

OF MEAT AND MEN:
EXPLORING MEN'S EXPERIENCES WITH VEGETARIANISM

by

Jacob B. Lax

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Sociology

Middle Tennessee State University
May 2018

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Angela Mertig, Chair
Dr. Vicky MacLean
Dr. Meredith Dye

*To my parents –
I love you.*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank the men in this study for participating and making this thesis possible. I would also like to thank Dr. Mertig, Dr. MacLean, and Dr. Dye for their time, attention and patience throughout this project. Your insights have been incredibly valuable, and you have left an indelible mark on my life and education. Finally, I would like to thank the Department of Sociology and Anthropology for all of your support.

ABSTRACT

Research suggests an association between meat and masculinity, but little is known about men who are vegetarian. Drawing on literature primarily from the sociology of gender and ecofeminism, this thesis employs a phenomenological research design to explore how masculinity operates in the experiences of ten men who are vegetarian. Three themes emerge from the analysis. The first theme, *rationality and emotionality*, shows that most men in this study use logic and reason to justify their decision to become vegetarian rather than making more emotional appeals. The second theme, *stereotype avoidance and self-presentations*, describes images of “PETA extremists” and “preachy vegetarians” and reveals how the men wish to present their vegetarianism in ways that avoid disrupting the status quo. The final theme, *masculine, vegetarian identity and the resolution of gender threats*, describes the complex and sometimes contradictory ways in which men who are vegetarian both reject and reproduce dominant constructions of masculinity. Together, the findings reveal that masculinity does appear to play some role in how the men in this study experience vegetarianism.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
LITERATURE REVIEW	4
Theoretical Background.....	4
Gender and society.....	4
Masculinities.....	5
Ecofeminism	6
Meat and Masculinity	8
Meat and strength.....	9
Vegetarianism	10
Vegetarianism and gender.....	11
Vegetarianism, gender and deviance	12
Vegetarianism, gender and emotions.....	13
METHODS	16
Locating Myself	16
Ethics.....	18
Data Collection	18
Analysis.....	19

Sampling	20
Sample Characteristics	21
FINDINGS	23
“‘It was more logical to make this decision’”: Rationality and Emotionality	23
“‘I don’t want to cause friction’”: Self-Presentation and Stereotype Avoidance	29
The PETA extremist	30
The preachy vegetarian	33
Considering gender	37
“‘Masculinity was not a barrier to me becoming vegetarian’”: Masculine, Vegetarian Identity and the Resolution of Gender Threats	38
DISCUSSION	46
LIMITATIONS	52
CONCLUSION	54
REFERENCES	55
APPENDICES	61
Appendix A. Interview Guide	62
Appendix B. IRB Approval	63

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Participants by age, type of vegetarianism, and primary motivation for vegetarianism	22
--	----

INTRODUCTION

A recent online news article published by *ESPN* examines the emergence of what reporter Cameron Wolfe (2017) terms a “vegan movement” on the Tennessee Titans football team. With the help of his chef wife Charity cooking his meals, linebacker Derrick Morgan transitioned to a vegan diet over the course of ten months. “One by one,” writes Wolfe, “Titans players spotted Morgan’s lunches and asked to be put on the meal plan” (n.p.). However, these changes in dietary practices did not go without some initial resistance from other members of the team. “The Titans’ vegan crew was the butt of jokes in training camp,” Wolfe notes, “but now more than a quarter of the roster is either on the plant-based meal plan or has shown interest in trying it out.”

What explains these football players’ interest in veganism? According to Wolfe (2017), “They believe there’s proof in the vegan mac and cheese that a plant-based diet helps them lose weight, recover faster and, believe it or not, play better” (n.p.). Wolfe continues on by describing numerous achievements made by vegan players on the team this year. All of this is to suggest that following a vegan or “plant-based” diet—two terms used interchangeably by Wolfe—actually bolsters the players’ performance and, by association, their masculinity. Indeed, Morgan is known to use his position as linebacker in a way that demonstrates substantial strength and aggression as he divides and conquers the offense.

The article implies a sense of novelty, or even surprise, due to the idea that these football players’ masculine performances could be achieved by following a diet based entirely on plant foods. At least two additional articles find this “vegan movement” newsworthy (Burrows 2017; Walker 2017). Numerous popular news sources report on

vegan bodybuilders much to the same effect (e.g., Andrade 2017). What is the fascination with masculinity and vegetarianism (or perhaps more specifically, with veganism)?

