### Introduction

Pizza can be defined as a flatbread with various toppings. It originally met its purpose as a quick and easy meal for Neapolitan peasants, but Italian pizza’s arrival in America and subsequent variations led to it being both a symbol of American culture, and its adoption as a finger food that could be eaten at home. Thus, its popularity is due to the nutritional needs, as well as convenience of consumption.

### Examining pizza as an example of Core-Fringe Theory

Pizza is made with a complex carbohydrate of flour, mixed with water. Various forms of flatbread with toppings have been in existence since the 1600s, but the concept of a pizza was actualized in the 19th century. This diet meets the core-fringe theory, originating as a traditional Neapolitan dish in the 1800s and thus meets the nutritional needs of a peasant from that area. Flatbread, or pizza dough in this case, acts as a core with additional toppings as a fringe.

We first compare a cheese pizza’s nutritional value with that of Italian flatbread.

As seen from the chart, 100g of cheese pizza meets more requirements for protein, calcium, Vitamins A and B12 as compared to an equal amount of the traditional flatbread, with protein and calcium meeting 23% and 21% of daily requirements. In comparison, the Margherita Pizza (officially the first pizza dish to be formally defined) contains 13% of Vitamin C daily intakes due to the inclusion of tomato, with all other nutrient levels close to those of an average pizza. A Margherita Pizza possesses tomato and basil leaves along with the usual cheese and pizza dough combination, thus the fringe of tomato and basil allowed for additional nutrients, making the Margherita Pizza not just a celebratory dish but one that has its popularity stemming from its potential as a meal. This becomes clearer as we see “high amounts of vitamin A and C” (Mintz, Pg. 44) provided by the tomatoes and basil leaves in the ingredient list. This provides the combination of wheat (in the pizza dough) and vegetables “creating an all-around sufficient diet.” (Mintz, Pg. 44)

However, it does not meet the core-fringe-legume theory that Mintz proposes later on. Mintz uses his theory to propose that agrarian dishes would follow this core-fringe-legume theory model. While other traditional Italian dishes such as *pasta e fagioli* (Pasta with beans) of Veneto fulfill the core-fringe-legume theory model, the Margherita Pizza (and indeed, most pizzas) do not have legumes as part of their ingredients. This could be explained when we see the origin of this dish. It was created as a meal in urban Naples, thus not fulfilling Mintz’s requirement as an agrarian dish. In addition, pizza’s flexible definition ensures that there would always be different values of nutrients for each kind of pizza. There is no standardized form of pizza, only that of its varietals. Thus, nutritional need is not a key reason for its widespread consumption but exists as a means of explaining its continued consumption in Naples.

### Cultural symbolism as an imported dish

Pizza was created as an urban dish with available ingredients in Naples. Its main consumer was impoverished and more reliant on the energy that a flatbread with ingredients could provide. Dumas wrote in *Le Corricolo*(1843) that “two *sous* would buy a pizza large enough for a whole family” (Lee, *A History of Pizza)*, implying that pizza for the impoverished inhabitants provided a heavy meal for a family despite the pittance required to consume the product.

Pizza’s existence as a poor man’s cuisine was further exemplified when “Judgmental Italian authors often called [the peasants’] eating habits ‘disgusting’” (Turim, *Pizza through the Ages*). From this statement, we see that eating pizza was widely reflected as offensive to the upper, literate class that Italian authors belonged to. In addition, the presence of street vendors or informal restaurants that produced pizza imply that pizza’s base ingredient did not require an oven for its preparation and could be sold as finger food due to the lower costs of production that such street hawkers rely on to continue their trade. Pizza established itself as a symbol of the impoverished working class*,* whom existed as a result of the growing overseas trade (which brought new types of toppings to Italy) and the movement of labor from the countryside (thus creating a class of workers who worked for a pittance and thus needed daily meals at a fraction of their salary). It had popularity amongst workers but avoided by the wealthier Italians due to its perceived associations with the lower class.

