows food crime to occur.

### *Design*

In a between subjects design experiment three independent variables were explored. The first independent variable was offending decision and this had two levels, one corresponding to an offending decision and one corresponding to a non-offending decision. The second independent variable was sense of victimisation, and once again this had two levels, sense of victimisation and reduced sense of victimisation. The final independent variable was combined vignette decision and this had two levels, offending and reduced sense of victimisation, and non-offending and sense of victimisation. For all the dependent variable was level of agreement with techniques of neutralisation with the first independent variable having five possible dependent variable options, denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of victim, condemnation of condemners and appeal to higher loyalties. The second independent variable had dependent variable options of denial of injury, denial of criminal intent, denial of victimisation and condemnation of condemners. The final independent variable had all previously mentioned possible neutralisations as the dependent variable.

### *Participants*

The study was completed by 71 participants with 49 fully completed useable responses. Participants were recruited through a poster campaign across the Glasgow University Campus and advertisements on social media pages of University of Glasgow student groups. The study was not restricted to a student population but students and sport groups were targeted to try and obtain as many responses as possible. Targeting sports and health and nutrition groups also enabled a wider proportion of the population to be included, not just current students, as friends of those who completed the study could also participate. Out of the useable survey responses there was an almost equal split for gender, with 24 males and 25 females. Due to the time restraints and subject matter of the study it was not deemed

possible to gain access to individuals within the companies caught up in the horsemeat scandal so an exploratory study involving those at the consumer end of the scandal appeared an appropriate compromise. This would allow both an accurate exploration of the attitudes affecting consumers' sense of victimhood but also allow the possible discovery of dangerous company behaviours that have been accepted by the wider community.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Ethical permission from the University ethics committee was sought and obtained before the collection of any participant data. As the experiment did not involve the use of any particularly vulnerable groups it was relatively low risk in terms of ethical boundaries, however, the subject matter, involving a scandal which could well have affected many of the participants, required a sensitive approach to question formation. As the experiment was conducted online it was of importance to ensure informed consent was obtained appropriately so all participants were given access to a plain language statement indicating the main purpose of the study along with contact details for relevant enquires. The online survey tool also had a function enabled whereby anybody who did not agree to informed consent at the beginning of the survey was exited from taking part, similarly any participants who exited the survey before the end had their data removed from the analysis in case this was to indicate withdrawn consent. A slight level of detail was omitted from the initial experiment description so as not to bias the results of the experiment by informing participants that the study was specifically looking at justifications for behaviour however the true purpose was revealed at the end of the survey along with contact details for any queries.

### *Procedure*

Participants were recruited through a poster or online advertisement and invited to complete a 15-20 minute online experiment investigating the repercussions of the horsemeat scandal. If participants wished to take part they were emailed a copy of the plain language statement and given the link to the online experiment. Participants were then free to complete the study in their own time from their own home. When completing the study participants first had to agree to give their consent to participate in the study. After consenting some basic details about participants were gathered specifically, their gender, age and topic of study or employment type before moving them on to the first part of the experiment. For this they were given instructions to read a hypothetical vignette which detailed a possible act of food crime, participants then had to indicate the choice they would make if they were the CEO of the company. They had a choice of four options, two of which corresponded to an offending decision and two of which corresponded to a non-offending decision. After this they were then directed to the next page which contained a list of statements corresponding to five different techniques of neutralisation, participants had to indicate their agreement with such statements through the use of a five point likert scale. The levels of agreement were as follows strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor

disagree, disagree and strongly disagree. A final question simply asked participants to give as much detail as possible as to why they answered in the manner they did. Participants were then directed onto the second part of the experiment which once again involved reading a hypothetical vignette, this time imaging themselves in the position of a consumer of food involved in the horsemeat scandal. Once again they had four possible options to choose from two of which corresponded to responses which acknowledged a sense of victimisation, and two of which corresponded to a reduced sense of victimisation. After making this choice participants were then directed to another list of statements corresponding to techniques of neutralisation and once again asked to indicate their agreement using the options already listed. When these were finished there was a final question exploring why participants had answered in the manner they did. Once the experiment was completed participants were moved to a final screen which thanked them for their participation and fully debriefed them on the aims of the study.

### *Analyses and Expected Results*

All of the dependent variables were originally planned to be analysed using three individual independent samples t-test's followed by bonferroni comparisons to identify the location of any significant differences. It was predicted that those in the offending group would score lower on the dependent variables, indicating stronger levels of agreement with neutralisations, than those who made a non-offending decision. Similarly, it was predicted that those in the reduced sense of victimisation group would score lower on the dependent variables, indicating stronger agreement with neutralisations, than those in the victimisation group. For the final hypothesis it was predicted that those who both offended and had a reduced sense of victimisation would show agreement with the same neutralisations.

The free response written answers from the participants were analysed in an attempt to spot the themes lying behind individuals justifications for the use of neutralisations. Themes were first identified by reading through all the responses and getting an idea of the differing views evident. Once these were identified general themes were generated and given a colour code. Statements which matched this code were highlighted and coloured accordingly. A separate document was then made in to which highlighted statements were cut and separated into their relevant theme sections, creating a collection of related statements for each theme. As well as this analysis, the links between justifications used by individual participants were identified by creating a spider map with a header for each theme as a central branch. Participant statements were then read through again and any time a theme was mentioned by a participant alongside the mention of another theme a link was drawn. Notes were also made of when a link between themes justified a particular individual's point of view. Finally, each themes quotes were analysed for differences and similarities followed by differences and similarities in the links between themes participants used.

## **RESULTS**

### *Part One: Quantitative Data*

The study was completed by 71 participants with 49 useable responses; the unusable responses were removed due to only half completion of the study questions. The data was tested for normality by a Shapiro Wilk test but unfortunately due to the low number of respondents did not meet the requirements for normally distributed data meaning that non parametric statistics had to be used instead.

### *Offending Data*

The first part of the analysis sought to test whether those who made an offending decision after reading a hypothetical food crime scenario were more likely to agree with neutralisations, indicated by a lower group mean as agreement was ranked with a 1 or 2 and disagreement a 4 or 5. The independent variable was the offending decision which was originally aimed to be split into two, with the first two options corresponding to a non-offending decision and the second two options indicating an offending decision. However due to the majority of participant responses being either option a (20 responses) or option b (25 responses), it was not deemed useful to assess for significant differences in the data as a very small number of participants chose the offending options (4) increasing the risk of the discovery of incorrect significant results. There also were not enough differences between the two most popular answer choices to warrant further investigation into any differences between these groups. For this reason only descriptive analysis was performed for the first hypothesis. The dependent variables labels are as follows D1 denial of responsibility, D2 denial of injury, D3 denial of victim, D4 condemnation of condemners, D5 appeal to higher loyalties.

