

THE MYTH OF MEAT;
UNCOVERING THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF CONTEMPORARY
ANIMAL-PRODUCT CONSUMPTION IN THE UNITED STATES

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

Of Anthropology

University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

By

Alyssa K. Barrineau

December, 2016

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ABSTRACT

Cultural constructs have long been a central focus in the field of anthropology. Food, along with other cultural constructs discussed by anthropologists, such as gender, emotions, dress, empire, and illness, to name a few, are crucial when studying human culture. This text discusses the contemporary cultural constructions of meat via Roland Barthes' theory of myth. Unveiling the myths associated with animal-product consumption furthers our understanding of food and dietary habits as being culturally constructed. Myths, in all contexts per Barthes, are social constructs. They are ideas, beliefs, customs, traditions, and norms that—despite being myths—shape, create, and inform our realities. Vegans have become modern-day mythologists by demystifying the myth of meat and have created another way of life that seeks to end non-human animal exploitation, dismantle colonial and patriarchal systems of power, and regain individual and collective health and wellness.

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INTRODUCTION: BECOMING A MYTHOLOGIST

Recently, I found myself in a predicament that I had never been in before. Little did I know that this newfound tension would transform my life in so many ways. I was unsure of what to do, how to feel, or how to proceed. As I trudged through unknown territory, I was forced to come face to face with my true self. I began asking myself how important my beliefs and morals were, how had I previously brushed off this awareness with denial, and how was I going to make this tension go away. I had felt this kind of stress before, but never to this degree. This time was different. This time it was like I had been hit over the head into an alternate reality where everything that was seen as normal became the new extreme. I felt as if I had been seeing my whole life through rose-colored glasses and they were abruptly torn from my face and shattered so I could never use them again. I felt like I was uncovering new territory, uncovering the lies I had been told my whole life. I knew right then I had to make a decision and a possible commitment that would eventually bring me peace and empowerment. Now that everything was different, I knew something had to be done. But what? I was overwhelmed and didn't know where to start.

I remember that moment and those realizations so vividly. A fear of the unknown. An overwhelming feeling of conflict that needed to be resolved immediately. I jumped up from the couch in a panic because of the connections I had just made. I paced the living room and decided the first thing I needed to do was get these products out of my house. How had I been this blind for so long? Why didn't I listen to my friend in college? How could I have been so apathetic? "Are we really doing this?!" I asked my boyfriend as I went to the kitchen. I could tell he was

still processing and asking himself the same kinds of questions. We had put ourselves in this position of our own accord. There was no way to un-learn or un-see. We realized the only option we had was to change. I frantically opened the fridge and kitchen cabinets to examine the contents and see how bad it really was. I brought the trash can over and began emptying the contents of my kitchen into the trash until the only things left were some onions and pasta. I wanted everything out of my house. I felt a small sense of relief as I walked downstairs to toss the heavy bag. This was a start, but I knew I needed to do more.

The next couple of days, I felt like a baby deer with wobbly legs. It is easy to walk once you have the muscles and coordination, but I felt like I couldn't learn fast enough to keep up. I felt like I was tripping constantly. There were so many unanswered questions, so many contradictory ideas, and so much conflicting information. I had unveiled a huge inconsistency in my actions versus my morals.

In order to find answers to our burning questions, we turned to the faithful internet where we found thousands of other vegan-curious people who had some of the same questions. We dove into books, articles, and documentaries. As we learned more, our hesitations and fears began to subside. Each day was a new challenge, but we were starting to feel more comfortable in our choice and new habits.

After about a month, all of my doubts and internal conflict had dissipated. I was excited for every meal now because I had some practice cooking. Every trip to the grocery store was an adventure. We did have a couple mishaps and experiments that went wrong, but we didn't let that get us down. We were both motivated and committed to our new way of life.

Despite all of the harrowing and repulsive images we had seen and information we had learned, our new way of life gave us hope. We felt empowered and refreshed; we had finally achieved peace within ourselves. Not only were our minds clearer and more open, we began to lose weight, drastically reduce our previously high cholesterol levels, and most importantly, we were feeling physically great and happy. My energy levels multiplied and I was sleeping much better than ever before. My previously lethargic and apathetic self was nowhere to be found. And just like every vegan says, our only regret was not doing it sooner.

CHAPTER ONE: SIGNS, MYTHS, AND CULTURAL CONSTRUCTS

My experience of the epiphany and the transition periods prompted me to question how other vegans had uncovered the myth of animal-product consumption. How did other vegans go about uncovering the cultural norm and assumption that we need to consume animals? How did other vegans construct their alternate belief system? In the words of the French philosopher, Roland Barthes, how did they demystify this grand cultural ideology?

In our society today, and for the vast majority of human history, meat-eating has played a large cultural role. We consume animal meat and other animal proteins at virtually every meal. It is the norm to consume non-human animal meat, which reinforces and protects the current status quo of animal consumption. “Meat” as we understand it today has become entangled in a web of cultural symbolism. When we see, hear, or think of meat, it is not only the tangible slab of flesh we think of; it carries a much deeper. Our mass culture associates meat with virility, masculinity, human domination over nature, cultural dishes, and identity, all of which induce nostalgia or a sense of belonging at holiday celebrations and other social gatherings. Meat has acquired countless cultural meanings that have been created and maintained by the mass culture through advertising; governmental “health” guidelines; doctors and the “health” industry; propaganda from the meat, dairy, and egg industries; monetary gain; and several other factors.

The underlying contemporary, cultural symbolism that surrounds meat and animal product consumption has been in the making for decades. Many of us have internalized and naturalized meat-eating. We have internalized the habit of the consumption of non-human animals, and we have internalized the symbolism and connotations that are associated with meat.

These secondary meanings and connotations that are connected to meat are what French theorist Roland Barthes calls myth. Drawing from Saussure's linguistic theory of semiotics, Barthes applies his theory to cultural structures instead of structures found in language. In 1957 in post-WWII France, Barthes published his collection of cultural critiques, *Mythologies*. Each chapter concentrates on one aspect of French mass culture and the cultural narratives associated with objects, images, traditions, or other cultural artifacts. Barthes then demystifies the cultural myth and exposes the historical, political, and cultural contexts that have been left out in order to create and sustain the myth.

In the last chapter, entitled "Myth Today," he details his theory of myth and furthers Saussure's work on semiotics. Barthes uses Saussure's concept of the sign and demonstrates that myth lingers in the secondary level of the sign system. A sign is the unification of the signifier, which can be understood as the word or sound image, and the signified, which can be understood as the concept or meaning (Barthes 1957; Klages 2001; McNeil 1996). For example, when we hear the word meat, the first thing that comes to mind is probably a slab of animal flesh. That is called steak, which would be the sign, the combination of our associations and the image itself. The signifier would be the tangible meat or the image of meat that we associate with the word steak. The signified, or meaning, of the sign could be nutrition or fulfilling our biological need for energy. However, the signifier and the signified cannot be separated (Barthes 1957; Klages 2001; McNeil 1996). You cannot have one without the other. In order for a myth to be created and naturalized, a secondary level is also unknowingly conceived (Barthes 1957; Klages 2001; McNeil 1996). This is where Barthes furthers Saussure's ideas. The secondary level of meaning where we find myth is what he classifies as the signification (Barthes 1957; Klages 2001; McNeil 1996). The signification is the union of the sign in the first level with the signified. So

not only does the steak represent the fulfillment of humans' simple need to eat, the signification takes us to the next level where we would associate steak with, for example, luxury, prestige, nationalism, strength, or masculinity. Myth takes the sign and uses it as a signifier to construct the signification.

Barthes' general aim is to demonstrate how these myths become seemingly natural and normal when in fact they are not. He urges the reader to be a mythologist instead of a myth consumer. Myth consumers are the people who buy into the mass cultural myths and take them at face value instead of critically analyzing them prior to accepting them as true. The mythologist investigates the myths and is able to break them down to understand the holistic perspective and contexts that have created them. As the mythologists begin to explore the mass beliefs, they use their investigations to create an alternate one that encompasses the underlying and hidden historical aspects of the myth they are attempting to demystify.

Claude Fischler is an anthropologist who specializes in modern food and eating. Born in France in 1947, Fischler currently serves as the Director of Research at the French National Center for Scientific Research and heads the Interdisciplinary Institute for Contemporary Anthropology. He specializes in the anthropology of food and nutrition, commensality, structure and functions of cuisines, food scares/risks, and cross-cultural attitudes towards food and health (Fischler 1997).

In the article, "Food, Self and Identity," published in 1997, Fischler addresses the many links between the construction of—both the individual and collective—identities and the food that we consume. The major theory from the article is the theory of incorporation.

Food is central to our sense of identity, in that any given individual is constructed, biologically, psychologically and socially by the foods he/she chooses to incorporate (Fischler 1997, 275).

It is easy to generally understand how food affects our identity. After all, you are what you eat, right?

Fischler's theory states, "to incorporate a food is in both real and imaginary terms, to incorporate all or some of its properties: we become what we eat. Incorporation is a foundation for identity" (1997, 275). His approach identifies biological incorporation (physical consumption of food stuffs) and the cultural incorporation (the beliefs and representations) (1997, 275). For the cultural incorporation, he emphasizes that "as a representation, the principle of incorporation underlies to a great extent human attempts at control over the body, the mind and therefore over identity" (Fischler 1997, 278). Not only does the principle of incorporation create, maintain, and transform new individual identities, it also aligns individuals together by their distinct culinary systems. The linkage in culinary systems leads to a collective identity based on the cuisine and gives meaning to "man and the universe, by situating them in relation to each other in an overall continuity and contiguity" (Fischler 1997, 279). Fischler's principle of incorporation is applicable, with ease, to the creation of individual and collective vegan identities.

An important aspect of Fischler's work is his concept of identity disturbances. He describes identity disturbances as a "biological tool, which may clarify analysis of the construction of identity" (Fischler 1997, 284). These disturbances are seen as something that provokes the question of one's own identity, as the question of identity only arises when challenged or seen as distinct. Fischler contends that the "identity disturbances frequently have to

be analyzed in a global context, to which the notion of crisis may be applicable, referring not only to the break-up and end of an order but also, frequently, to the genesis of a new order” (Fischler 1997, 284).