One exception to this would be when in a visit to Naples in 1889, Queen Margherita approved of a pizza prepared as a local specialty by Raffaele Esposito after having grown tired of the French cuisine that marked her class. Despite the visit, pizza was still considered a Neapolitan dish and did not gain the height of popularity that it attained in the post war period.

As stated earlier, the low costs of production meant that immigrants who were already present in the United States could mass produce it for themselves. Before the Second World War, pizza existed as an ethnic dish consumed by the Italian-American immigrant communities (Iacchetta, Pg. 27). As pizza was already “a highly malleable meal in nineteenth-century Italy”, it rapidly transformed from an “ethnic specialty to an exciting snack to a wholesome family dinner to a gourmet meal”. (Iacchetta, Pg. 35) Pizza became “a powerful and evocative symbol of the collective self of a people” (Ohnuki-Tierney, Pg. 4) due to its reinvention as an all-American dish. One example could be seen in Chicago-style pizza, which was “rarely viewed as an Italian dish, but an American dish using wholesome Italian ingredients” (Iachetta, Pg. 31) Such reworkings of pizza led to its adoption “in American food culture as an American dish” (Iachetta, Pg. 3), with American pizza being imported back to Italy “because it was American” (Turim, *Pizza through the Ages*) after the Second World War. Pizza existed not just as a symbol of Italy, and Italian immigrants in America, but later grew to become a symbol of American culture in other parts of the world, including within its place of origin.

This popularity was further built upon by two changes (Lee, *A History of Pizza)*. The first would be the increase in disposable income, which led to the rise in popularity of foods that could be frozen and heated up for private consumption rather than home-cooked. The second being the adoption of food delivery. As vehicles became widely available, pizzas were one of the first dishes to be delivered to the doorstep. Pizza was not just widely available to the masses but advertised as appealing to the general population as well. For example, Pizza Hut’s first commercial “seems to focus more on providing an American experience where pizza is consumed by all” (Iacchetta, Pg. 32), thus promoting the idea of a common meal to be shared between families and friends, rather than as a traditional Italian dish. Pizza chains adopting the use of refrigeration and meeting the demand of consumers led to growing consumption of pizza. When these pizza chains expanded overseas, so did the popularity of the American pizza.

### Conclusion

Pizza’s popularity has been demonstrated as a result of the convenience brought about by technology and the ease of adaptation to local tastes. It functions as a symbol, in Charles Sanders Peirce’s identification of semiotics, because its meaning is arbitrary. In America, pizza still registers as an ethnic dish due to its Italian-American roots. However, in Italy, and perhaps in other locations where American pizza chains have expanded, pizza is defined as American. Because of this, it is hard to tell where Italian influence on the dish ends and where the American varietals begin. It is safe to conclude that pizza exists as a symbol but depends on context to give its meaning.

### Appendix

Atkin, Albert, "Peirce's Theory of Signs", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), from https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/peirce-semiotics

Iachetta, V. J. (2015). *The Integration of an Ethnic Dish into 1950s America* (Unpublished master's thesis). University at Buffalo. Retrieved March 13, 2019, from https://arts-sciences.buffalo.edu/content/dam/arts-sciences/history/documents/Iacchetta-Thesis.pdf

Lee, A. (2018, July 7). A History of Pizza. Retrieved March 12, 2019, from https://www.historytoday.com/archive/historians-cookbook/history-pizza

Mintz, S. W., & Schlettwein-Gsell, D. (2001). Food Patterns in Agrarian Societies: The Core-Fringe-Legume Hypothesis A Dialogue. Gastronomica, 1(3), 40-52. doi:10.1525/gfc.2001.1.3.40

Ohnuki-Tierney, E. (2004). Rice as Self. *Education About Asia,* *9*(3), 4-9. doi:10.1515/9781400820979

Turim, G. (2012, July 27). A Slice of History: Pizza Through the Ages. Retrieved March 12, 2019, from https://www.history.com/news/a-slice-of-history-pizza-through-the-ages