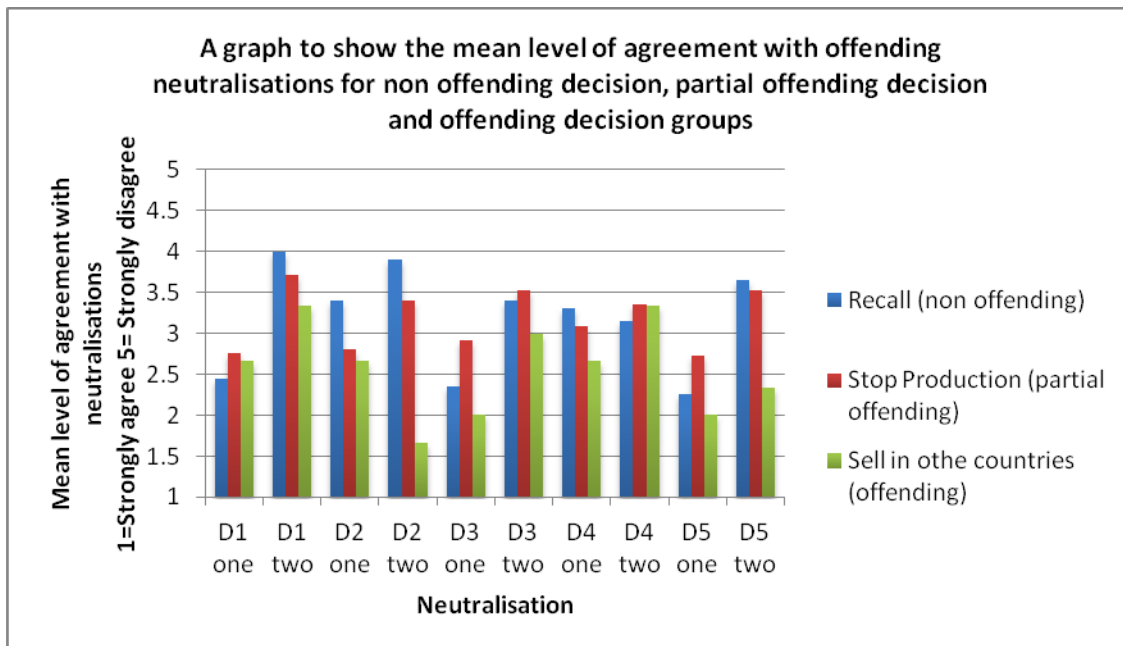


Figure 1

From the descriptive statistics it appeared that for most cases the non-offending and partial offending option demonstrated stronger disagreement with the neutralisations than those who picked the offending option. This was particularly apparent for D2 two, with the non-offending group mean of 3.9, the partial offending group mean at 3.4, compared to a group mean of 2.67 for the offending group. D5 two also seemed to have a large contrast with a non-offending group mean of 3.65 and partial offending group mean of 3.52, compared to a group mean of 2.33 for the offending group. Despite these observations however the extremely small size of the offending group compared to the non-offending and partial offending group made any comparisons made likely to result in false positive findings so further analysis was not carried out. This meant that the first and third hypotheses could not be tested and no assumptions could be made beyond provisional analysis of descriptive data. It was therefore provisionally concluded that it appeared as though those who did make an offending decision showed stronger agreement with neutralisations as indicated by a lower group mean, but that the low number of participant offending decisions may indicate a lack of offending mentality within the consumer population.

### *Victimisation Data*

The second part of the analysis sought to test whether those who showed a lesser sense of victimisation, would show stronger agreement with victim neutralisations than those who demonstrated a sense of victimisation. Once again a lower mean would indicate a higher sense of agreement with neutralisations and a higher mean would indicate a lower sense of agreement with neutralisations. The independent variable was the response to the victimisation vignette, with 20 participants choosing victimisation responses and 29 choosing non victimisation responses, and the dependent variable was the level of agreement with a number of statements corresponding to four different techniques of



neutralisation. The neutralisations were D6, denial of injury, D7, denial of criminal intent, D8, denial of victimisation and D9, condemnation of condemners.