Moreover, how does masculinity play out in terms of men's experiences with vegetarianism? The present study considers these questions.

Although most people may not immediately associate meat with masculinity, a gendered phenomenon exists surrounding meat and vegetable consumption. Research suggests that men are more likely to eat or express a preference for meat, especially red meat, than are women (e.g., Daniel et al. 2011; Rothgerber 2013; Rozin et al. 2012). Women, however, are more likely to eat or express a preference for vegetables than are men (e.g., Rozin et al. 2012; Ruby 2012). Rogers' (2008) analysis of television ads finds that meat consumption is linked to a "crisis in masculinity." He provides an example of a commercial in which a man is seen struggling to assemble boxed furniture. Unable to read the instructions and use his power tools appropriately, the man loses his composure and, in an aggressive manner, haphazardly drills together pieces of the furniture. A narrator's voice is then heard telling the man to relax and "feed the beast" with an extra beefy taco. Rogers (2008) interprets this scenario as a failure of the man to accomplish competing models of masculinity—on one hand, there is the more intellectual and "civilized" man, but on the other, there is an image of a "working man" with power tools. Regardless, the consumption of an "extra beefy" taco helps the man in the ad to restore his sense of masculinity and thereby resolve the tension produced by the crisis. With this in mind, what is to be said of men who deliberately eschew eating meat?

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the role of gender in men's experiences with vegetarianism. This research investigates the ways in which men who are vegetarian

construct themselves as masculine subjects in relation to their diets, and specifically examines the ways in which men may incorporate masculinity into their identities and interactions as vegetarians. As will be shown in the following literature review, this study contributes to a growing body of sociological knowledge at the intersection of gender and food, among other areas, including emotions and nonhuman animals (hereafter “animals”).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review is divided into three sections. The first section provides the theoretical groundwork necessary for a sociological exploration of men's experiences with vegetarianism, and includes discussions of gender, masculinities, and ecofeminism. The next section addresses both the "masculine" meaning of meat and meat consumption as a gendered practice. The final section focuses on the vegetarian experience and includes discussions of vegetarianism in relation to gender, deviance, and emotions. Collectively, the literature suggests that men who are vegetarian have a unique standpoint from which to understand meat consumption and masculinity in the larger society, and their experiences with vegetarianism are thus worth exploring.

Theoretical Background

Gender and society. In the US and other contemporary Western societies, gender is commonly viewed through an individualistic, biological deterministic lens, which treats masculinity and femininity as innate properties of individuals respectively located within "male" and "female" bodies (e.g., Fausto-Sterling 2000). This research, however, approaches gender from the perspective of social constructionism, and emphasizes the interactional, institutional, and historical contexts that differentially shape human bodies and lives in gendered ways. Gender as a social construct evades biological interpretation and encompasses the myriad social meanings ascribed to certain bodies, including but not limited to perceptions and expectations of anatomical differences in reproductive organs.

Scholars propound various sociological theories of gender. Using Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical sociology as a starting point, West and Zimmerman's (1987) theory of "doing gender" suggests that gender is established and sustained through interactions

and interactional work. Gender accountability structures in the larger society ensure that others “perform” according to dominant expectations. Connell (2005) conceptualizes gender as a means by which social processes and relationships are organized, or as “a structure of social practice” (p. 71). Fundamental to this argument is Connell’s (2005) focus on gender relations, which situates masculinity and femininity in relational systems. Based on ideas first presented by Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985), Connell (2005) conceptualizes gender as both inter- and intra-relational and argues that although masculinity is defined in relation to femininity, it is not monolithic.