Another significant perspective of Fischler’s work is his critique of the industrialized, modern food cuisine and how it has disrupted the connection between identity formation and the modern eater (1997, 285). He argues that the modern eater has become a “pure consumer” in that they consume products of whose production, history and origins they know nothing of (Fischler 1997, 285). The preparation and production of food is far too commonly done in factories, away from the eyes of the eater, which has led modern food to become less identifiable from its natural state as it is “processed, packaged, presented” by the manufacturers (Fischler 1997, 285). Fischler writes that “Modern food has become in the eyes of the eater an ‘unidentified edible object,’ devoid of origin or history, with no respectable past in short, without identity” (Fischler 1997, 285). He warns about the dangers of modern food and its lack of identity that “modern uncertainty or insecurity about food thus induces movements of reaction and re-equilibrium” (Fischler 1997, 285).

His critique of modern food and the modern food system is also substantial to the vegan movement. It is very common for vegans to maintain a sentiment of distrust and uncertainty with many industrialized foodstuffs. In addition, the risks associated with the consumption of animal products are recognized within the vegan community. Distrust and risks are what Fischler claims as motivators in “movement(s) of reaction and re-equilibrium” (Fischler 1997, 285).

Fischler believes that these reactive demands manifest themselves in individual and collective ways “through recipes or diets the aim is to reintroduce a normative logic into everyday eating, a coherent system of reference, a rule, in short, an order” (Fischler 1997, 289).

This statement can easily be seen in the vegan context. Vegans have set rules, and although there are variable elements within any structure, there are firm norms and practices that are followed.

His ideas parallel Barthes' ideas of myths, mythologists, and myth consumers in various ways. Specifically, Fischer's theory of incorporation states that when we eat, not only are we incorporating the physical, tangible foodstuffs, we are also incorporating the cultural meanings and symbolism that is intertwined with it to our identities. The second level of underlying cultural meanings is where myth resides (Barthes 1957, 224). Fischler recognizes that food will always carry secondary, cultural meanings that, when consumed, are fused with our identities. As we incorporate foodstuffs into our bodies, we are constructing our individual identities with the cultural meanings that surround and invade the food. Our culture gives symbolic meaning to food products that we, subconsciously and consciously, contemplate. Those symbolic meanings are what our culture uses to construct our realities, much like myths. Myths supply the content that is used to construct our individual and collective realities. However, the myth consumers do not see the construction of the myth and the mythologists read the myth as a social or cultural construction.

Fischler writes that the modern eater has become a "pure consumer" which mirrors Barthes' concept of the myth consumers. Both are individuals who heedlessly consume products of whose production, history and origins they know nothing of (Fischler 1997, 285; Barthes 1957, 242). Fischler's unidentified edible objects and the subjects of Barthes' myths are both deprived of their histories (Fischler 1997, 285; Barthes 1957, 232). The mass media and advertising constantly warp their messages about the products.

The alternative to myth consumers are mythologists. Likewise, in the context of Fischler's theory, the alternative to being a pure consumer would be the appearance of collective and individual "movement(s) of reaction and re-equilibrium" that are the result of distrust, insecurity, and lack of identity of modern foods (Fischler 1997, 285). Vegans' discontent with non-human animal exploitation and oppression—in addition to environmental destruction—has led them to organize social movements of reaction and re-equilibrium.

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Food and dietary habits differ cross-culturally which demonstrates how each society creates rules and norms that are accepted and adhered to. Cultural constructions have been an essential concern in the field of anthropology (Douglas 1974; Lèvi-Strauss 1966; Counihan 1992; Yafeh 2007; Taylor 1989; Rasmussen 2010; Schieffelin 1980, 1985; Buckser 2006; Berger and Luckmann 1966). Cultural construction has been defined as a "the forms and influences of human patterning takes that are the consequence of inter-subjective sharing and exchange of cultural artifacts and information associated with such artifacts, including of course symbolisms" (Lewis 2009). The norms, traditions, and beliefs that shape and influence our lives are all products of our culture and human existence. Despite the inherent fluidity of cultures, many cultural constructs are socially accepted as static truths instead of being recognized as culturally subjective concepts. For instance, the notions of gender, race, illness, identity, empire, patriarchy, performance, reciprocity, age, and death have been exposed to be culturally defined (Counihan 1992; Yafeh 2007; Taylor 1989; Rasmussen 2010; Schieffelin 1980, 1985; Buckser 2006; Berger and Luckmann 1966). People use cultural constructs to create individual and collective identities and realities. They are powerful, real forces that dictate our behaviors, appearance, language, customs, dietary habits, and much more. The realities we conceive are meaningful and bring significance to the cultural constructs. "Social order [including cultural constructs] exist only and

in so far as human activity continues to product it; it is a human product” (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 70).

Ori Yafeh examines the cultural construction of femininity of Jewish ultraorthodox kindergarten girls in Jerusalem, Israel (2007). Through the importance of time and a collective Jewish memory, the girls’ social norms and understanding of what is feminine are constructed through accepted and practiced social norms (Yafeh 2007). These norms and practices that are used to construct ultraorthodox femininity are dress, hair, voice, food and eating, and gestures (Yafeh 2007). By learning about and adhering to these customs, the girls continue the cultural construction of Jewish ultraorthodox femininity (Yafeh 2007).

Similarly, the concept of masculinity is also culturally constructed and defined. What may be considered masculine in one culture may or may not be considered masculine in another. Emily Wentzell illustrates the construction of masculinity in Mexican men who experience erectile difficulties (2013). Specifically, she examines how these men, with the aid and influence of their wives and mistresses, reconstruct the cultural notion of “traditional” *machismo*/masculinity (Wentzell 2013). Her interlocutors reconstructed socially accepted forms of masculinity to better fit their own personal changes (Wentzell 2013). Her study demonstrates how—physical and cultural—changes and disjunctions play a role in self-construction (Wentzell 2013, 41). “Expectations that who people ‘are’ might or should change are widespread cross-culturally, ranging from expectations of change over the lifecourse to engagement in self-help to religious conversion” (Wentzell 2013, 41).

Sulamith Heins Potter analyzes the cultural construction of emotions in rural China and how they differ from the significance of emotions in the so-called western world (1988). Dr.

Potter demonstrates that experienced individual emotions in rural Chinese culture are irrelevant to social relationships and social order (1988, 185). For example, in the United States, the individual emotion of love is understood as a fundamental aspect of the social relationship known as marriage. However for the Chinese in Potter's study, they show that their individual emotions are not associated with building or maintain social relationships or structures (Potter 1988, 185). Instead, the Chinese culturally construct their social structures and relationships on peoples' worth ethic (Potter 1988, 205). "They search endlessly for the best way to understand and enact the connection between the person's capacity to work, the reward for work, and the social order as a whole" (Potter 1988, 205).

In rural Ireland, Lawrence J. Taylor investigates the various cultural constructions of death that are inspired by the Gaelic drinking toast, "*Bàs i-nEirinn*" ("*To die in Ireland*") (1989). He discusses the local and religious influences on funerary traditions as well as the symbolic meanings associated with death (Taylor 1989). The major motifs are religious death, political martyrdom, and emigration (Taylor 1989, 184).

Other cultural constructs—discussed by Susan Rasmussen—are age and dress among the Tuareg in Niger (2010). It is accepted as common practice that Tuareg men wear face veils/turbans. The men's face veils hold differing meanings depending on who and how the face veil is worn (Rasmussen 2010, 463). Furthermore, she examines the shifting meanings and how the veil influences and recreates the cultural constructs of gender, age, and ethnic and cultural identities (Rasmussen 2010, 464).

There are countless constructs that have been explored in discipline. Cultural constructions are cornerstones in both the field of anthropology and our own lives. They shape

our thoughts and influence our behaviors. These constructs are essential to anthropology as they exhibit patterns of social behaviors as well as demonstrate how individuals create themselves, create meanings, and create the world around them. It is important to further the examination of these constructs as well as their meanings and their consequences. This text will expose the cultural constructions using Barthes' theory of myth. Demonstrating the myths associated with animal-product consumption furthers the determination that our food and dietary habits are culturally constructed. Myths, in all contexts per Barthes, are social constructs. They are ideas, beliefs, customs, traditions, and norms that, despite being myths, shape, create, and inform our realities.

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In Chapter Two, the text will first explore the creation and reinforcement of the myth of animal product consumption and the N's of Justification in order to understand how the myth has been naturalized and normalized in the contemporary United States. Chapters Three, Four, and Five will delineate other major themes that emerged from the vegan demystification, including patriarchy, oppression, and health inequalities between vegans and animal-product consumers. The final section, Chapter Six, will illuminate the alternate myth created by vegan mythologists to confirm that Barthes' theory of myth applies to animal-product consumption and veganism in the contemporary United States.

CHAPTER TWO: THE CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTAINENCE OF THE MYTH OF MEAT

Major characteristic of myths detailed by Barthes are their distortion and normalization. “[Myth’s] function is to distort...But this distortion is not an obliteration...the concept needs them; they are half amputated, they are deprived of memory” (Barthes 1957: 231-232). The myths distort the historical, political, and social contexts that surround the signs entangled in the myth. Myths spin narratives in their favor. “Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact...it establishes blissful clarity things appear to mean something by themselves” (Barthes 1957: 255-256).

Although there is no appointed vegan leader, there are most certainly pioneers and luminaries who have deconstructed the myth of meat and are vocal regarding its construction and maintenance. Several of these influential individuals are discussed later in the text, which demonstrates how they have demystified the social construction of animal proteins. Notwithstanding, it is important to understand the ways in which these vegans are influential. The vegans cited throughout are distinguished outside and within the vegan community. The individuals come from all different paths of life and professions yet all their unique stories share similarities as they seek to demystify animal-product consumption. They were chosen due to their substantial impacts on the vegan culture and community. They have all helped many people

demystify the myth of meat on a large scale which reinforced the decision to include them in the text.

One of the most influential, contemporary social scientist who has dedicated her career to deconstructing the myth of meat is Dr. Melanie Joy. Dr. Joy is a Harvard-educated psychologist and was a professor of psychology and sociology at the University of Massachusetts, Boston (Beyond Carnism). After publishing her award-winning book, *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows*, she founded the vegan advocacy and animal rights organization known as Beyond Carnism (Beyond Carnism). She has spoken at countless events and has even been featured on mainstream media outlets such as *The New York Times*, BBC, ABC Australia, and NPR (Beyond Carnism). “Her TEDx talk on carnism is in the top one percent of most-viewed TEDx talks of all time” (Beyond Carnism). Dr. Joy is revered amongst vegans.