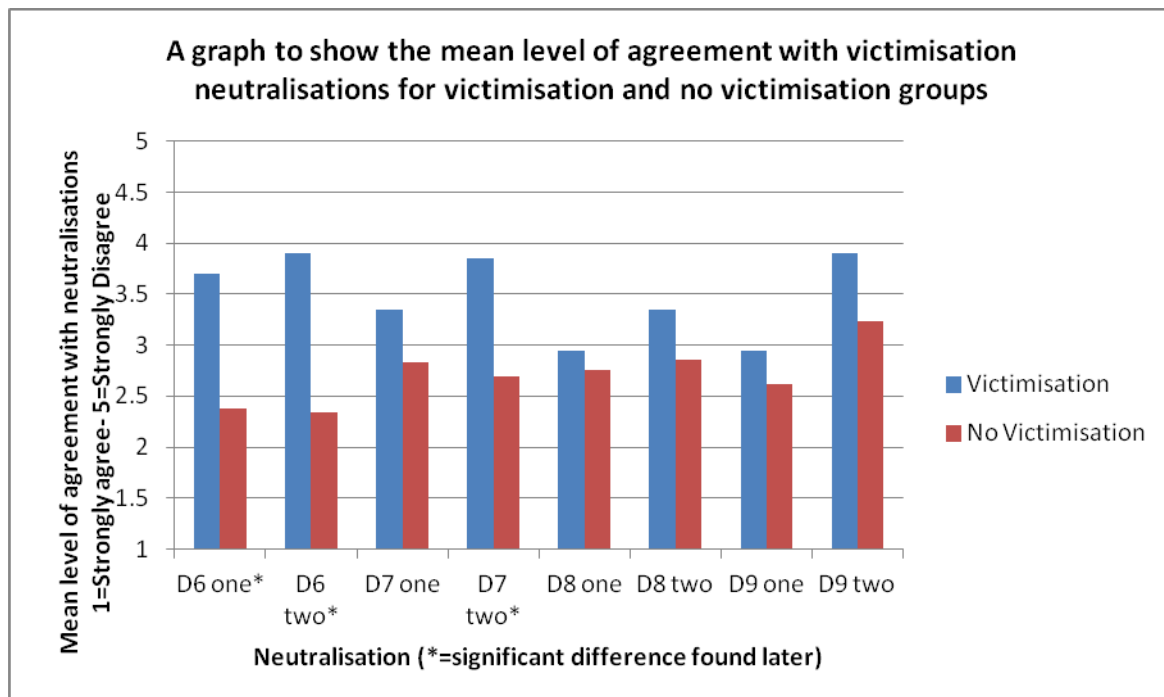


Figure 2

As can be seen from the descriptive statistics shown in the graph above it appeared as though for all of the neutralisations those who disagreed more strongly with them were more likely to feel a sense of victimisation showing some provisional evidence in agreement with the second hypothesis. The most interesting mean differences were on the D6 one neutralisation (Denial of Injury) with a victimisation mean of 3.70, SD= 1.74 versus a no victimisation mean of 2.38, SD= 0.99, the D6 two neutralisation (Denial of Injury) with a victimisation mean of 3.90, SD= 1.07 versus no victimisation mean of 2.34, SD= 1.01 and D7 two neutralisation (Denial of Criminal Intent) with a victimisation mean of 3.85, SD= 0.98 versus a no victimisation mean of 2.69, SD=1.14. The D7 one neutralisation (Denial of Criminal Intent) and D9 two neutralisation (Condemnation of Condemners) looked like they may also be significant with a victimisation mean of 3.35, SD=1.14 versus a no victimisation mean of 2.83, SD= 1.03 for D7 one and a victimisation mean of 3.90, SD=1.17 versus a no victimisation mean of 3.24, SD= 1.24 for D9 two.

A Mann Whitney U test was employed to check for significant differences in the median as the data was not normally distributed. This test confirmed three significant differences, namely the D6 one, D6 two (denial of injury) and D7 two (denial of criminal intent) neutralisations. The medians for D6 one, of 4 for victimisation and 2 for no victimisation, were shown to be significantly different, (Mann Whitney U, 123 (49) = 123 p=0.001) as was the medians for D6 two, of 4 for victimisation and 2 for no victimisation, (Mann Whitney U, 86.5 (49) = 86.5 p=0.001). The medians for D7 two, of 4 for victimisation and 3 for no

victimisation, was also shown to be a significant difference (Mann Whitney U, 133.5 (49) = 1335 p=0.001). There were no other significant differences found meaning that the null hypothesis, that the distribution of rankings of agreement is the same across categories of victimisation, could not be rejected for the other five neutralisations. Therefore these findings provided partial support for the second hypothesis, showing that for the denial of injury neutralisations and for one of the denial of criminal intent neutralisations, those who showed a lesser sense of victimisation when considering actions after the horsemeat scandal, were more likely to agree with these neutralisations.

### *Summary of Part One Findings*

From the first part of the analysis it became clear that there were some neutralisations specifically associated with a lessened acknowledgement of victimisation, specifically the denial of injury and denial of criminal intent neutralisations. While these were where significant differences were found it was also of note that the pattern throughout was that those who felt a lesser sense of victimisation showed more agreement with neutralisations indicating the presence of a number of justifications for blaming victims for the occurrence of food crime. The first part of the study also found that while there were consumers who placed blame on other consumers for the occurrence of food crime, very few individuals would make an offending decision if they were working for a food company. The few that did offend appeared to follow the predicted pattern whereby they showed stronger agreement with neutralisations than those who did not offend. The lack of offending participants may indicate instead a mentality that is adopted to enable food crime only when individuals are actually employed and working within a food company. This idea will be explored further in the discussion when the wider implications of the study are outlined. The next part of the study analysed the qualitative data to get an idea of the wider reasoning behind the way participants answered.

### *Part Two: Qualitative Analysis*

#### *Offending Explanations*

Despite the lack of testable findings for the first part of the experiment the free response part of the questionnaire which sought to garner information on why participants had responded to the survey in the way they did, offered some interesting observations. Participants' answers were analysed for common themes resulting in the identification of six commonly mentioned factors, namely company responsibility, consumer responsibility, morality and ethics, company need for profit, consumer power and a need for information. The most commonly mentioned factor was company responsibility, mentioned by fifteen participants, followed by consumer responsibility, mentioned by seven participants and morality and ethics mentioned by six participants. Themes were often mentioned together, particularly the balance between company responsibility and consumer responsibility, which was mentioned five times.

### *Company Responsibility Observations*

Company responsibility refers to any mention by the participants of a company's responsibility to its consumers. There were variations within answers of how responsible participants felt companies should be for consumer safety with some identifying more responsibility than others. For instance three of the participants saw a limited level of company responsibility, with consumer awareness also being seen as necessary. Participant 22 spoke of how businesses should "inform their customers about what goes into their products" but leave the "customer to make informed decisions because the aim of a business is to make money and not reduce profits by being completely honest". This answer also demonstrated the reasoning for reduced company responsibility being down to other requirements of both consumers to be responsible, and the need for companies to make acceptable profits, linking to the consumer responsibility theme and need for profit theme analysed later. Participant 76 similarly spoke of an underlying company responsibility to make "people aware of every aspect of the product" but that this then meant that consumers cannot "blame the company merely because they make it available". The final participant to mention company responsibility at a limited level was participant 37 who thought that "businesses have a wider responsibility than just their profit margin. It is important that they recognise the impact of their products on the environment, their employees and their customers" but that consumers should be "aware of what their buying" and "recognise their decision to remain uniformed". What appeared to link all these three perceptions was recognition of a very basic level of company responsibility accompanied by a perceived wider responsibility of consumers to educate themselves and make "informed" decisions on their purchases. These responses demonstrated how important the perception is for some that we are in control of the purchasing decisions we make, possibly indicating the themes of individualism, choice, and personal responsibility, which Kwan (2009) found, and the wider influence of responsabilisation trickling down so that consumers feel they must somehow attempt to control their exposure to risk from food by being 'informed' rather than relying on responsible practise from companies.