Masculinities. Research in critical masculinities studies has been profoundly influenced by the conceptualization of multiple masculinities (e.g., Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Messner 2004). In particular, Connell’s (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity examines four hierarchical relations among masculinities in patriarchal social systems: hegemony, subordination, complicity, and marginalization. *Hegemonic masculinity* represents the ideal form of masculinity within a patriarchal social system and defines the dominant expectations for men, however unattainable they ultimately may be. Domination, control, autonomy and rationality are quintessential markers of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculine ideals are products of institutional power and authority and function to legitimate patriarchal structures of oppression. As part of a relational system, hegemonic masculinity gains its meaning through its power over femininities and the subordination and marginalization of other forms of masculinity. *Subordinated masculinities* are masculinities that, from a hegemonic view, may not even be considered masculinities at all. As such, they derive their subordinated status by representing what “masculinity” (i.e., hegemonic

masculinity) is not and thus become stigmatized as “feminine.” Connell (2005) uses gay masculinities to represent the archetypal subordinated masculinity, demonstrating in turn that heterosexuality is part and parcel of hegemonic masculine displays. *Complicit masculinities* may not dominate “others” or meet hegemonic ideals, but nonetheless benefit from the structure of masculinities under patriarchy. *Marginalized masculinities* refer to masculinities in tension with hegemonic groups, which casts light on the element of struggle implicit among masculinities in this relational system. Masculinities may be marginalized for numerous reasons; intersectionality often plays a role. Hegemonic masculinity may manifest differently depending on context and location, and it should also be emphasized that the concept does not refer to static types of masculinities but rather to specific gender ideologies and displays in relation to one another (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

The present research is interested in how hegemonic masculinity may or may not play out in the experiences of men who are vegetarian. This study investigates the extent to which meat consumption is considered a hegemonic masculine practice, particularly from the perspective of men who are vegetarian, and whether or not men who are vegetarian distance themselves from hegemonic constructions of masculinity more generally. Theoretically, ecofeminist theory provides a framework with which these questions gain greater meaning and context.

Ecofeminism. Ecofeminism, according to Gaard (1993), is based on the premise that patriarchy is not only “the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species” but “is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature” (p. 1). A central tenet of ecofeminism

is that the oppression of women is inextricably linked with the oppression of animals and nature. Whereas ecofeminism emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life forms, patriarchy is antithetical to interconnectivity and propounds a “masculine” concept of the self as separate and superior to “others” (Gaard 1993). This patriarchal concept of the self results in a sense of disconnection that produces the “differences” upon which all oppression is built (Gaard 1993).

Given these theoretical foundations, ecofeminism elucidates the existence of dichotomies such as “self-other,” whereas the “self” is “masculine” and the “other” is “feminine,” which implicates interrelated structures of oppression (Gaard 1993, 1997). Numerous dichotomous metaphors operate similarly: for instance, the “civilization-nature” dichotomy considers “civilization” a masculine achievement whereas “nature” is feminine, inferior and subordinate to civilization.

From an ecofeminist perspective, patriarchal ideologies perpetuate a hierarchal social system that gives men license to exploit women and nature, among other oppressed groups. Consider, for example, the myriad metaphors that exist in English and other languages that link animal terminology with the denigration of women (Adams [1990] 2015; Kilyeni and Silaški 2014; López Rodríguez 2009), bodies and behaviors (Schmauks 2014; Talebinejad and Dastjerdi 2005), and emotional connection through sexual interaction (Adams [1990] 2015; Fiddes 1991; Gaard 1997). Language of men being “on the prowl” for sexual interaction with women invokes hegemonic masculine imagery of hunting. In addition, a sense of “animalistic” passion is often used to characterize a loss of “civilized” or “rational” self-control over sexual impulses (Gaard 1997), which sometimes may function to deflect men’s accountability for their sexual

behavior. Men who do not display hegemonic standards of masculinity, on the other hand, may be denigrated and feminized as a “fruit,” among other animal-related terms. For these reasons and others, it makes sense that women often describe the experience of sexual assault as feeling like “a piece of meat” (Adams [1990] 2015).

Ecofeminism reveals that the linkage of hunting animals with male domination of women is not coincidental under patriarchy. Of course, hunting is also associated with animals and, more specifically, with meat. To have meat, an animal must die; killing an animal for its meat often evokes primordial images of “the hunt,” a highly masculinized activity (e.g., Fiddes 1991). These images date back millennia, and the masculine meanings ascribed to such images are far from extinct in contemporary Western societies.

Meat and Masculinity

Meat is imbued with masculine meaning. Take the broader gendered meaning implicit in the “meat-vegetable” dichotomy: whereas meat clearly connotes masculinity and is associated with a sense of action, vegetables and other plant foods are labeled “feminine” and viewed as passive (Adams [1990] 2015). Of course, meat and plant foods are not as dualistically opposite as Western culture purports—plants do indeed play an integral role as an energy source at the “bottom” of the “food chain”—but this is just another example of dichotomous positioning shaped by patriarchy.