Another prominent social scientist who rocked the boat with her feminist theoretical text, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, is Carol J. Adams. She is considered a “radical” ecofeminist and *The New York Times* named her book the “bible of the vegan community” (Bloomsbury Publishing). *The Sexual Politics of Meat* has been translated into eight languages and has had several editions released since it was first published in 1990. She is a notable activist for humans and non-humans. She currently resides in Dallas, Texas, where she and her husband manage a homeless shelter and soup kitchen. Adams has been interviewed countless times, has published over ten books, and has contributed to over thirty books, academic journals, and articles (Carol Adams).

Russell Simmons has been in the public eye and pop culture since the 1980s and in 2011 was worth an estimated \$340 million (CNNMoney). He is a prominent African-American author,

musician, producer, and entrepreneur. He gained fame when he founded the hip-hop music label, Def Jam Recordings, and has published six books. Simmons is also well known for his practice of yoga and his advocacy for ahimsa (nonviolence), and veganism. His path to veganism was aided by his passion for yoga. In 2011, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) named him PETA's Person of the Year due to his compassion and advocacy (PETA 2011).

Dr. Garth Davis is a notable bariatric and weight loss surgeon in Houston, Texas. The Davis Clinic's website has over one hundred testimonials of how Dr. Davis and his colleagues have helped people regain their health and wellness through permanent weight loss (The Davis Clinic). Dr. Davis' book, *Proteinaholic*, has garnered great reviews from critics and the public. He has been active in the vegan community and the medical community by giving lectures at vegan events and medical schools across the nation. He has been featured in the Houston Chronicle several times (Houston Chronicle). He was also one of the stars on the medical, reality television series, *Big Medicine*, and was featured in the vegan documentary, *Vegan: Everyday Stories* (IMDB).

Dr. T. Colin Campbell, Professor Emeritus at Cornell University is another pioneer who has influenced both the vegan and nutritional communities. He is highly respected and distinguished nutrition researchers. His bestseller, *The China Study*, was called the "Grand prix of epidemiology" and the "most comprehensive large study ever undertaken of the relationship between diet and the risk of developing disease" by The New York Times (New York Times 2011; Campbell 2005). Dr. Campbell has studied nutrition, biochemistry, and toxicology for over forty years and has been a faculty member at Cornell University (his alma mater) and Virginia Tech. Most recently, he has founded the T. Colin Campbell Center for Nutrition Studies and

collaborated with his son and other colleagues to make the documentary, *Plant Pure Nation* (Nutrition Studies).

Kristina Carrillo-Bucaram, also known as Fully Raw Kristina, has been influential in the vegan and health communities for several years and has gained popularity through her YouTube and other social media platforms where she has almost two million followers and over 72 million views (Instagram; YouTube; Social Blade). She also runs an organic foods co-op for local Houston families named Rawfully Organic (Rawfully Organic). In early 2016, she released her first book, *The Fully Raw Diet* and has gone on a nationwide book tour visiting over fifteen cities (Fully Raw by Kristina). She has been interviewed on English and Spanish news channels in Houston and across the United States (YouTube Fully Raw Kristina). She is a recognized and influential individual within the vegan community.

Dr. A. Harper Breeze, the editor of *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society*, is another renowned, contemporary vegan luminary. She has a PhD in Critical Food Geographies and is known for her intersectional approach to veganism (Sistah Vegan). Dr. Harper's newest book project collaborates with the Black Vegans Rock organization and focuses on the intersection of the Black Lives Matter movement with ethical consumption (Sistah Vegan). The projected title is *The Vegan Praxis of Justice in an Era of Black Lives Matter* (Sistah Vegan). She was even selected as the Vice Presidential Nominee for the Humane Party (Sistah Vegan).

Howard Lyman is known for his 360 degree transformation from cattle rancher to environmentalist and vegan activist. After devoting the first half of his life to the animal agriculture industry, Lyman realized the error of his ways, and after a spinal injury, decided to

quit the cattle ranching business (Lyman 1998). Since then he has devoted his life to repairing the land and speaking out against the exploitative nature of the animal agriculture industry (Lyman 1998). He has been featured in several documentaries (*Vegucated*, *Cowspiracy*, *A Delicate Balance: The Truth*, and *Peaceable Kingdom: The Journey Home*) and frequently gives lectures and presentations across the United States (IMDB).

Although many people have demystified the myth of meat and recognized that animal products are not mandatory for a high quality of life, the people listed above and throughout the text have become influential and impactful individuals in aiding others to dismantle the myth of meat. They have become the spokespeople for veganism. They speak out against the carnist ideology and, individually and collectively, encourage others to also decode the myth of meat. Through their books, lectures, and various social media platforms, these individuals have created waves of change within the United States and globally. They have dedicated their lives to spreading awareness about the myth of meat and are living proof that it is in fact a myth.

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In the vegan context, the myth of meat is known as the carnist ideology, a term coined by Dr. Melanie Joy. Barthes notes that myth is an ideographic system, which can easily be paralleled with an ideology. Dr. Joy describes the carnist ideology as:

Carnism is the belief system in which eating certain animals is considered ethical and appropriate. Carnists—people who eat meat—are not the same as carnivores. Carnivores are animals that are dependent on meat to survive. Carnists are also not merely omnivores. An omnivore is an animal—human or non-human—that has the physiological ability to ingest both plants and meat. But like “carnivore,” “omnivore” is a term that describes one’s biological

constitution, not one's philosophical choice. Carnists eat meat not because they need to, but because they choose to, and choices always stem from beliefs (Joy 2009, 30).

It is common for people to see veganism as a choice. However, many fail to recognize that eating animal products is also a choice. The myth consumers are the individuals who accept carnism as fact instead of a choice. They have accepted what our mass media and culture have created: that it is natural, normal, and necessary to consume animal products. Joy further explains that we are taught to ignore inconsistencies in the myth and to blindly accept carnism (Joy 2009, 96). "When an ideology is in its prime, these myths rarely come under scrutiny" (Joy 2009, 96). She claims that these N's of Justification are put in place to protect and reinforce the myth. They serve as "mental and emotional blinders" to not question, or ignore, the myth (Joy 2009, 96). It is important to note that carnism is an inherently violent ideological system since meat cannot be procured without violence. It is common knowledge that slaughterhouses are not pleasant places and the vast majority of the population would not want to work in a slaughterhouse. Therefore carnism, like other violent ideologies, attempts to hide and distort the violent realities with defense mechanisms that reshape our views and thought processes.

Barthes claims that there is always motivation behind the creation and maintenance of a myth (1957, 236). In regards to the myth of meat, there are several mythmakers, as Joy has established. The mythmakers' motivation for the myth of meat to remain intact is wholly financial. The mythmakers have infiltrated every nook of our society to ensuring that the information we are given reinforces the carnist system that animals are here for human consumption (Joy 2009, 97). Professionals, agribusiness, governmental and private institutions,

legal systems, and news media all play a role in distorting and ensuring the existing myth of meat continues; they are messengers and agents of the myth (Joy 2009, 99). The media outlets are full of ads and propaganda confirming that we need these products. Fruits and vegetables like broccoli and apples are rarely—if ever—advertised in commercials.

For the majority of our society, eating meat is considered normal; it is an accepted social norm, something created and emphasized through cultural channels. When individuals go against these social norms, those expected forms of behavior are exposed and these individuals are often met with pressure to conform. Many vegans are often questioned and even mocked by the masses as they stand against the current social norms. We have normalized the idea of the consumption of animal products. Over 90% of the population consumes animal-products.

In the process of normalizing meat-consumption, we have also naturalized it. Barthes emphasizes that myths are frozen into something natural (1957, 240). Myths have become so ingrained and unquestioned that the myth in question is accepted as natural, which is what we observe in the myth of meat consumption. However, in examining the naturalness of contemporary meat consumption, there are several factors that must be considered.

“Naturalization is to natural as normalization is to normal” (Joy 2009, 107). Joy confirms that much like social norms and their normalization, naturalizations are also social constructions (2009, 107). In the context of animal-product consumption, society is sold the idea that contemporary consumption is justified because of its “naturalness.” The very concept of naturalness that we observe with the consumption of animal products is produced by the same humans who have deemed themselves the top of the “natural hierarchy” due to their *believed* biological superiority (Joy 2009, 108). Throughout human history, believed biological

superiority is one of the largest and most detrimental assumptions that has been naturalized and normalized. Far too many individuals and social groups have been the victims of genocides and eugenic proposals because of this idea of biological superiority.

One of the primary justifications for contemporary myth of non-human animal product consumption is that human-animals are the “top of the food chain.” However, this idea is erroneous because by definition, chains are cycles and there is no “top” (Joy 2009, 108). Even if there were a “top” of the food chain, it would most likely be a carnivore, not an omnivore (Joy 2009, 108). Furthermore, without man-made tools, it would be a challenging task for a human to take down larger animals and remove their skin with only our fingernails and teeth. True omnivores and carnivores are excited by raw flesh and blood, whereas the vast majority of humans are repulsed by raw flesh and blood; they must alter and process the flesh before consuming it. There is also the argument that humans have canines, which indicate flesh-consumption. However, in fact, it is not the canines but the carnassials that indicate flesh-consumption and carnivorous status (Zaraska 2016, 21). Carnassials are a defining feature of the members of the Order Carnivora (Zaraska 2016, 21; Encyclopedia Britannica). Canines found in herbivores or frugivorous are primarily used as defense mechanisms against predators and not for tearing flesh for consumption (Zaraska 2016, 20). The intestines are another important aspect of anatomy to examine. In carnivores and omnivores, the intestines are considerably shorter than the intestines of herbivores or frugivorous (Mills 2009). Intestines of carnivores and omnivores are one and a half to three times the animals’ body length, whereas herbivores and frugivorous’ intestines are nine times the body length of the animal (Mills 2009). Human intestines are 6 to 8 times the body length, making us closer to herbivores or frugivorous. Many contemporary nutritional scientists and medical professionals argue that humans are herbivores or frugivorous

and not omnivores (Zaraska 2016; Greger 2016, McDougall 2013, McDougall 2016, Campbell 2005, Davis 2015, Branard 2013, Mills 2009, Lisle and Goldhamer 2003).

The myth conveys to the masses that it is natural to eat the flesh of animals, but only a select few animals are considered natural for consumption in our culture. For example, many citizens of the “western” world would consider eating a dog or cat cruel and inhumane because in our culture, they are categorized as companion animals instead of farmed animals. Using this example, we uncover the non-naturalness of animal consumption. Every culture maintains a classification system of non-human animals and the animals’ classification results in how they will be treated and viewed by the human-animal population. Therefore, it is clear that our animal-product consumption is culturally constructed instead of “natural.” In several Asian countries it is “normal” and “natural” to consume dogs and cats. So why eat one but not another? Because our culture tells us to.