As well as those who saw a balance of company responsibility and consumer responsibility weighted towards the latter, a number of participants also expressed views that suggested a stronger requirement on companies to act appropriately. For example, participant 29 spoke of how they did not feel that "there is enough information readily available to consumers to make educated choices about what they are eating" and spoke of how even though this information may be available online, in a supermarket making quick informed decisions was not possible with the current information provided by companies. Another spoke of businesses having a "responsibility to play in providing safe products... perhaps still selling unhealthy products but making it clear" so that consumers can then make informed decisions. Another participant thought there was "too much cost saving applied to the food

industry instead of producing higher quality goods” and that “poor education” and the cost of buying high quality goods was at the heart of this. An issue that the participant felt could be improved by the industry bulk buying more of the healthy foods rather than the refined junk food products. These perspectives showed a differing opinion on what sort of information companies were thought to be obliged to provide demonstrating that some individuals see a limit to how responsible we can really be for assuring our safety.

Although the perception of the level of responsibility companies have for consumers health differed between the participants, there did appear to be a clear line that businesses should not be crossing when it came to consumer safety. This line could explain why so few participants made an offending decision, possibly indicating that the scenario used in the experiment demonstrated an example of a safety limit that should not be crossed. Participant 52’s statement that “profit is not as important as the safety of consumers, period” illustrated this perceived minimum standard well, similarly participant 60’s opinion that ultimate responsibility “for not putting harmful ingredients into products... lies with the manufacturer and the government” demonstrated the safety level that consumers should expect to be upheld. Participant 30 linked his opinion on the minimum level of safety to morality and ethics, “I have strong moral and ethical views on life. I don’t believe in shortcuts at the detriment of quality and the health of others”, while participant 67 voiced an opinion on the limits of profit seeking behaviour “business should be about making enough money to support yourself in life, not at the expense of others”. These opinions showed some of the beliefs that lie behind the justifications for ethical lines that businesses must not cross.

Participant 67’s mention of a limit to the behaviours allowed to create profits was a topic mentioned by four other participants. Most of these participants spoke of how profit seeking activity should be limited by companies and that by doing so, the company will benefit. For instance, participant 72 states that being responsible for what you sell to customers and putting their health as a “top priority” will lead to better profit through greater “customer satisfaction”. Similarly, participant 68 acknowledges the importance of profits to companies but feels that this doesn’t come above their responsibilities to customers “business should take responsibility for their products although profits are important customers should be made to feel safe”.

In summary, the findings appear to show that although there is a basic level of agreement on what is inappropriate behaviour by companies there are differences perceived in how far that responsibility then extends. For some participants, consumers need to take on more of the responsibility in finding out what is healthy, once they are adequately informed of what is in products, while for others this duty is for companies and governments to fulfil. The sort of answers provided suggested a differing adoption of responsabilisation, with some individuals quite strongly emphasising the need for consumers to protect themselves, and others not excusing some of the more controversial practises of companies. The basic

level of company responsibility perceived by most participants may explain why there were no offending decisions made, the vignette could have been perceived by participants as an example of a behaviour which crosses the line of acceptable company practise, leading to non-offending decisions being made. This in turn meant that the use of neutralisations was not required, as no offending decision was made that needed justifying.

### *Consumer Responsibility Observations*

Consumer responsibility was not just mentioned in conjunction with company responsibility as previously detailed, but was also mentioned as an explanatory factor on its own. A number of participants who mentioned consumer responsibility placed a large onus on the individual to look after their own health and research what was in the products. Participant 5 had a strong view that it was naïve to think “businesses will take an ethical standpoint” and that it was down to the consumer to take an “active stand” and be “actively informed regarding the business practises of companies”. Participant 5 also felt that the information was “readily available for those who look” a view in contrast to those previously mentioned in the company responsibility section where some participants spoke of how companies should be providing more information to consumers.

The idea of an informed consumer was a common point in the consumer responsibility justifications. For instance participant 37’s view that it is “the consumers responsibility to be aware of what they are buying or to recognise that they are making the decision to remain uniformed”. This view showed an emphasis like the previous quotes on being responsible for seeking out information not expecting it to be given to you by the company. Others who stressed the importance of being informed perceived the responsibility for any health consequences after this as on the consumer as “when the consumer is aware of what they are purchasing they cannot blame the company merely because they make it available” (participant 76). Similarly, participant 64 spoke of how “the choice is the consumers to choose the (informed) unhealthy or unsafe choice or safe choice”. These points show that beyond a basic line of safety provided by companies, consumers are seen as responsible for their own health in relation to their food purchases. These sorts of views may be of importance when considering the discovery of some level of victim blaming in the latter part of the experiment, for instance whether the perception that consumers should be responsible for making informed decisions about unsafe products results in a perception that there is no injury from company actions. The logic may be that if the consumer is aware of a products ingredients they cannot claim to have been harmed by a product they knew had the potential to lead to a health consequence. It mirrors an adoption of responsabilisation as it shows an acceptance of the idea that we must protect ourselves by being aware and active in our purchasing decisions.

Participant 18 showed a view that seemingly played down the severity of company actions “I think theres a lot of hype about food causing diseases... If I wanted something special with my food id pay more for better quality.” This view demonstrated both ideas in line with

denial of injury, as the participant expressed a view suggesting there wasn't much harm caused by products, and an acceptance of the idea that how much you chose to spend dictates the quality of the goods.

Overall the majority of the consumer responsibility statements placed a large onus on the consumer to be educated and aware of what they were purchasing. The most conflicted statements were those where company and consumer responsibility were mentioned simultaneously with opinions differing on how much consumers should be accepting responsibility for. This conflict, along with a number of participants mentioning the need for consumers to be informed and not blaming companies for merely making products available, hint at the possibility of wider influences on attitudes being responsabilisation and self-control as well as an underlying ideal of company behaviour.

### *Morality and Ethics Observations*

Mentions of morality and ethics by participants corresponded to the norm of behaviour they perceived as being appropriate for a profit seeking company. Participant 19's comments illustrate this well "companies main aim is to make a profit however that should not be at the expense of consumers health for moral reasons", similarly, participant 62 states "ethics should never be less important than making money!". Participant 77 went further suggesting that it wasn't just the company's moral behaviour which was important but also societies, "capitalist consumer culture is running us into the ground. Sustainable, ethically responsible, fairly traded, safely farmed produce HAS to be the way forward for the good of individual's health and society's collective moral conscience". Morality and ethics were mainly used as a justification for the standards that companies should not be crossing, a basic level of protection to individuals from harm.