Patriarchy is further implicated throughout contemporary Western processes of meat production and consumption. Because patriarchy affords meat higher status than plant foods, meat tends to be reserved for men when it is in short supply, and in particularly masculine contexts, such as for soldiers during war (Adams [1990] 2015; Fiddes 1991). Even when meat is plentiful, larger pieces tend to be consumed in

accordance with perceived “levels” of masculinity (Adams [1990] 2015; Fiddes 1991). These social practices are motivated by gendered beliefs about meat and masculinity.

Meat and strength. In Western societies, meat and meat-eating are associated with physical strength. Meat, after all, includes animal muscle, and eating meat is believed to enhance the development of physical strength (e.g., Adams [1990] 2015; Boyle 2007; Fiddes 1991; O’Doherty Jensen and Holm 1999). More specifically, the protein found in animal muscle is frequently perceived as a nutritional necessity for boys and men to become the “strong men” that predominant standards of masculinity require (Adams [1990] 2015; Fiddes 1991). In this sense, Adams suggests that meat consumption provides a means for men to literally embody some ideals supportive of certain hegemonic masculine practices:

It has traditionally been felt that the working man needs meat for strength. A superstition operates in this belief: in eating the muscle of strong animals, we will become strong. According to the mythology of patriarchal culture, meat promotes strength; the attributes of masculinity are achieved through eating these masculine foods. . . . The literal evocation of male power is found in the concept of meat. ([1990] 2015:11)

Not all meat is equally “masculine,” however. Red meat, in particular, seems to comport with hegemonic masculinity better than other meats (Adams [1990] 2015). After all, men eat substantially more red meat than do women (Daniel et al. 2011). Some scholars theorize that this relationship is due to the closeness of red meat to blood and thus violence (e.g., Fiddes 1991; Twigg 1979). Empirically, however, this does not seem to play out: Rozin et al. (2012) find that red meat is rated as more masculine and preferred more by men than by women due to its relationship with muscle and strength rather than with blood or violence.

Importantly, meat consumption in itself is not necessarily an anthropocentric or hegemonic masculine project. Many species are carnivores and require the meat of other animals for survival. From an ecofeminist perspective, however, humans in the contemporary West, within which capitalism and patriarchy are deeply embedded into the social structure, find themselves producing and consuming meat in overwhelmingly oppressive contexts. Together, the specific ways in which meat is produced and consumed and the existence of certain “meat myths” operate to reinforce the ideals of hegemonic masculinity.

For whatever reasons, vegetarians choose to abstain from consuming meat—a practice in which the vast majority of Western societies participate. The extent to which masculinity operates in this regard remains to be explored. In the next section, I discuss vegetarianism, with particular attention to the ways in which it is gendered. The literature reveals a gap in knowledge of how masculinity plays out in men’s experiences with vegetarianism.

Vegetarianism

Vegetarians constitute a numerical minority of Americans. A recent nationally representative poll of United States adults aged 18 and older ($n = 2,017$) indicates that 3.4 percent of respondents report never eating “meat, fish, seafood or poultry” (Stahler 2015). This falls within the range of other estimates (e.g., Cherry 2014; Ruby 2012).

While vegetarians are a small group, there are numerous types. The most common type of vegetarian is the *lacto-ovo* vegetarian, who avoids meat but eats dairy and eggs. In this regard, vegetarians may either be *lacto* and consume dairy only (no meat or eggs), or *ovo* and consume eggs only (no meat or dairy). More restrictive, *vegans* exclude all

animal products and byproducts from their diets, and also often seek to avoid any trace of animals in all products they consume, such as clothing, toiletries, and so on (Boyle 2007, 2011; Maurer 2002). *Fruitarians* are another type of vegetarian who avoid all foods that, when harvested, are perceived to harm the plant, such as root and leaf vegetables (Boyle 2011).

Vegetarians may also be distinguished by motivation. Jabs, Devine and Sobal (1998) find that primary motivations for vegetarianism may be based either on health reasons or ethical reasons: health vegetarians typically adopt vegetarianism due to perceptions of threats to health posed by consuming meat and/or other animal products, whereas ethical vegetarians are motivated by moral principles and a desire to align their practices with their beliefs.