Another aspect of the *unnaturalness* of animal-product consumption is their “production” or “processing.” An estimated 99% of all meat in the United States comes from factory farms (Farm Forward 2014). Factory farms are man-made businesses that defy natural processes. The animals are given hormones, antibiotics, and are genetically modified. They are far from “natural.”

The primary cultural channels that encourage, emphasize, and teach naturalization (of any concept, not just meat consumption) are history, religion, and science (Joy 2009, 108). Looking back, human-animals have consumed non-human animals for all of human history, which for many makes it seem that this is the way things have been and will continue to be without question. Mainstream theistic religions uphold the idea that animal-product consumption

has been divinely ordained and approved. Contemporary, mainstream nutritional science has been hijacked by corporate greed and self-benefiting experiments and data. Despite that, science is misused as a pillar in the naturalization process (Joy 2009, 108). It is important to note that humans' claim to natural superiority is very much reinforced by our spiritual and intellectual capabilities (Joy 2009, 108). Another example of claimed false superiority is seen in our country's patriarchal system. Men have often believed themselves to be the "better" sex due to their strength or virility. Feminists and anti-patriarchists have demystified the myth that men are the "naturally superior sex." It is also important to note that this is also another construct initially classified as "natural." Infants and mentally challenged humans are not considered edible due to their arbitrary intellectual "inferiorities." "In short, naturalization makes the ideology [of carnism] historically, divinely, and biologically irrefutable" (Joy 2009, 109).

The last N of Justification as denoted by Joy is that animal-product consumption is necessary. The idea that eating animal flesh is necessary is directly connected to the idea that eating animal flesh is natural. If we believe that meat eating is natural, it connotes that it is a biological need, which in turn means that humans by necessity are required to consume animal flesh and bodily excretions in order to survive. "This belief reflects the core paradox of the system: killing is necessary for the great good; the survival of one group depends on the killing of another... if we cannot exist without meat, then abolishing carnism is akin to suicide" (Joy 2009, 109). The carnist ideology perpetuates this part of the myth that meat is necessary, even though research suggests that animal product consumption is in reality detrimental to human health (Joy 2009, 109).

Another subsection of the necessity of animal product consumption is that we consume the animals to reduce and control their populations to ensure that the world will not be overrun

by farmed animals. What would we do with all of these animals? However, in this instance, we fail to recognize that humans bring these animals to life and breed them for the sole purpose of meeting the demands of the human population that consumes the farmed animals' bodies/excretions. If there was no demand for these products, no animals would be bred for consumption hence farmed animals would not overrun the world. "There is a myth within this myth, a paradox that is central to all violent ideologies – that killing must continue in order to justify all the killing already done" (Joy 2009, 111).

Returning to the idea that consuming animal products is necessary for human health, this theory has long been disproven by medical professionals and researchers. Some of the pioneers in plant-based nutrition are Dr. T. Colin Campbell, Dr. Neal Barnard, Dr. John McDougall, Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn, Dr. Michael Greger, Dr. Garth Davis, and Dr. Douglass Lisle to name a few. Furthermore the American Dietetic Association has confirmed that a vegan diet is suitable for all stages of life including: pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood (2009). Additionally, there are various notable professional athletes and body builders who thrive on vegan diets, including Olympic runner Carl Lewis, bodybuilder Torre Washington, marathon runner Fiona Oaks, Ultramarathon runner Rich Roll, tennis players Venus and Serena Williams, NFL defensive lineman David Carter, and bodybuilder Crissi Carvalho. The notion that meat or other animal products are necessary for human health has been debunked.

The Three N's of Justification are the basis of the creation of the myth. They are also the primary pillars that maintain and reinforce the primary ideas of carnism throughout our society. These concepts are everywhere; we are continually bombarded with complementary information and persuasion in the mass media. However, it is important to examine how the myth has influenced or affected other sectors of our society from a vegan point of view. Many vegans have

further demystified the consumption of animal products in a myriad of ways. The next chapter will examine how feminists have demystified the consumption of animal products through animal-product consumption's symbolic relationship and parallels with the patriarchal structures and social norms in our culture.

CHAPTER THREE: DEMYSTIFICATION OF THE PATRIARCHY

Carol J. Adams reflects on the sexual, racial, and patriarchal aspects of the consumption of animal flesh from a feminist perspective in her book, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, published in 1990. In our society today, animal protein is held in high regard and in the mainstream it remains at the top of the protein hierarchy, above plant proteins (Adams 1990, 4). Alongside the protein hierarchy is the gender hierarchy. The United States and many countries around the globe, are patriarchal societies, in which women—and people of color and ethnic minorities—are subordinate to white men. When put together, the men at the top of the hierarchy will consume the protein that is also at the top of the hierarchy: animal flesh (Adams 1990).

It is no mystery that our society has explicitly and implicitly drawn the connection of masculinity with the consumption of animal protein. Men cannot be manly without their steak, Bar-B-Q, lamb, pork chops, or hamburgers. These are quintessential representations of modern masculinity. “People with power have always eaten meat” (Adams 1990, 4). Much like Mary Douglas, Adams argues that dietary habits demonstrate and reinforce class distinctions within a society. Adams also states that our dietary habits declare patriarchal distinctions (Adams 1990, 4).

Women, [and] second class citizens, are more likely to eat what are considered to be second-class foods in a patriarchal culture: vegetables, fruits, and grains rather than meat. The sexism in meat eating recapitulates the class distinctions with an added twist: a mythology permeates all classes that meat is masculine food and meat eating a male activity (Adams 1990, 4).

Adams describes cross-cultural examples of the connection of patriarchy and the consumption of animal protein. Cross-culturally, food taboos are more commonly placed on women to ensure that there is enough meat for the men (Adams 1990, 5). Examples of this abound from the Solomon Islands where the women care for the pigs that they rarely consume and only consume when “treated” by their husbands, to Indonesia where “flesh food is property of the men” (Adams 1990, 5). She notes that there are differences in patterns of meat consumption between non-technological societies and technologically advanced societies (Adams 1990, 5). In non-technological societies, the taboos are more frequent and powerful (Adams 1990, 5). In contrast, in technologically advanced countries where we live in a world of abundance, like the United States or the United Kingdom, the intersectionality of class and social status, the “sex role assumptions about meat are not so blatantly expressed” (Adams 1990, 7). She notes that in England, diets of upper-class women are much more similar to the diets of upper-class men than to working-class women. Therefore the hierarchy is exposed once the society enters a state of famine, warfare, or when the meat is being controlled (Adams 1990, 7). For example, enslaved African men in the United States were allowed only half a pound of meat a day and enslaved African women were allowed a quarter of a pound or less a day (Adams 1990, 7).

Adams also draws on the parallels between treatment of non-human animals and women in our society. Women and non-human animals are metaphorically and literally dismembered for men’s consumption and pleasure (Adams 1990, 20). In the media, women are objectified for the pleasure of the male viewer (Adams 1990, 21). In visual images in movies, TV, advertisements, and other media, women are dismembered (Adams 1990, 21). We see the lone breasts, legs, or asses of women as these body parts are seen as independent of the female individual; they are

metaphorically dismembered by our society, thereby furthering the objectification and sexualization of women (Adams 1990, 27). Adams defines the act of butchering as the act of dismemberment into small pieces that can be consumed, as one cannot consume an animal, or woman, whole (Adams 1990, 20, 30). Despite the many negative effects of the metaphorical butchering of women, the animals have a far worse fate: literal dismemberment. In the grocery stores, we see the legs, breasts, and other body parts literally dismembered for the sole purpose of being consumed by men; meat is a “man’s food” (Adams 1990, 20). The connection between the metaphorical butchering of women and the literal butchering of animals clearly demonstrates the strength of patriarchy in our current society.

Adams critiques the feminist discourse for not extending our understandings and parallels to the literal exploitation, objectification, fragmentation, and consumption of non-human animals (Adams 1990, 26).

Despite this dependence on the *imagery* of butchering, radical feminist discourse has failed to integrate the *literal* oppression of animals into our analysis of patriarchal culture or to acknowledge the strong historical alliance between feminism and [veganism] (Adams 1990, 26).

A feminist-[vegan] critical theory begins, as we have seen, with the perception that women and animals are similarly positioned in the patriarchal world, as objects rather than subjects (Adams 1990, 157).

It is significant that despite the name of her theory as a feminist-vegetarian critical theory, her form of vegetarianism is truly veganic in praxis, which is of great importance. Adams coined the term “feminized protein,” which is animal protein that is produced by female

reproductive systems, or cow's milk, and unfertilized menstrual cycles of chickens (Adams 1990, 62). "Female animals are oppressed by their femaleness" (Adams 1990, 62).

As cows, chickens, and pigs are raped ("artificially inseminated" without consent) over and over again in order to produce milk, baby hens, and baby pigs, the consumption of animal products furthers the exploitation of non-human female animal reproductive systems (Adams 1990, 63). After a cow has been impregnated, she is only allowed a short 48 hours with her newborn calf until her baby is taken away to become veal, if he is male, or to become a "milk machine" like her mother if she is a female. These are standard practices in the dairy industry (Adams 1990, 63; Joy 2009; Kemmerer 2011, 173-184). The dairy industry directly supports and maintains the production of baby male calves into veal (Adams 1990, 63; Joy 2009; Kemmerer 2011, 173-184). Once the female cow's, or pig's, body has been exhausted by her oppressor through too many pregnancies, usually only a quarter of her life expectancy, she is sent to the slaughterhouse (Adams 1990, 63; Joy 2009; Kemmerer 2011, 173-184).

Therefore due to the transparent exploitation of female reproductive systems, "*The Sexual Politics of Meat* is truly a feminist-vegan critical theory" (Adams 1990, 63)

In addition to Adams' theory and critique of feminism is Lisa Kemmerer's critique which complements Adams'. In the edited volume, *Sister Species*, editor Lisa Kemmerer states:

By distancing themselves from other exploited females, such feminists [who consume animal products] endeavor to pass exploitation on to other exploited individuals, those whom they perceive as being yet lower on the hierarchical ladder. Such indifference to the exploitation of those whom they perceive as lesser mirrors the larger culture of hierarchy and oppression. In so behaving, these feminists 'mirror patriarchal oppressors.' Women, including eco-feminists, who prefer to ignore that nonhuman animals who are exploited for their reproductive abilities are oppressed females closely resemble men who prefer to ignore that

women are human. Women who prefer not to recognize a cow as an objectified female also resemble early feminists who focus exclusively on white, middle-class women. Feminists who engage in this kind of denial, who support and participate in the oppression of the less powerful in hopes of elevating themselves, are not only hypocritical but also engage in a profound betrayal of feminism's deepest commitments. To avoid such pitfalls, in light of linked oppressions, feminists and ecofeminists must specifically address the oppression of the nonhuman animals with whom we share the planet. In failing to do so, activists and theorists adopt the sort of exclusionary theorizing they ostensibly reject. For those who seek freedom from violation of the powerful—power and privilege must not be more widely shared, they must be radically dismantled. Instead of feeding nonhuman individuals to the patriarchal monster in the hopes of saving themselves, women must turn the monster away (Kemmerer 2011, 20).