One individually interesting participant view was that of participant 5 who unlike most of the mentions of morality, which came hand in hand with an increased perception of company responsibility, saw ethical standpoints as naïve and instead felt consumers should be more responsible. "In an ideal world you would like to think that all businesses will take an ethical standpoint when it comes to what they provide for consumers but ultimately that is a naïve view as business primary goal is to produce wealth for those involved". Participant 5 then went on to make statements in line with a strict view on consumer responsibility. This view and the observation that most participants who mentioned morality had views emphasising company responsibility could indicate that there is a standard moral norm within society for the limits of profit seeking activity and that in order to differ from this some form of neutralisation must be used. For example participant 5 may be demonstrating an instance of denial of responsibility, putting consumer naivety as a justification for reducing the responsibility of companies for their ethically questionable actions.

### *Company Profit Observations*

When company profit was mentioned it appeared to be to excuse some level of dishonesty, or lowered level of responsibility for a company based upon the idea that a company's main aim is to make a profit. They didn't excuse all business behaviour just that some actions are excusable in order to make money. These statements include the previously mentioned view of participant 5 and participant 22 "the aim of a business is to make money and not reduce profits by being completely honest". One participant went further and spoke of the negative perception companies receive "I think that people forget that business create jobs and opportunities that would not be there otherwise and not all of them are 'evil corporations'. I think responsibility for the purchasing of products should be shared" participant 69.

While there were the previously mentioned accounts which appeared to side more with companies and their need for profit leading to some negative consequences, there were other accounts that recognised company's main motivation but still saw a clear divide they should not be crossing. For instance the previously mentioned statements from participant 19 "Companies main aim is to make a profit however that should not be at the expense of consumers health" and participant 75 "Obviously a business needs to make a profit. No profit = no business. However it also needs to obey the law and look after employees and customers if it is to survive".

### *Other Observations: Consumer Power and Need for Information*

Consumer power was mentioned three times by participants explaining the reasoning for their answers. It revolved around the idea that the consumer has the power to change things as they can make or break businesses. Interestingly, it once again reflected the unclear territory as to who is responsible for creating a safe food market as opinions differed on whether consumers should be using their power to affect change or whether companies should be utilising consumer power by providing safer products which will win consumers. For instance the views of participant 5 "I feel that the only way things are going to change and improve is if the consumer takes a more active stand and ensures they are more actively informed regarding the business practises of companies", compared to the view of participant 72 "Businesses need to be aware and responsible of what they are selling to consumers. It is a well-known fact that customer satisfaction leads to better profits therefore consumers health is a top priority". It is similar to consumer responsibility but more directed towards how the consumer can be empowered by shopping in certain ways.

Need for information was mentioned within participant responses twice, responses mentioned that more information needs to be provided to consumers in an easy to digest format so that they can make healthier decisions. In this manner need for information could

be seen as more aligned to opinions which recognised a higher level of company responsibility.

### *Victimisation Explanations*

On analysing the victimisation explanations four main themes became apparent, namely, company responsibility, consumer responsibility, overreaction and distrust. Once again the most commonly mentioned theme was company responsibility with fourteen participants mentioning it, consumer responsibility was the next most common theme mentioned seven times. Overreaction and distrust themes were both mentioned twice.

### *Company Responsibility Observations*

Many participants commented on companies having a requirement to provide a fundamental level of safety, a mirrored finding to that in the first part of the experiment. Participant 29 spoke of how no matter what price is paid “customers of any shop in the UK should be able to have confidence that the food they are buying is safe for consumption” and participant 45 stated how “reduced price could understandably result in lower quality, however a level of safety should always be maintained in produce”. Participant 45’s statement about decreased quality not equalling decreased safety were common in participant responses with three other participants commenting that while they’d accept a lesser quality product for less money they would not stand for the inclusion of dangerous ingredients.

As well as comments on the unacceptability of company’s adding dangerous ingredients to food, some participants also outlined their idea of the wider responsibilities of companies, for instance participant 60’s perception that “manufacturers need to do more/take more responsibility when it comes to standards, especially in terms of standards for workers”. Participant 37 also spoke of how companies “trying to eek out ever greater profit margins” by “exaggerating and inflating” the cost of quality products has had consequences for suppliers, specifically with the example of the removal of the National Milk Consortium. These views showed ideas that ran in opposition to some of the victim blaming that was found in other parts of the study, they showed that some participants saw a role companies may be playing in harming consumers and the wider food industry. One participant even spoke of how “corporations viewing things purely as numbers is what decreases the quality” (participant 19) demonstrating some opinions which erred away from the victim responsibility angle.

One particularly noteworthy participant view was that of participant 78 who commented:

“Not all customers are in a position or able to access the information you are talking about (elderly people and people with disabilities) and the supermarkets go out off their way to gain consumers trust, it’s a word that they use in their advertising all the time. As a result



people do trust them to keep them safe. Is it too much to ask that if a product says that it is something that it is actually the thing that its supposed to be?"

This appeared significant as it showed recognition of the wider environment food safety issues are placed within, where large companies spend a lot of time and money creating a brand image and trust in that image that they rely upon to sell products. As the participant points out this may be the only information source consumers have to rely on so it becomes a company responsibility issue when this information is not reliable or is misleading. One question that arises from this participant statement is whether this perception is shared by other consumers and resultantly, how far this responsibility extends. When the issue changes from mislabelling products to providing enough information or safeguards to prevent people eating foods which may lead to obesity, will there still be sympathy for consumers who have not accessed other sources of information or will this be associated with self- control and consumer responsibility. This question is in fact one of the most important talking points in research with many questioning the role food companies are playing in the obesity epidemic and how they are using personal responsibility to excuse their actions (Brownell & Warner, 2009), an argument which is discussed in the final part of the paper.

The participant statements within the company responsibility theme show that there is a perception that companies should be taking more responsibility for the consequences of their profit driven motivations on the safety of the food market. These views showed far less association with a strong onus on the consumer to shop responsibly and could therefore reflect the views of the consumers who did not blame victims of the food scandal for its occurrence. Fewer mentions of informed consumers and active consumer choices suggest that it is possible that a lesser adoption of the ideal of responsabilisation leads to a greater recognition of the safety requirements of companies.