Vegetarianism and gender. Vegetarianism is a gendered phenomenon. While numerical estimates are difficult to obtain given different conceptualizations of “vegetarian” and sampling issues, past surveys consistently demonstrate that women are more likely to identify as vegetarian than are men (e.g., Maurer 2002; Ruby 2012). And as mentioned earlier, research also indicates that women are more likely to consume vegetables and less likely to consume meat than are men (e.g., Maurer 2002; O’Doherty Jensen and Holm 1999; Ruby 2012). That said, it is important to keep in mind that there is uncertainty regarding whether or not vegetarians are disproportionately women in practice (Stahler 2015).

Despite women’s eating preferences or behaviors, the notion persists that a “proper” meal contains meat. Ideologically, Adams ([1990] 2015) and others (e.g., Sobal 2005) argue that the centering of entire meals around meat is a testament to male

dominance in patriarchal Western societies. Vegetarianism, in turn, is associated with ideals seemingly counter to hegemonic masculinity in that they are feminized, including opposition to violence and increased concerns for animals and the environment (Cherry 2014; Maurer 2002; Ruby 2012). Men who are vegetarian may embrace these ideals, which has implications for research on vegetarianism and deviance.

Vegetarianism, gender and deviance. The issue of vegetarianism and deviance is complex. Voluntary vegetarianism dates back to about 500 BCE, and has historically been considered subversive in Western societies for undermining dominant ideologies and social structures (Boyle 2007, 2011). However, Boyle (2011) makes the case that present-day vegetarianism in the West can be classified as a form of positive deviance, a “superior’ behavior that is nonetheless rejected” (p. 268). At the same time, vegetarianism “is accepted in its more common forms but still carries very deviant status at the strictest levels” (Boyle 2011:270). The increase in stigmatization that comes with increasing animal- and plant-related restrictions has particular implications for men, perhaps in part because more such restrictions suggest increased concern for animals and nature, which may be considered feminine.

These relationships play out empirically in complex ways. For instance, one study demonstrates that although men who are vegetarian are perceived as less masculine than are omnivores, they are also perceived as more virtuous (Ruby and Heine 2011). However, more recent research suggests that perceived levels of masculinity may not differ significantly between omnivores and lacto-ovo vegetarians (Thomas 2016). Testing a series of vignettes about omnivores, lacto-ovo vegetarians and vegans, Thomas (2016) finds that vegans are most likely to be rated low in perceived levels of masculinity,

especially when it is known that they made an active choice to follow their diet. This study suggests certain complexities in regards to how levels of restriction and motivation may impact gender accountability structures for men who are vegetarian.

Nath's (2010) qualitative study of men who are vegetarian is one of very few studies that actually explores the experiences of men who are vegetarian from their perspectives. Conducting in-depth interviews of men who are vegetarian in Australia, Nath (2010) finds that friends and family are primary sources of criticism of the men's diets. The content of these criticisms centers around the men's strength and sexuality. What is particularly interesting here is the emergence of the barbecue as a salient setting in which the men report censure for their vegetarianism. However, not all men in the study take issue with such interactions; some find other men's jokes to be amusing or in "good fun." Further, the men in the study use meat substitutes as "social instruments" (Nath 2010:268), which serve to recreate the dominant practice of meat consumption. This study is an important first piece in the literature on men's experiences with vegetarianism, but little research exists in regards to the specific stereotypes or challenges to self-presentations encountered by men who are vegetarian in terms of masculinity; the present research attempts to contribute to knowledge in this area, and focuses in part on the role of emotions in the experiences of men who are vegetarian.

Vegetarianism, gender and emotions. The present study seeks to understand the role of emotion in men's experiences with vegetarianism, as emotions are integral elements of experience and also have implications for studying masculinity. In their study of "comfort foods," Locher et al. examine the interrelationships among food, emotions and society, and conclude the following:

Food . . . is much more than merely nourishment for the body; it is nourishment for the mind and soul. Further, food not only marks the fixed positions that individuals occupy as group members, . . . but it also can be manipulated to modify or change emotional states and feelings. Thus, food and eating represent some of the ways that people use their bodies to respond to social structure through the social creation of personal meanings. (2005:289)

In other words, emotions shape the ways in which we interpret the food we eat and our embodiment of it. In analyzing these processes, we must consider how the emotions are produced and interpreted in social contexts. Vegetarians who reject meat specifically for a more just society take issue with the dominant Western social structure (Boyle 2011). We may expect certain emotions to be involved in such a rejection, and this study attempts to examine these with particular attention to masculine subjectivities and self-presentations. Indeed, the presence of emotion in the experiences of men who are vegetarian has implications for understanding their masculinity.