The author notes the magnitude of importance for feminists and ecofeminists to extend their fight, ethics, and morals to nonhuman animals. Much like Adams, she also harshly critiques the patriarchal nature of our society and the connections between men and civilization, and the connection between women and nature since they are constantly being objectified by the males in power (Kemmerer 2011, 15). The true nature of patriarchy “empowers certain individuals at the expense of others: devalued individuals are viewed as a means to the ends of the dominant group” (Kemmerer 2011, 13).

Another example of how the patriarchal ideology has contributed to the myth of meat is apparent in the book *Mad Cowboy* by Howard Lyman. In our culture, the earth and nature are seen as feminine entities. The planet is often referred to as Mother Nature or Mother Earth. In the patriarchal “traditional” gender roles, women are seen as caring, nurturing individuals who have the ability to give life and are the domestic figures. Viewing nature and the planet as the personification of femininity also leads Mother Earth to be treated as a woman would be treated in the patriarchal ideology, a second-class citizen and only present for the consumption or

exploitation by men. In his testimony, we witness how the patriarchal ideology and the myth of meat have exploited and abused our planet.

Howard Lyman came into the public eye in 1996 when he was invited on the Oprah show to debate a cattleman regarding meat production and consumption in the United States. At that time, Lyman was a cowboy who had turned into a pure vegetarian. After detailing the aspects of rendering and cattle raising, Oprah declared that she would never eat beef again (Lyman 1998, 14). Oprah's statement on television sparked a lawsuit from the Texas cattlemen for food disparagement (Lyman 1998: 14). The cattlemen sued both Oprah Winfrey and Howard Lyman. Lyman's transformation narrative, from cattle rancher to vegan, is interwoven throughout the book. He also discusses political, historical, and cultural factors that have shaped the cattle industry's power as well as exposing its corruption, disingenuous acts, and disregard for the cattle's well-being. However, the main objective of *Mad Cowboy* is to expose the animal agriculture industry's exploitation and degradation of the environment on a global scale.

Lyman comes from a cattle-ranching family in Montana. He was the fourth generation to continue with the family business. However, after a spinal injury that Lyman claims was due to working with pesticides and hazardous chemicals on the ranch, he came face to face with the fact that he had been exploiting the land. He knew that he had to change. It was during his recovery from spinal surgery that he had his epiphany.

I kept moving my feet, and my thoughts kept returning to how rich the soil had looked when I was a kid. It didn't look like that anymore. Now it crumbled in my hands. It was thin as sand. There were no more worms in it. After all the tons of herbicides and pesticides and chemical fertilizer I'd poured into it, the soil looked more like asbestos. The trees on and around the farm were dying. The birds were gone. The farm was no longer a living, breathing thing; I made up my mind then and there no matter what the outcome

of my operation, I'd dedicate the rest of my life to restoring the land to what it had been when I'd had the good fortune to be born to it (Lyman 1998, 66).

The resources required to fulfill the demands of the meat-eaters, particularly those living in the so-called western, developed nations are devastating the planet, land, and oceans. In regards to air pollution, one-third of the annual increase of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is due to deforestation and burning of the Earth's biomass in order to grow grain for the farmed animals to consume (Lyman 1998, 124). The enormous amounts of grain that are produced, that could be used to feed people in need of food, instead is given to the creatures that we have brought to life only for them to eventually become not even an afterthought for some human. It takes an estimated sixteen pounds of grain to create ONLY one pound of beef (Lyman 1998, 125). Imagine how long a human could subsist on sixteen pounds of grain. The transportation of the cattle, the packaging, and processing of the meat are energy-intensive procedures, especially when compared to the energy used for shipping, packing, and processing of fruits and vegetables (Lyman 1998, 125).

Furthermore, the pesticides and fertilizers that are used impact the air and the soil. "Petro chemical fertilizers are generously employed in the production of feed grains for livestock. Nitrous oxide, one of the notorious greenhouse gases believed to be responsible for global warming, is emitted in the production of chemical fertilizers" (Lyman 1998, 126). All of this, in addition to the billions of cows in the world, the amount of methane produced, an estimated 150 trillion quarts of methane gas, is the *second* most significant contributor to climate change (Lyman 1998, 127).

The billions of individual cows that are raised for slaughter, with all of the food they consume, produce vast amounts of waste. Far too often, their waste is irresponsibly disposed of,

contaminating rivers and streams and the lands around them with ammonia, nitrates, and other dangerous bacteria (Lyman 1998, 129). Recent estimates indicate that livestock waste exceeds the national human waste by 130% and that animal waste is responsible for ten times as much water pollution than caused by the human population of the United States (Lyman 1998, 129). This does not take into account all of the livestock carcasses that are also dumped into rivers and lands where they are left to rot, causing even more contamination and pollution (Lyman 1998, 129).

From Lyman's testimony and other environmental research, it is clear that animal agriculture is devastating our Mother Earth just for the sake of our palates and dietary habits. Just as the patriarchal ideology believes that women are here for men, the human population has taken on the role of the oppressor, or men, and Mother Earth has been given the role of the oppressed and is exploited solely for the gain of her oppressor.

The patriarchal structures in our society work with the myth of meat to further reinforce both the carnist and patriarchal ideologies. The next chapter will examine how the myth of meat has infiltrated and exacerbated racial and ethnic oppression.

CHAPTER FOUR: PARALLELS OF OPPRESSION

Not only do the patterns of consumption of animal flesh demonstrate the patriarchal structures, they also demonstrate and reinforce racism. “The Western world is not only a symbol of male power, it is an index of racism” (Adams 1990, 8). Adams argues that in our contemporary society, second-class citizens, specifically women and people of color, have acculturated to the white man’s culture and upheld their values, reinforcing sexism and racism through the consumption of animal flesh (1990, 8). “Racism [happens when the] power arrangements and customs that favor white people prevail, and that the acculturation of people of color to this standard includes the imposition of white habits of meat eating... Racism and sexism together upheld meat as white man’s food” (Adams 1990, 8). This chapter will demonstrate how racial and ethnic oppression in the United States has collaborated with the myth of meat in order to continue discrimination and oppression of racial and ethnic minorities, as it has for non-human animals, especially farmed animals.

Miyun Park’s essay, “Fighting Other,” in the edited volume *Sister Species*, begins with a memory from kindergarten when an adult at her school dismissively inquired about her nationality/ethnicity. He guessed Japanese or Chinese. When she replied that she was Korean, he said, “I never heard of ‘Kreeyan.’ You’re nothing” (Kemmerer 2011, 79). This leads her to discuss otherness, the othering of people who are different than us, and how she believes that “these differences don’t and shouldn’t matter. Nor should it matter if we’re winged, finned, feathered, hoofed-or not-when it comes to the infliction of unnecessary pain and suffering” (Kemmerer 2011, 79). For Park, her transformation narrative is closely linked with her own

oppression that she has experienced as a Korean-American, as well as the oppression and prejudice her parents endured after coming to the United States (Kemmerer 2011, 79).

As a child, I felt like I couldn't win. Either I was too Korean or too American—an 'egg,' yellow on the inside, but white on the outside. Either way, I was 'other.' I grew increasingly uneasy—not only with what I perceived to be injustice, but also with my identity. Was I a Korean kid who happened to be living in America? An American kid who happened to look like a Korean? Could I be a hyphenated 'Korean-American'? While I struggled to keep my balance, embracing Americanism yet holding onto Korean customs, I became even more confused. Why did I have to be one thing or another? Why couldn't I just *be* (Park 2011, 80-81)?

She describes her youth that was filled with “first-generation childhood obligations” like piano lessons, swim team, homework for school and her Korean school, and volunteering with her sister. She remembers being upset that not everyone was as lucky as she was to have two sacrificing parents and a good childhood. As she continued to grow and mature, she began to find ways to protest the countless injustices that she had experienced or seen in her lifetime. She spent time protesting at the White House and the Pentagon, she wrote letters to politicians, and she volunteered at soup kitchens and health care charities. At 19 she received an unsolicited piece of mail detailing the horrors of factory farming that changed her outlook.

That little piece of unwanted mail stole my ignorance. I could no longer segregate 'food' animals as 'other.' If I did, I would be guilty of the same prejudices held by those who yelled, 'Go back to China, you gook!' (Kemmerer 2011, 81).

The racial and ethnic discrimination and oppression Park experienced later illuminated another

pattern of oppression due to another type of otherness, animals. For Park, discriminating against ethnicity or race is on par with discriminating against non-human animals due to their species. Both discriminate based on physical, unchangeable biological traits whose symbolic meanings have been culturally established.

Speciesism is the discrimination and prejudice against non-human animals and a belief that any one species is significantly different from one another in physical and emotional capacities to feel pain or pleasure (Spiegel 1997, 7). This belief also involves “the idea that one’s own species has the right to rule and use others” (Spiegel 1997, 7). This form of discrimination has led to the systematic, institutionalized oppression of non-human animals (Kemmerer 2011, 17). The discrimination and exploitation of non-human animals is enforced and in some cases protected by the national legal and justice systems (Kemmerer 2011, 17).

Another example of vegans discussing how the myth of meat has exacerbated and paralleled race and ethnic oppression is in A. Harper Breeze’s edited volume—*Sistah Vegan*—published in 2010. The text is a compilation of personal narratives, poems, and monographs written by self-identified Black, female vegans. Each chapter is written by a different woman and explores how she came to understand that dietary habits and food production connect to either dismantling or maintenance of environmental racism, speciesism, ecological devastation, health disparities, institutional racism, overconsumption, and other social injustices (Harper 2010, xix). She writes that the purpose of the book is to understand that self-identified Black, female vegans are using veganism as a tool to combat various social injustices.