### *Consumer Responsibility Observations*

Consumer responsibility statements focussed primarily on the idea that if consumers spend less on food they can only expect that the quality of that product will be poor. There wasn't much sympathy for not being able to afford spending money on food and many statements expressed a seeming annoyance that people wouldn't expect paying less would end up reducing the quality of products, for instance the following statement from participant 5.

"the on-going demand of consumers to make products cheaper is ultimately going to lead to situations where the quality of the product will be reduced, where else do people expect these price reductions to come from"

Participant 30's explanation appears to exhibit a clear statement of victim blaming, associating the choice of not spending on food with health:

“can you afford NOT to spend more on food? It is your health after all. I’d love my shopping bill to be cheaper but I make my choice and budget accordingly”

This demonstrated both the previously mentioned observation of a lack of sympathy with the position of not having the money to spend on expensive food and a seeming acceptance that of your spending less money it’s your fault that the product is not good for you rather than the company for supplying it. This sort of statement could explain why denial of injury was agreed with significantly more for those who didn’t blame the company but the consumer, as it showed no association of a company selling low quality products with an irresponsible act, rather consumers as making a choice to expose themselves to harm.

Participant 72 showed another example of victim blaming explaining that they saw reduced quality in products as the result of “ever changing consumer habits” with consumers “spending less on food” forcing businesses to drive down prices and quality. However the participant also showed an understanding that the drive for lower prices may lie in the recession and the impact it has had on people’s budgets leaving the participant to then question whether it is “right to provide those who can only afford cheap products with rubbish quality goods”. This perhaps demonstrates the difficulty people have in apportioning blame for incidents related to food products.

Similar to the first part of the experiment the idea of an informed consumer was important to two of the participants with participant 37 placing that responsibility firmly in the consumers’ hands. They stated that “it is everyones responsibility to be aware of what is good and bad for them and decide whether the risk is worth it.” This perception was very similar to the denial of criminal intent statement which garnered significantly more agreement from those who placed more responsibility for the horsemeat scandal on the consumer. Specifically the statement, it is not a company’s responsibility to make people aware of what should be eaten sparingly but the government and the consumer. It demonstrated an ideal of personal responsibility and self-control that governs perceptions around food and consumption. Participant 69’s mention of consumer responsibility was perhaps slightly more forgiving but still didn’t see the responsibility for creating healthy choices coming from food companies.

“I do believe it is the consumers responsibility to understand that a ready meal costing £1 and 90 ingredients on the back is probably not as nutritious as buying the components of the meal and cooking it themselves. This knowledge should come from schools, community centres, family and friends etc.”

This view sees consumers as responsible for gathering the information from other sources and combined with the previous statements demonstrates the presence of rhetoric surrounding being responsible for your own health and body. It showed that while the consumer is not seen as being the sole carrier of responsibility, unlike some of the other

participant views, the company is not seen as responsible for educating about healthy choices, or informing consumers beyond providing the correct ingredient's.

As a whole the consumer responsibility statements perhaps provided the most in terms of trying to understand the reasons behind the significant differences that were found. They appeared to demonstrate a heavy placing of responsibility on the consumer and at times an overlooking, or lessened expectation of the responsibilities of companies. Reduced quality was instead sometimes seen as the inevitable result for businesses products because of the demand from consumers for cheap products.

#### *Other Themes: Overreaction and Distrust*

A couple of participant statements could be identified as following an overreaction theme. Participant 68 for instance commented "I think people in this country forget just how fortunate we are to have food and water in comparison to third world countries ... consumers at times over react and expect too much". Participant 69 similarly stated "I think issues concerning food and labelling are highly exaggerated". These comments appeared very similar to the two denial of injury statements which were found to be agreed with most by those who placed more blame on consumers for the horsemeat scandal. This provides more evidence alongside the statistical evidence that denial of injury attitudes may exist in regards to food consumption. The comments clearly lessen the perceived impact of company actions on consumers within the UK food market, blaming consumers for being too sensitive rather than questioning what is acceptable behaviour.

In contrast, another couple of participants demonstrated views consistent with distrust in the food industry. Participant 57 expressed how they had changed their behaviour drastically becoming vegan and only buying locally as they "do not trust food companies". Participant 78, whose comments were mentioned earlier in the company responsibility section, expressed feelings of fear associated with food industry practise "we do believe them because it is too frightening to think too deeply about what you are actually eating". These views demonstrate the other side of the coin to those who made statements about overreaction to the food scandal, possibly showing some of the motivation which may lie behind those who didn't place blame on the consumer for the horsemeat scandal.

#### *Summary of Part Two Findings*

The overall findings of the qualitative data shed further light on the big influences on consumers perception of the UK food industry. As predicted by previous research, responsabilisation, self-control and capitalist ideals all appear to have impacted upon how consumers explain and view the occurrence of food crime. Some of the statements suggested, particularly within the consumer responsibility and over-reaction themes, that stronger adoption of ideals in line with responsabilisation and the importance of the pursuit of profit, led to a lesser requirement on companies to protect consumers and provide them

with product information. Similarly, a greater recognition of the role companies play, or should be playing in creating safe products and a healthy food industry, was associated with a lower mentioning of phrases and words associated with greater consumer responsabilisation. It was interesting that some of the more extreme views when it came to consumer responsibility very much saw spending less on food, and not researching food, as a careless or naïve decision by the consumer and did not question the ethics or legality of companies making dangerous products for those on a lower budget. This could illustrate a quite negative consequence, of lessened sympathy with victims and resultant lack of demand to hold companies to account, resulting from adopting the idea that we are responsible for the safety of our purchasing decisions. This consequence could indicate responsabilisation as a method companies can exploit to externalise the negative consequences of marketing and selling cheaply made products, an argument that is further expanded within the discussion.