Emotions and emotional displays are highly gendered. Men are generally regarded to be less emotional than are women, and are negatively sanctioned for certain emotional expressions deemed “feminine” (Schrock and Knop 2014). Patriarchal constructions of emotions position emotionality in dichotomous relation to rationality. The “rational-emotional” dichotomy upholds rationality as a superior feature of “human” (or more accurately, “masculine”) intellect, whereas emotions are feminized and relegated to a position of inferiority (Gaard 1993, 1997; Schrock and Knop 2014).

The ways in which men discuss the role of emotion in their experiences with vegetarianism is explored in the present study. This research is interested in the emotional significance of meat, in particular, for men who are vegetarian, in addition to the significance of emotions to them in general, both of which have implications for

understanding masculinities more broadly. It is important to note, however, that simply because men who are vegetarian engage in one counter-hegemonic practice (i.e., eschewing meat), this does not mean that it will be reflected in their views of masculinity or be interpreted as a strategy of resistance.

METHODS

The present research explores the experiences of men who are vegetarian by way of a phenomenological research design. Phenomenological research aims to describe the “essence” of lived experiences (e.g., Creswell 2013). This gains particular meaning from the philosophical idea of the intentionality of consciousness, the notion that consciousness always exists in relation to some object. We can thus study larger patterns of meaning about these “objects” above and beyond any one individual experience. However, phenomenological research also approaches the investigation of lived experience from an interpretivist, social constructionist perspective. Social constructionism recognizes that humans’ understanding of reality is shaped through interactions with others in particular historical moments. With this in mind, research in the interpretivist tradition examines the subjective meanings informants construct through interactions given the social and historical contexts of their lives (Creswell 2013, 2014).

This research is also informed by feminist epistemology and methodology. In the sense that this research privileges the expression of groups marginalized—or perhaps partially marginalized—under patriarchy, and “positions gender as the categorical center of inquiry” (Hesse-Biber 2014:3), this study contributes to feminist sociology. In addition, this research meets the consciousness-raising goals of feminism more generally, as many men in this study report feeling enlightened after their participation by realizing how their vegetarianism is associated with gender and/or has political implications.

Locating Myself

It is important for any researcher to consider how their own experiences shape the research process, but feminist researchers have devoted considerable attention to this

issue. Throughout the research process, I did not want to be a disembodied researcher. I attempted to engage in reflective practice (Naples 2003) and stay “grounded” within my research, engaging in a more embodied approach with attention to individual, interactional and collective issues of ethical concern. In so doing, I kept notes to document my interpretations of how I shaped the research experience, which included recognizing how my own social and historical placement shape my experiences as a researcher. For example, I myself am a vegetarian who has felt the tensions of hegemonic masculinity on a personal level. On one hand, I am interested in any similar experiences or knowledge I may share with other men who are vegetarian across a broad spectrum of social statuses. Furthermore, I recognize my personal desire to discover something about the role of gender in these men’s experiences with vegetarianism. On the other hand, I recognize that men who are vegetarian are likely to have their own personal experiences with vegetarianism and masculinity that are different from my own, and the two experiences may not necessarily be linked for them in their experience. With this in mind, my notes included reflections on the extent to which I felt able to develop a good rapport with my informants and establish trust with them. In addition, I rigorously interrogated issues related to gender during both the data collection and analysis stages to present alternative explanations for the men’s experiences and improve the validity of the findings. At the same time, it is imperative to recognize that the narratives told are co-constructed, inevitably shaped by the researcher.