Collectively, these ladies [authors of the other chapters] are actively decolonizing their bodies and minds via whole-foods veganism and/or raw foodism, resisting becoming a ‘health disparities’ statistic by kicking the junk food habit, questioning the soulfulness

of postindustrial Soul Food, raising children who have never tasted a McDonald's (not so) Happy Meal, and making the connections that compassionate consumption has to creating a compassionate and eco-sustainable society (Harper 2010, xix)

For example, Michelle Loyd-Paige writes, "Not liking what I saw, I made a conscious decision to change my eating habits so that they would more closely represent my thinking on issues of social justice, the equitable use and distribution of global resources, and the health-diet-survival connection for African-Americans" (Harper 2010, 3). She recalls learning about the perils of animal agriculture in the United States, due to her initial thoughts regarding chicken consumption (Harper 2010, 6). She learned about the inhumane practices inflicted on animals that are raised for food and concludes, "Animals are part of creation, just as humans. Treating them so callously is symptomatic of general disregard for anything our culture defines as inferior and expendable. In the U.S., how we treat food animals is reminiscent of how people of color were treated" (Harper 2010, 4). This connection prompted the author to investigate the connections of oppression and the health inequalities that are found in the African-American community.

Seeing a connection between the treatment of feed animals, laying chickens, and people of color is a rather recent phenomenon for me...The connection becomes clear with a careful reading of our history and an understanding of the true nature of food production in the United States...Understanding the connection strengthens my resolve to continue eating like a vegan. Choosing to eat this way is a reminder to myself and a demonstration to those around me that all of creation is worthy of respect and human treatment, even chickens (Harper 2010, 5).

For African-Americans, however, it is no laughing matter. We are literally killing ourselves and decreasing our quality of life by the way we eat...I am healthier now. I know too much now. I am

committed to living an authentic life and to working for the elimination of all forms of injustice. I am now thinking and eating at the same time. There is no turning back (Harper 2010, 6-7).

The majority of the authors in *Sistah Vegan* identify their ancestors' oppression, and the lasting effects of colonization and slavery, as part of their reason to live a vegan life.

One of the authors notes that the book, *The Dreaded Comparison*, by Marjorie Spiegel, had a profound impact on how she viewed human and animal slavery. Spiegel takes on 'the dreaded comparison' and demonstrates the parallels between human and animal slavery. Racism and speciesism are inherently connected, as they are both forms of discrimination and manifest oppression of the "other." Both racism and speciesism are also based around the same basic relationship of the oppressor and the oppressed (Speigel 1988, 28).

In our culture, to be called an animal, bitch, or pig is an insult. Non-human animals are considered the "lower" beings much like slaves were considered second-class citizens. In other words, their "otherness" and differences in their appearance, language, or culture are accepted as valid reasons for their oppression and classification as lower beings. These culturally constructed hierarchies are biased and have been constructed and reinforced by those in power, those in the role of the oppressor. "It is only an anthropocentric world view which makes qualities possessed by humans to be those by which all other species are measured" (Speigel 1988, 23). The millions of creatures that we share the planet with are unique in their own non-human way. A human could never be a better swimmer than a fish or dolphin; similarly a fish or dolphin could never be better than a human at driving a car or riding a bike. Their "otherness" does not justify their enslavement or exploitation. Comparing the suffering of human-animals to the suffering of non-human animals is offensive only to the speciesist who has accepted the cultural hierarchies

constructed by the masters (Speigel 1988, 30). We all recognize that non-human animals feel pain and suffer like humans, yet the systems of oppression force victims to prove that they are more like the masters and to join them instead of recognizing fellow victims and coming together to dismantle the systems of oppression all together (Speigel 1988, 30). When we take on the role of the oppressor we are furthering the systems of oppression instead of breaking them down. The systems of oppression encourage us to become the oppressor to avoid becoming the oppressed. The oppressed are prohibited from coming together to fight the system itself. To deny our similarities to non-human animals is to undermine our own capabilities and possibilities (Speigel 1988, 30). Speigel claims that by eliminating the oppression of animals, we could begin to weaken the psychological and social structures that create the opportunities for oppressor and oppressed relationships in our culture today (1988, 30). “The animals of the world exist for their own reasons. They were not made for humans any more than black people were made for whites or women for men” (Walker in Speigel 1988, 14).

In Karen Davis’ *The Holocaust and The Henmaid’s Tale*, she investigates the similarities of the methods used and the atrocities committed during the Jewish Holocaust to the animal holocaust. She uses holocaust as a metaphor to illuminate other atrocities. They are different and separate cases but parallels of oppression and exploitation are evident regarding the atrocities committed on factory farms.

“When the oppression of one group is used metaphorically to illuminate the oppression of another group, justice requires that the oppression that forms the basis of the comparison be comprehended in its own right...there is no good reason to insist that one form of suffering and oppression is so exclusive that it may not be used to raise moral concerns about any other form of oppression” (Davis 2005, 4).

Interestingly, Israel is the country with the highest percentage of vegans (Stub 2016). Dr. Alex Hershaft, a notable animal rights activist and founding president of the nonprofit organization Farm Animal Rights Movement (FARM), is also a Holocaust survivor. He was born in Poland, but along with his mother, fled to the United States and then Israel after his father was murdered by the Nazis (FARM). Hershaft is now the founding president of the Farm Animal Rights Movement organization that fights for the rights of farmed animals. In an interview, he stated:

I noted the many similarities between how the Nazis treated us and how we treat animals, especially those raised for food. Among these are the use of cattle cars for transport and crude wood crates for housing, the cruel treatment and deception about impending slaughter, the processing efficiency and emotional detachments of the perpetrators, and the piles of assorted body parts - mute testimonials to the victims they were once a part of (2014).

Some of the similarities found between human-engineered suffering on humans and human-engineered suffering on non-human animals include vivisection, genetic engineering, slave labor, displacement from homes, entertainment, overcrowded spaces, separation of parents and offspring, mass graves, live transport, genocide, institutionalization of oppression, violence in the bureaucracy, deindividualization, deprivation of basic needs, physical and political secrecy, systematic violence, branding, domination, whippings, beatings, and objectification (Spiegel 1988, Szybel 2006, Davis 2005, Joy 2009).

An additional form of oppression observed in the meat/dairy/egg industries is in the exploitation of slaughterhouse workers. Investigative journalist Eric Schlosser exposed the inherent violence and how the workers are seen as disposable in his article, "The Chain Never Stops," published in 2001. The meat industry has the highest injury rates and is known for

“discouraging injury reports, falsifying injury data, and putting workers back on the job quickly to minimize the reporting of lost workdays” (Schlosser 2001). The workers that are injured are left without health insurance and many become disabled for the rest of their lives with no aid or compensation from the slaughterhouse (Schlosser 2001). Below is a list of accident reports detailing slaughterhouse worker injuries:

Employee Severely Burned After Fuel From His Saw Is Ignited. Employee Hospitalized for Neck Laceration From Flying Blade. Employee's Finger Amputated in Sausage Extruder. Employee's Finger Amputated in Chitlin Machine. Employee's Eye Injured When Struck by Hanging Hook. Employee's Arm Amputated in Meat Auger. Employee's Arm Amputated When Caught in Meat Tenderizer. Employee Burned in Tallow Fire. Employee Burned by Hot Solution in Tank. One Employee Killed, Eight Injured by Ammonia Spill. Employee Killed When Arm Caught in Meat Grinder. Employee Decapitated by Chain of Hide Puller Machine. Employee Killed When Head Crushed by Conveyor. Employee Killed When Head Crushed in Hide Fleshing Machine. Employee Killed by Stun Gun. Caught and Killed by Gut-Cooker Machine. (Schlosser 2001).

In addition to the serious physical risks of working in a slaughterhouse, the industry is one of the nation's lowest-paid industrial jobs (Schlosser 2001). In some slaughterhouses, more than three-quarters of the employees are non-native English speakers and many are illegal immigrants (Schlosser 2001). The industry's true concern is with profit. Even when an injury occurred, as the title says, “The Chain Never Stops” and the other workers must make up for one less person (Schlosser 2001).

Just recently in 2016, the Oxfam published a report regarding the working conditions of poultry workers, “No Relief; Denial of Bathroom Breaks in the Poultry Industry.” Oxfam, an international confederation of eighteen NGOs who aim to fight global poverty, conducted

interviews with poultry workers across the nation including Tyson and Perdue farms in Texas and Arkansas (2016). The report concluded that:

“Workers urinate and defecate while standing on the line; they wear diapers to work; they restrict intake of liquids and fluids to dangerous degrees; they endure pain and discomfort while they worry about their health and job security. And they are in danger of serious health problems. The denial of bathroom breaks strikes women particularly hard....They struggle to maintain their dignity and privacy when requesting adequate time to use the restroom” (Oxfam 2016).

The myth of meat has worked with the patriarchal and racial social norms and structures to maintain and protect the current interconnected systematic oppression of humans and non-human animals. The vegans who draw parallels between human and animal suffering and oppression have demystified the myth of meat by recognizing the suffering and exploitation of others.

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Decolonize Your Diet is another example of how racial and ethnic discrimination is wrapped into the myth of meat. The book is primarily a cookbook full of plant-based recipes that have origins in the indigenous cultures of Mexico, prior to their colonization by the Spanish. The authors are a couple of Mexican descent, Luz Calvo and Catrióna Rueda Esquibel, whose recent ancestors migrated to the United States. They are both currently professors in California where their area of study is Mesoamerica and its indigenous peoples. The aim of the cookbook is to

promote a return to their ancestors' diet, to empower their people to value indigenous traditions, and challenge the colonial structures and traditions that oppressed their ancestors.

Before colonization, Mesoamerican food was steamed, grilled or cooked on a clay skillet known as the comal. Meat was eaten only in small quantities. Our ancestors gathered and ate wild herbs and greens. They cultivated hundreds of different varieties of beans, squash, and corn, not just the few varieties now available at most grocery stores. In terms of corn, in particular, our ancestors created a rich and sustaining cuisine that included yellow, white, red, blue, and black corn, made tamales, tacos, atoles, and more (Calvo and Esquibel 2015, 403).

The authors discuss the data and academic dialogue concerning the colonization of their ancestors by the Spanish and the lasting effects of that colonization. For the couple, the transformation to a plant-based diet lead them to their current new perspective on life: to reject the colonizer's negative diet and reclaim and revive their cultural heritage and tradition. They explain that, for them, decolonization is the dismantling of the long-lasting colonial systems of domination and knowledge (such as economy, education, religion, and food system) and to learn, value, recover, and teach the indigenous ways of life (Calvo and Esquibel 2015, 403). They actively practice decolonizing their diet everyday by valuing and consuming the indigenous diet of their Mesoamerican ancestors.