## DISCUSSION

Viewed together, the two parts of this study have offered insight into the influence of consumer responsibility on attitudes towards victims of food crime. From the first part of the study it became clear that those individuals who placed less blame for the horsemeat scandal on the big players in the UK food industry were more likely to instead question the decisions and reactions of the consumers who had been victimised. The neutralisations they agreed with, both denied victims a sense that anything significantly dangerous had happened and allowed responsibility to be placed onto the consumer rather than being seen as a failure by food companies to protect its customers. The second part of the study then allowed for a more in depth understanding as to the deeper motivations that may lie behind these neutralisations with participants' statements that both mirrored the neutralisations agreed with and commonly spoke of personal responsibility and the need to be informed which appear in line with a wider acceptance of the principle of consumer responsibility. The actively informed consumer was a commonly mentioned idea, often even in those who had recognised a greater responsibility on companies to look after its consumers, seemingly demonstrating the acceptance of personal responsibility for safety when it comes to food consumption choices. This it could be argued reflects the general societal push to consumer responsibility and governance at a distance mentioned by Garland (1996). Using these findings, of a general trend towards consumer responsibility and resultant victim blaming, and the findings of other researchers looking at the placing of responsibility for obesity, an argument will now be placed that the food industry is utilising consumer responsibility as a medium to avoid blame for the health consequences associated with both producing dangerous or unhealthy foods and marketing them.

The first piece of evidence for this perspective is the already noted acceptance of consumer responsibility and capitalist sentiments evident within participant answers. A number of the participants likened not making an informed choice and spending more on food products as naïve and lacking the common sense to see that lessened product safety and quality would be the inevitable result. It was seen as a choice to pay less for food, or not research enough, supposedly knowing and accepting that this had the potential to lead to purchasing harmful products. Alongside this, participants' general acceptance that the scandal was somehow unavoidable due to the nature of the new globalised food chain showed an agreement with the idea that society is to blame for demanding a food supply chain which outsources many responsibilities and makes it harder for companies to control standards. This view echoed the sentiments of consumer responsibility as it clearly saw a responsibility on the consumer and society to be active in protecting themselves from food product related harm, not relying on government or industry regulations to protect them. It was of interest that government regulation was mentioned very little in comparison to mentions of consumer and company responsibility once again supporting the idea that this

perception of control has been devolved downwards. Similarly, the agreement with denial of injury neutralisations and the mentions of consumers in the UK overreacting also showed a general lack of recognition that there was any harm from industry practise. Both of these attitudes can also be found when looking at the research into the relation between food industry practise and obesity. As already mentioned Kwan (2009) found that obesity was heavily linked to personal responsibility even when industry's role in advertising products was acknowledged. A study by Bonfiglioli, Smith, King, Chapman, and Holding (2007) in Australia found that when obesity was mentioned in television news stories there was a dominant discourse of poor personal nutrition causing weight gain, with all efforts to stop it being directed at an individuals need to eat less and move more. Environmental factors on the other hand, were neglected, specifically any attention to what many researchers have termed the "obesogenic environment" (Adler & Stewart, 2009), which highlights the importance of longer working hours, less infrastructure revolved around walking or cycling and the presence of a food market and advertising structure dominated by processed and energy dense foods on increasing obesity. Just like the views in the current study much of the talk about the current obesity crisis has been focussed on personal responsibility and individual action to reverse the health consequences, rather than questioning the effect current environmental conditions and industry practise are having on eating habits (Adler & Stewart, 2009).

The general focus on personal responsibility in relation to food consumption in both the current study on the horsemeat scandal and other research into obesity shows how ideals of personal responsibility have been creating an environment which blames victims more than government and business. What will now be argued is that this acceptance of individual responsibility, whether it results from responsabilisation in the UK or capitalist ideals of choice in the USA, is being used by the food industry as a way to avoid the blame for the negative consequences of their business practise and instead place the cost of fixing it back onto the consumer. By encouraging victim blaming, companies can use the defence that even if they've made a product available it is not their fault consumers went on to purchase it, instead the products they supply are fuelled by demands from consumers, not fuelled by the demand they have created. In relation to my findings this is important as those who victim blamed agreed that the horsemeat scandal was an inevitable consequence of a globalised food industry, caused by a minority of individuals. Rather than feeling distrustful and changing shopping habits these participants felt people were overreacting and not seeing their own responsibility in purchasing decisions. There were views which also saw the culture of society, encouraging a globalised capitalist food chain, as responsible for the negative consequences this then has on opening doorways to criminal activity. Society and individual choice has made these outcomes unavoidable rather than a failure of companies to regulate their own behaviour and be responsible for safe industry practise. The presence of this view is however in contradiction to what has happened, with the current investigation into the scandal leading to criminal arrests (The Guardian, 2013b) and

a criticism of one large retailer for claiming this was an industry wide problem when many other companies did not sell adulterated meat products (The Guardian, 2013c). In light of this, combined with the study findings the recent scandal can be seen as an instance where large elements of the food industry have successfully, in the eyes of some consumers, lessened their responsibility for an act that was a direct result of criminal practise not consumer consumption decisions or general industry behaviour. Similarly in terms of obesity there is in fact evidence from numerous scientists that advertising does in fact increase the consumption of snacks and unhealthy foods linked to obesity rather than just encouraging brand switching as claimed by food companies (Halford, Gillespie, Brown, Pontin, & Dovey, 2004; Harris, Bargh, & Brownell, 2009).

Responsibilisation can therefore be seen as having the consequence of allowing companies within the UK food industry to have an excuse which lessens the perceived damage resulting from the products they sell. The horsemeat scandal for some was seen to be partly the result of consumers not avoiding products which are cheap and heavily processed, and indeed encouraging the production of these goods by supporting money saving industry strategies, rather than a reflection of dangerous practise within some retailers allowing criminal adulteration of food sold onto unwitting consumers. Based upon the similarities between the reactions to victims of the horsemeat scandal and reactions to obese individuals a study by Brownell and Warner (2009) is of relevance to the current debate. They compared the actions of Big Food companies with the actions of Big Tobacco and found a number of similarities in the actions currently being used by the big players in the food industry to defend themselves against criticism for their role in the obesity crisis. Brownell and Warner (2009) noted the strategy the food industry are using as a defence, with one of the main tactics being a “focus on personal responsibility as the cause of the nations’ unhealthy diet” and raise fears that “government action usurps personal freedom” (pg.265). They point out that personal responsibility and freedom are central values in America but the use of these hides the reality that some of the most significant health advances have come from “population based public health approaches in which the overall welfare of the citizenry trumps certain individual or industry freedoms” (pg. 265). Using influential spokespersons and taking aggressive positions against organisations who speak out against their claims that their food isn’t encouraging the obesity crisis, Big Food may be seen as actively attempting to influence society and consumers into placing less blame on their actions so they can continue to make profits selling these foods (Brownell & Warner, 2009). While in the USA the salience of personal responsibility may lie with traditional American ideology, it could be that the push towards responsibilisation in the UK has allowed personal and societal responsibility to be a useful weapon for the food industry here too. While Brownell & Warner (2009) were looking specifically at the actions of companies in relation to obesity, what the current study has shown is that the acceptance of consumer responsibility has had a trickle-down effect of also meaning that some consumers are placing blame on victims for food crime due to the pervasiveness of the idea of

consumer and societal responsibility. By further promoting this ideal food companies can be seen as encouraging the externalisation of the harmful effects food can have on health, allowing them to continue marketing, selling and producing products which have negative consequences for consumers, whilst simultaneously blaming customers for buying cheap products without being informed and realising the consequences of their actions.