Phenomenological researchers traditionally have attempted to remove themselves and their biases from the research process (e.g., Creswell 2013; Moustakas 1994). Feminists, however, have generally regarded this as impossible (e.g., Reinharz 1992;

Sprague 2005). With this in mind, heuristic phenomenology is a more precise description of the research design employed here (Moustakas 1990). McDonald (2000) employs heuristics in her phenomenological study of becoming vegan and explains that this method “explicitly recognizes the impossibility of neutrality in research and enables the researcher to study phenomena which he or she has had intense experience” (pp. 3-4). Heuristic phenomenology recognizes the value of using personal experiences as a starting point for research. I am not afraid to rely on my intuition and knowledge of being a man who is vegetarian to guide the research process. Furthermore, as a feminist researcher, I find it important to make my biases clear, which may in turn actually enhance the objectivity of this research. Although I make every attempt for the findings in this research to reflect the stories of the men in this study alone, my own personal experiences as a man who is vegetarian do indeed serve as the motivation for this study overall, and are at no point entirely escapable from my interpretations of the data.

Ethics

This study received approval from Middle Tennessee State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). Written, informed consent was received from all participants. The confidentiality of informants is protected by the use of pseudonyms and removal of identifying information (e.g., changing others’ names, removing geographic locations) and storing transcripts separately from signed informed consent forms per IRB standards.

Data Collection

Data were collected through the use of semi-structured, qualitative interviews. The choice to use semi-structured, qualitative interviews for this project is rooted in the

complex, subjective, and emergent nature of the research and data at hand. The exploratory purpose of this study also lends itself to qualitative investigation, as very little is predetermined before beginning data collection relative to more quantitative or closed-ended approaches (Arksey and Knight 1999). Further, the use of open-ended questions allows informants to respond in their own words, which is of primary importance in studying the subjective experiences of men who are vegetarian.

The interviews were guided by an interview protocol that consists of seven broad, open-ended questions (see Appendix A), which are suited to phenomenological inquiry in particular. The questions reflect the phenomenological design and ask broadly about the meaning and feeling of different experiences. The interview guide reflects the research agenda and allows for comparisons, while still permitting the informant to respond in ways most relevant or important to his personal experience (Arksey and Knight 1999).

Interviews took place in coffee shops and on college campuses, and lasted approximately one hour on average. The audio of each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. These transcriptions served as the raw data for analysis.

Analysis

The analytic strategy for this study follows Creswell's (2013) suggestions for phenomenological research designs. The first stage of analysis included reading, and rereading, the entirety of each interview to glean the overall "essence" of its meaning. Then, significant statements within each interview were summarized, coded and given tentative labels. These significant statements were then clustered into larger categories of information, which were then generalized further into broad themes. Much revision took

place throughout this process and it did not progress in a perfectly linear fashion, which is common for qualitative analysis (Creswell 2013).

Sampling

This research employs what Creswell (2013) terms a “purposeful” sampling strategy, meaning that informants are selected “because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p. 156). With this in mind, participation in this study was limited to individuals who are men, at least 18 years of age, and who identify as vegetarian. Although numerous additional restrictions could be made to these criteria to more narrowly focus this study, allowing the inclusion of different types of vegetarians and motives for vegetarianism provided the opportunity for in-depth comparisons across diverse experiences. Attention to the nuances and richness of individual experiences is at the heart of qualitative inquiry (Creswell 2013), in addition to feminist inquiry (Sprague 2005).

Informants were recruited for participation predominantly through informal, word-of-mouth recruitment strategies. Although advertisements and snowball sampling were attempted, these strategies were not very fruitful. Interestingly, none of the men in my study knew other men who were also vegetarian. Informants also received a fifteen dollar cash incentive for their participation with funds generously provided by the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. One participant, Kip, declined receipt of this gift. A total of eleven people were interviewed for this study, but one interview was excluded from analysis when it was confirmed that the participant did not identify as vegetarian and was therefore ineligible to be included. The final sample size for this research was ten men.

Sample Characteristics

Although no specific demographic questions were asked across all interviews, respondents were asked to report what demographic variables they thought were important to them and their experience. During the interviews, Brent revealed that he is Japanese American, and Gabriel and Aaron revealed that they are Latino. Many others reported themselves as “white” or “Caucasian.” In addition, Corey and Kip reported sexualities other than heterosexuality. Religious backgrounds and religious identifications were also diverse. Jimmy Lee explained that he practices Catholicism. Aaron described himself as an eclectic pagan, and Corey described himself as Buddhist. Gabriel explained that he was born into a family of Seventh-Day Adventists but no longer practices any religion. Furthermore, if the participants did not disclose their type of vegetarianism and primary motivation at the beginning of the interview, these questions were asked of them.