Another vegan who has further demystified the myth of meat is Russell Simmons. Russell Simmons is a famous African-American celebrity known for his involvement in hip-hop music and for co-founding Def Jam Records. Now almost sixty years old, Simmons has written several books and promoted veganism as a compassionate, ethical lifestyle throughout the media. He begins the book with his past-self who struggled with addictions and then presents his two

main catalyst experiences, giving credit to his yoga class. He claims that his transformation to a vegan and his practice of meditation and yoga is what led him to feeling truly happy and fulfilled with his life. He writes to enlighten people about his new world view.

He discusses how the enslavement of African-Americans has produced and influenced the contemporary cuisine associated with African-American culture. He tells the reader about the traditional diets found in Ghana, Benin, Senegal, and Sierra Leone that primarily consisted of yams, cassavas, melons, bananas, okra, sweet potatoes, porridge, and very little or no meat (Simmons 2015, 22). Simmons also discusses the contemporary idea of “traditional” African-American cuisine.

Your African ancestors were not chowing down on a big plate of ribs or eating two dozen chicken wings in a sitting...

Ham hocks? Ribs? Pig's feet? Chitlins? Those are not African dishes. Those are slave dishes. Never forget that!

[Those dishes] were introduced to our ancestors' diet only once they were put in chains and brought over to plantations in the Caribbean and North America. Do you know why okra and red beans, which are originally from West Africa, became so popular in the South? Because when the first slaves got here, they wouldn't eat the heavily salted pork the plantation owners were trying to feed them. Since those slave owners wanted to protect their investment, they had their ships bring okra and red bean seeds back from West Africa. Otherwise their slaves wouldn't eat (Simmons 2015, 22-23).

Much like the decolonization efforts of the writers in *Sistah Vegan* and *Decolonize Your Diet*, Simmons recognizes the importance of understanding the historical and political forces that have shaped our ideas about ethnic cuisine. He even discusses contemporary issues of race and food and demonstrates how powerfully symbolic meat consumption has become in regards to our identity.

If you questioned your plate of ham hocks, black-eyed peas, and corn bread, it was almost like you were questioning your blackness.

We've got to move past that mentality and confront the damage animal products wreak on our community. Largely because of its meat-based diet, the African American community is disproportionately affected by diseases like high blood pressure, high cholesterol, strokes, and diabetes...What's so heartbreaking is those are all largely *preventable* diseases. Which could be avoided by taking animal products out of our diets. We're quick to talk shit on Twitter about someone who won't eat meat at a cookout, yet we're quiet as mice when the fast-food chains push low-quality meat in every urban area. Just as we don't have much to say when the milk marketers create ads specifically targeting African Americans and Hispanics [despite the large percentage of lactose intolerance]...Let's celebrate how adaptable and inventive African Americans have been in the face of so many hardships and crises (Simmons 2015, 23-25).

Simmons calls for a new beneficial diet for his community as well as an awakening regarding African ancestral knowledge. He demonstrates with contemporary examples from social media how powerful food is when creating and discussing individual and collective identities. His statements reinforce the issues of decolonization as well as critical self-reflection.

Not only does the myth of meat exacerbate health disparities in minority populations here in the United States, it also is one of the major causes of environmental racism. For example, in North Carolina, hog farms are nine out of ten times *more* likely to be located closest to rural, minority communities. "People of color and the poor living in rural communities lacking the political capacity to resist are said to shoulder the adverse socio-economic, environmental, or health related effects of swine waste externalities without sharing in the economic benefits brought by industrialized pork production" (Edwards 2001).

Even historically, the meat industry has discriminated against minority populations. In *Mad Cowboy* Lyman discuss the colonization of the Americas and how the Europeans' taste for meat was the primary factor in the violence against the Native Americans (Lyman 1998, 136-138). Cowboys needed the land to raise their own livestock, which depleted the vegetation and supplanted the native animals around which the Native Americans had built their cultures (Lyman 1998, 136-138).

From the vegan demystification we see that the myth of meat has collaborated with racial and ethnic oppression and the patriarchal structures to maintain the current power systems in our country. All oppression is inherently connected.

CHAPTER FIVE: REGAINING HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Another major theme that has come to light from the vegan demystification is regaining health and wellness. Many people come to the vegan lifestyle looking for better health. The health crisis in the United States is evident as we spend trillions of dollars on healthcare every year. The myth of meat tells us that vegans are weak and malnourished, however, through the vegan demystification, we will see how this is also another falsehood perpetuated by the myth.

The Standard American Diet, full of meat, dairy, eggs, trans-fats, and saturated fats, is the number one cause of premature death and the number one cause of disability (Greger 2015, 1). Over a century ago, the top killers in the United States were infectious diseases like pneumonia, tuberculosis, or diarrheal disease, however today the top killers are primarily lifestyle diseases like heart disease, cancer, and chronic lung disease (Greger 2015, 2). Of the top fifteen killers in the United States, thirteen can be prevented or reversed through a whole-foods vegan diet and lifestyle (Greger 2015). It is only the top thirteen because the other two causes of death are suicide and iatrogenic causes (death by doctors) (Greger 2015, 10, 239). More and more medical professionals are beginning to recognize the dangers of the Standard American Diet. The food industry ensures its continuing profits by coming up with products that alter and manipulate the dopamine reward system in our brains (Greger 2015, 400; Lisle and Goldhamer 2003, 89). They keep us hooked on their products (Greger 2015, 400; Lisle and Goldhamer 2003, 89). Meat is the new tobacco (Greger 2015). The myth of meat tells us we need animal products to be healthy, however when examining the science, we see that vegans have the lowest rates of obesity,

cancer, heart disease, and diabetes. (Greger 2015, McDougall 2016, Campbell 2005, Lisle and Goldhamer 2003, Branard 2004).

Dr. T. Collin Campbell, Professor Emeritus of Nutritional Biochemistry at Cornell University, is one of the most notable, contemporary pioneers in plant-based nutrition. A former meat-loving dairy farmer, Campbell has now helped thousands of people regain their health and wellness. Before *The China Study*, Dr. Campbell's career focused on protein, mostly animal protein. His book is called *The China Study* because Campbell and his colleagues wanted to know why the rates of disease were so low in rural China, where a primarily plant-based diet is eaten, yet so high in the United States, where a diet high in animal protein is eaten. However, the study with over 8,000 statistically significant correlations resulted in unexpected conclusions (Campbell 2005, 43).

He and his colleagues determined that animal protein in high amounts promotes cancer growth and the reduction of animal protein reduced cancer growth (Campbell 2005, 60). This is important because in the United States, animal protein is held in high regard and is believed to be 'optimal' human food. Campbell and his colleagues discovered the opposite was true. The overconsumption of animal protein in the Standard American Diet is one of the major causes for the high rates of disease in the United States (Campbell 2005). Dr. Campbell's Third Principle of Good Eating is: "There are virtually no nutrients in animal-based foods that are not better provided by plants" (Campbell 2005, 230). The Sixth Principle of Good Eating is: "The same nutrition that prevents disease in its early stages can also halt or reverse disease in its later stages" (Campbell 2005, 236).

Dr. Campbell's findings were of course met with opposition from the meat and dairy industries and their representatives. He has bravely spoken out against the corruption and lobbying that has affected millions of Americans' lives and hold profit over health and science.

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Kristina Carrillo-Bucaram, also known as FullyRaw Kristina, published her health and cookbook in 2016. Kristina is a native Houstonian in her later twenties who is half Lebanese and half Ecuadorian. The main focus of her book is to provide tips for living a raw vegan life, and they include recipes, tricks, and exercise plans. Raw vegans subsist on raw fruits and vegetables. They consume produce that is uncooked or dehydrated at less than 110 degrees.

Previously, Kristina had been constantly ill with frequent trips to the hospital. She suffered from hyperglycemia, weight loss, regular migraines, nausea, chronic fatigue, depression, vomiting, dehydration, and blood sugar level problems (Carrillo-Bucaram 2016, 44). At 5'7" her lowest weight was 87 pounds and she was heavily dependent on drugs (Carrillo-Bucaram 2016). After finding out about a raw foods diet, she decided to give it a try because she felt like she had hit rock bottom (Carrillo-Bucaram 2016, 44). She became a raw vegan overnight. After just one week of raw foods, Kristina couldn't believe she was already feeling better (Carrillo-Bucaram 2016, 44). She has now lived a raw vegan lifestyle for over eleven years and has regained her health and happiness (Carrillo-Bucaram 2016). She has fully recovered from her hyperglycemia without medication and is extremely vibrant. She runs six to ten miles every day, runs three businesses in Houston, and inspires others to eat their fruits and veggies!

I am dedicated to this lifestyle and I'm dedicated to helping people feed people good food and healthful information. This has changed my life...(Carillo-Bucaram 2016, 73)

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Dr. Garth Davis, a native Texan with European ancestry who currently resides in Houston, is a practicing bariatric weight-loss surgeon at The Davis Clinic. His book, *Proteinaholic*, analyzes the role that protein, specifically animal protein, has played in the United States' health epidemic as well as the historical factors that resulted in the grave misunderstandings regarding protein and human nutrition.

My name is Garth Davis, and I was a proteinaholic. For many years, I obeyed what I'd been taught by the medical establishment, by my colleagues, and by the media: that each and every meal and snack had to contain a huge serving of my beloved protein. I would gulp down protein drinks whenever possible, and dive into big, thick steaks practically daily. Protein was my drug and, worse yet, it was my prescription. I actually pushed protein on my patients, encouraging them to do as I did (Davis 2015, 3).

He hopes by sharing his research and his journey to veganism, he will help his patients and others in their fight for health and wellness. He realized he owed it to himself and his patients to find a better way than invasive, expensive surgeries for permanent weight loss (Davis 2015, 32).

Dr. Davis felt like he was in a slump and did not like what he saw in the mirror (Davis 2015, 21). After his optometrist had found cholesterol in his eyes, he began to rethink everything he had initially learned, or not learned, in medical school.

I was a physician—a specialist in weight loss—yet I didn't look trim, or fit, or even very healthy. I looked the way I felt—frail ...I felt like a complete hypocrite. Not only did I feel lousy all the time, my labs made it clear that I was well on my way to the same chronic disease that my patients were suffering: hypertension, heart disease,

and diabetes. Who was I to tell them what to do when I obviously didn't have a good solution myself (Davis 2015, 21- 22).