As well as the discovery of victim blaming and possible links to responsabilisation, the studies discovery of a lack of offending decision in the participants could suggest that there is something unique to elements of the food industry which allowed the original offending decision to occur. As the study did not use any participants directly involved in the food industry it is hard to speculate on precisely what that crime facilitative factor may be however the previously mentioned research by Croall (2007) which identified risk factors such as globalisation, and its increased demand for out of season goods, as well as food market dominance by a limited number of big food companies may act as a starting point. It may be that there is a culture within some food companies which has normalised risk placing the gaining of profit above the safety of consumers as suggested by Brownell and Warner's work and Stuckler and Nestle's (2012) work into obesity and Big Food. Further research into the actual working environment and culture within food companies is needed to speculate on why crimes like the horsemeat scandal have occurred originally, and how business culture may be improved so these incidents are less likely to occur again.

Another important finding is that not all of the participants in the study did blame the victims of food crime for its occurrence. Those who identified as feeling distrustful of the industry and wanting a wide number of individuals to be held accountable from the food industry disagreed more strongly with the neutralisations which placed some responsibility back on the consumer. The more detailed participant answers hinted that this was possibly due to a stricter perception of the responsibilities businesses have to its consumers, occasionally driven by a moral or ethical standpoint. A couple of participants even appeared to recognise the limits to how much information individuals can really take in when making food choices and how they are already being influenced by the trust created through food providers marketing and branding. A clearer understanding of what is behind participants attitudes when they have recognised the wider responsibility of companies to society and its consumers would be a great addition to further research giving pointers as to how resistance to victim blaming can be increased within society.

Although the study has provided some useful new data to be added to the food crime literature there are a number of weaknesses within the research style which could be improved in further research. The most obvious of these weaknesses is the lack of participants involved in the food industry limiting insight into the actual workings of business culture and practise. As already pointed out this has meant that the study has not been able to say much on why the original offending decisions can occur in the first place, or how globalisation and market dominance may be creating food company environments that



are facilitative to criminal activity. While this study did allow an understanding of how consumers and victims react to food crime, increasing the understanding of the wider influences on food consumption attitudes, it doesn't give insight as to how the food industry views its consumers. Future research should examine in more detail the business culture that allows offending to occur and whether neutralisations are a part of this using insiders from the UK food industry.

A second issue with the current research method is the use of a forced choice paradigm to attempt to spot the appearance of a lessened sense of victimisation. Although it appears quite strongly as though the statements provided were indeed measuring a lessened sense of victimisation and its resultant correlation with victim blaming it could be that the choices need further validity testing to ensure they are indeed measuring levels of victimisation. The method was used as it allowed a direct test of association however further research may want to use a free response assessment to get a more nuanced understanding of the attitudes towards victims of food crime.

One final criticism of the research is the somewhat limited number of consumer groups included in the sample. Due to the short time scale it was easier to access consumers from the university community and individuals known to those within the university community. While this did give an accurate picture of some of the differing consumer views within food consumers it could be argued that the participant recruitment style missed out on some important consumer groups. For instance, the use of an online medium for the study and advertising primarily on a university campus may have explained the decreased number of older participants in the study. Similarly, using a university sample may have excluded more individuals from poorer upbringings who may indeed be the consumers most likely to struggle with the costs of food. While students may also be cash limited it could be argued they have a greater accessibility to information on where food is sourced than other groups of consumers this study may have missed. A study by Croall (2009) into white collar crime and patterns of victimisation noted that the elderly and those of a lower socio economic status may be more susceptible to the risks of certain food crime. Specifically, Croall (2009) mentions how the poor are less able to "avoid purchasing cheap and often substandard or goods" while "more affluent customers, are more likely to be informed about the risks involved with foods" (Croall, 2009, pg. 141-142). By not including as many individuals from these backgrounds, the study may have missed a proportion of the population who are more likely to be victimised and are also less aware of the risks they may face. A similar study may therefore want to include these groups more by advertising within community centres and areas where there is wider access to public computers.

In conclusion, the study into the use of neutralisations related to food crime has indicated the negative influence responsabilisation may be having on the public perception of blame for food crime. Views which emphasise personal and societal responsibility over company responsibility were shown to be associated with victim blaming and a lowered perception of

harm from UK food industry actions. Using comparisons with Big Food industry behaviour related to the obesity crisis the study argued that its findings demonstrated how the growing societal acceptance of responsabilisation and personal responsibility has been used by some elements of the UK food industry to excuse criminal behaviour which is harming consumers. Instead of questioning what extra steps and responsibilities companies should be taking to prevent incidents of food crime happening within the new global supply chains, responsabilisation has allowed a view to emerge within consumers that individual buying choices are to blame for exposure to risk. Alongside this the lack of offending decisions found within the sample suggests that there is a crime facilitative environment within the UK food industry which is allowing the occurrence of initial acts of food crime to occur. The research needs that have arisen from this study include widening the understanding of why criminal acts are occurring within the food industry and discovering more about consumers who haven't adopted a view which victim blames so that resistance to this can be increased within society. By focussing on questioning how much consumers and society can really be responsible for in terms of consumption decisions, trust in the UK food industry can be restored securing the safety of even the most vulnerable food consumers. Overall, the study has given a glimpse into the battle UK food consumers are having in placing responsibility for food safety and some of the major influences on attitudes towards food consumption decisions.

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## **APPENDICES**

Section includes:

- Ethics Approval Note
- Experimental material: Plain Language Statement and Questionnaire