After copious amounts of research, Dr. Davis came to the conclusion that meat and animal protein were the problem. It took him about a year to convert to a fully vegan diet, slowly phasing out one animal product at a time. The three main points that he urges his readers to remember are that “Carbs do not cause diabetes, meat and fat do,” “Carbs do not cause heart disease – meat does,” and “Carbs are not behind the obesity epidemic, meat and calorie excess is” (Davis 2015, 12). He has helped thousands of patients in the Houston area achieve permanent weight loss and regain their lives.

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Howard Lyman also reported his journey to health in *Mad Cowboy* and how his health vastly improved on a vegan diet.

I'd seen countless friends suffer from heart attacks or require heart surgery. I'd seen the cancer rate in America increase dramatically. My own health was hardly exemplary: I weighed three hundred fifty pounds, my cholesterol was over 300, my blood pressure was off the charts, and I was getting nosebleeds... Within a year of eating no meat, my health problems all started to go away. Not only did I feel better physically, but I felt better knowing that there was one answer to many of the different ills afflicting both ourselves and our environment. Everything revolved around the fork (Lyman 1998, 81).

It took Lyman about a year to become fully vegan and his only regret was not doing it sooner (Lyman 1998, 175). Years later, he wrote another book, *No More Bull! The Mad Cowboy Targets America's Worst Enemy: Our Diet*, that details the dangers and consequences of the consumption of animal products and fad diets.

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For the couple who wrote *Decolonize Your Diet*, overcoming cancer was a major factor in their decision to turn to a plant-based diet. After Luz Calvo was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2006, she began to research breast cancer in the Latino communities. She found that Mexico has some of the lowest rates of breast cancer in the world, that immigrant Latinas had significantly lower rates of breast cancer than United States-born Latinas, and finally, the longer Latina immigrants lived in the US, the higher their risk for developing breast cancer (Calvo and Esquibel 2015, 263). While she was researching breast cancer, she had a moment of clarity and realized that the Standard American Diet was one of the culprits for her illness. She and her partner decided to decolonize their bodies and diets in order to regain her health and wellness. They returned to a diet of beans, corn, squash, wild greens, nopales, fresh fruits, nuts, and seeds (Calvo and Esquibel 2015, 274).

Thus began our quest to decolonize our diet. First we started eating simple foods: a fresh pot of beans! And then I learned how to make fresh tortillas from scratch. Ah! My spirit awoke. I recalled warm memories of these tastes and smells from my childhood (Calvo and Esquibel 2015, 282).

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Russell Simmons also discusses the healthy side effects of his vegan lifestyle. He always assumed he couldn't live without animal products, and was surprised at how good he felt.

Physically, I started feeling the difference in just a few weeks. I had more energy and slept better at night...My taste buds stopped craving those heavy, greasy flavors and started appreciating lighter and more diverse seasonings. (Simmons 2015, 19).

He also discusses the governmental subsidies that keep meat cheap and details all of the hidden costs of the meat and dairy industries that is an estimated, staggering \$414 *BILLION* a year in the U.S. (Simmons 2015, 32). Furthermore, he takes into account the debilitating cost of healthcare in the United States. He shows that although your grocery bill may slightly increase when purchasing quality produce, it is a type of insurance for the future well-being for you and your family. Keeping yourself, or your family, healthy on a plant-based diet will dramatically reduce medical issues as well as the costs associated with healthcare (Simmons 2015, 34).

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The meat, dairy, and food industries have led us astray from living healthy lives. They bombard us with commercials and propaganda for their products. The myth of meat has retained its power and authority at the cost of people's health, all for the sake of profit and corporate greed. People who have gone vegan for their health have seen tremendous overall improvements. Happy and healthy vegans are literally demystifying the notion that vegans are weak and malnourished.

CHAPTER SIX: VEGAN AS THE ALTERNATIVE

The myth of meat is a very powerful force in the United States and the majority of the world. Our society has been deceived and manipulated by the interconnected systems of oppression. Every fragment of each myth and social and cultural structures are intricately interwoven to create space for the myths to be maintained and reinforced. However, the myth of meat has legitimate, real-life consequences for our planet and bodies. That is why it is so important to demystify the carnist ideology, so that present and future generations can choose an alternate way of life. Vegans have demystified and broken down all segments and claims of the myth of meat. Vegans have become the mythologists while exposing the distortions and inversions.

Returning to Roland Barthes, he urges the reader to take on the role of the mythologist instead of the myth consumer. The role of the mythologist is to decipher the statements made by the myth and provide an alternative, which is what vegans have done. Not only have the vegan mythologists uncovered the statements directly associated with meat consumption, but they have also demystified the symbolic meanings behind meat and animal product consumption.

Barthes also discusses the life of the mythologist and the events that take place after the demystification. He writes that unveiling the myth is in itself a political act (Barthes 1957, 271). For many, being vegan *is* a political statement. Myths construct our worlds and realities (Barthes 1957, 271). All different kinds of vegans eschew animal products to make a political statement, whether it is a statement about animal or human rights, oppression, or saving the planet.

He also writes that the mythologists separate themselves from the myth consumers and that the “mythologist must become estranged if he wants to liberate the myth” (Barthes 1957,

272). Just by identifying oneself as a vegan, you separate yourself from the rest of society, which is overwhelmingly non-vegan. Vegans also separate themselves culturally and socially by attending vegan events or frequenting vegan locales or businesses.

...the mythologist is excluded from this history in the name of which he professes to act. The havoc which he wreaks in the language of the community is absolute for him, it fills his assignment to the brim: he must live this assignment without any hope of going back...It is forbidden for him to imagine what the rest of the world will concretely be like when the immediate object of his criticism has disappeared. Utopia is an impossible luxury for him: he greatly doubts that tomorrow's truths will be the exact reverse of today's lies (Barthes 1957, 272).

Joy points out that in our contemporary, modern world, it is not necessary, normal, or natural to eat animal products. We live in a world of abundance and plenty instead of scarcity and have the choice every time we go to the supermarket or a restaurant to choose alternate options. In the last five years alone, the availability of vegan products has skyrocketed. Vegans before us and contemporary vegans have shown that it is possible to live a vibrant and full life without animal products. We now know that they are unnecessary. Factory farming and the slaughter of billions of innocent creatures artificially bred into existence is not natural. The "circle of life" or "top of the food chain" justifications are no longer accurate. Genetically altering the animals so they are unable to move or procreate on their own accord is far from natural. The majority of us are taught that animals deserve respect and in some cases are even considered family. From our closest animal friends we learn that each individual has his or her own personality, likes, and dislikes. Yet, the myth of meat manipulates our thoughts and justifies and normalizes the consumption of other animal body parts. The farmed animals born into enslavement and exploitation feel pain, sadness, hunger, and joy just the same as humans and the

animal companions we share our lives with. Why love a dog or cat but eat a pig or cow? The myth of meat justifies their consumption by claiming that it is normal and has been accepted historically and contemporarily.

Due to the myth of meat, the consumption of animal products has acquired many symbolic meanings that have invaded other social and cultural arenas. For example, feminist vegans attempt to dismantle the patriarchy by demystifying the myth of meat. They expose the exploitation of other females and their reproductive systems for the gain of the patriarchy. These feminists also expose how women and animals are both objectified and dismembered for male consumption.

For vegans who identify as racial or ethnic minorities, they see parallels in how their ancestors were treated and how animals on factory farms are treated. In order to break the oppressor and oppressed relationship, they refuse to acculturate and therefore reject the traditions and customs that maintain the current power structures. Furthermore, the health disparities seen in minority populations are also a great concern for the racial or ethnic minority vegans. They aim to help better their communities and guide their people to an alternate lifestyle that can potentially save millions of lives.

The medical and scientific pioneers who have dedicated their lives to plant-based nutrition have fought against one of the biggest industries in our country as well as the world. It was a huge breakthrough in October 2015 when the World Health Organization and mainstream health organization confirmed that all mammalian meat is carcinogenic (Q &A from the World Health Organization). More and more people are beginning to realize the vast health benefits of a plant-

based diet. People have been able to reverse their heart disease and diabetes just by changing what they put in their bodies.

This text exposes contemporary cultural constructions via Barthes' theory of myth. Demonstrating the myths associated with animal-product consumption furthers the determination that our food and dietary habits are culturally constructed. Myths, in all contexts per Barthes, are social constructs. They are ideas, beliefs, customs, traditions, and norms that—despite being myths—shape, create, and inform our realities.

Cultural constructions have long been a central focus in the field of anthropology. Food, along with other cultural constructs discussed by anthropologists, such as gender, emotions, dress, empire, and illness, to name a few, are crucial when studying human culture (Douglas 1974; Lèvi-Strauss 1966; Counihan 1992; Fischler 1997; Yafeh 2007; Taylor 1989; Rasmussen 2010; Schieffelin 1980, 1985; Buckser 2006; Berger and Luckmann 1966). It is important to examine the cultural myths and constructs surrounding foodstuffs and social rules surrounding food for many reasons. Food is essential to all human life. It connects our lives and brings us meanings and emotions. Most importantly, food gives us sustenance to survive. Daily life, celebrations, and many other social gatherings revolve around and include food. Furthermore, eating is frequently a shared act which in some cases can be considered very intimate. Eating also demonstrates social barriers of who can or cannot eat with who or even foods that are taboo. Cultural rules surrounding food consumption are shared belief systems that guide the ways we think about and interact with what we consider food. We maintain our bodies and our identities via food consumption. It is inconceivable to understand a culture in a holistic, broad, cultural anthropological way without exploring its cuisine.

Just as the myth of meat is created by human culture, so is the alternative of veganism.

Veganism has been culturally created as a reaction to and acknowledgment of the dominant discourse that is carnism. Vegans demonstrate the malleability of social constructs by means of creating their own cultural notions and customs and have become modern-day mythologists by demystifying the myth of meat and creating another way of life that seeks to end non-human animal exploitation, dismantle colonial and patriarchal systems of power, and regain individual and collective health and wellness.

Overall, vegans have fully broken down the myth of meat and have created an alternative to consuming animal products. Vegans have become mythologists in the hopes of creating a better future for all our fellow Earthlings. The myth of meat not only exploits non-human animals, but has negatively impacted our bodies and our planet. Vegans have created an alternate myth that requires no death or exploitation of humans or animals and liberates us all from the current patriarchal and racial or ethnic oppression. The alternative to the myth of meat is veganism.

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