The participants are listed by age, type of vegetarianism, and motivation in Table 1 below. The mean age of the sample is 29.1 years, but ages range widely from 18 years to 68 years. The sample is evenly divided into five lacto-ovo vegetarians and five vegans. Two men, Aaron and Gabriel, practiced vegetarianism prior to becoming vegan. Although prior literature distinguishes between health and ethical motivations for vegetarianism (Jabs et al. 1998), the lived realities for the men in this study are more complex. All the men express some sort of mix of motivations, varying in the relative importance of ethical concerns. With this in mind, the reasons for their initial foray into vegetarianism are listed in Table 1. It is notable that prior research (Jabs et al. 1998) is affirmed in that those who were initially motivated by health generally became more

ethical in their reasoning over time. Two vegetarians, Gabriel and Maxwell, are lifelong vegetarians.

Table 1. Participants by age, type of vegetarianism, and primary motivation for vegetarianism

Name	Age	Type of vegetarian	Primary motivation
Corey	23	Lacto-ovo	Ethical
Kip	68	Lacto-ovo	Ethical
Brent	32	Lacto-ovo	Ethical
Kevin	27	Lacto-ovo	Ethical
Maxwell	23	Lacto-ovo	Health
Robbie	28	Vegan	Ethical
Aaron	18	Vegan	Ethical
Gabriel	24	Vegan	Ethical
Jimmy Lee	24	Vegan	Health
Roy	24	Vegan	Health

FINDINGS

Three themes emerged from my analysis of the men's interviews. The first theme, rationality and emotionality, describes how rationality and reason are elevated to a position of superiority over the role of emotions in the men's discussions of their vegetarianism. The second theme, self-presentation and stereotype avoidance, reveals how the men discuss their vegetarian selves in ways that avoid disrupting the status quo. The third and final theme addresses masculine, vegetarian identity and the resolution of gender threats. Here, the men's views of gender and the challenges masculinity sometimes presents to them as vegetarians are discussed. All together, these themes help us to begin to understand how masculinity may operate in men's experiences with vegetarianism.

"It was more logical to make this decision": Rationality and Emotionality

For the men in this study, the experience of being vegetarian is characterized by a particular sense of individual awareness. Most of the time, this awareness begins to develop prior to becoming vegetarian. The men typically mention learning about abusive treatment of animals on factory farms, environmental harms of industrial animal agriculture, and/or damaging health effects of consuming animal products, often by watching documentary films. With this knowledge, the men experience an increased sense of consciousness, not only of the harms that exist due to animal production and consumption but of their own participation in the perpetuation of these harms. In contrast to acquiring this more troubling information, they also learn positive information about vegetarianism. Many provide examples of discovering new and delicious plant sources of protein; a few share realizations of previously held negative attitudes toward vegetarian

food. These experiences help the men to reconstruct their conceptions of suitable dietary practices, and lead to the adoption of a vegetarian diet. Although this trajectory does not apply perfectly to the lifelong vegetarians in this study, whose initial experiences as vegetarian were not necessarily chosen, this sense of awareness still appears to play a key role in the continuation of vegetarianism: the lifelong vegetarians, in addition to a few others, report deepening commitment to their diet over time, as they continue to learn about the harmful effects of animal production and consumption and the benefits of vegetarian practices to society.

With this in mind, the men list a wide variety of possible societal benefits to practicing vegetarianism—from lowering carbon emissions to improving the distribution of tax dollars. What unites these benefits appears to be an emphasis on reduction, particularly the reduction of what are perceived to be excesses or inefficiencies related to processes of animal production and consumption. These benefits, and potential benefits, are highly salient for the men in this study; the benefits of vegetarianism are indeed used as a primary justification for their diets. At the same time, they recognize their limited power to effect widespread social change as individuals. Jimmy Lee, for example, considers his veganism to be a “humble contribution” to the larger society. For Robbie, being vegan “contributes to slow progress.” In any event, the men perceive themselves to be contributing to some worthwhile effort that exists above and beyond them.

Although we may reasonably expect emotions to play some role in these men’s experiences, they largely characterize their choice to be vegetarian as a logical response to this increased sense of awareness. There do, however, appear to be important differences in the perceived importance of emotion when broken down by motivation.

Health vegetarians, in particular, minimize the importance of emotion in their experiences, even when ethical concerns do factor in to some extent. Consider, for example, how Roy reflects on some of his thoughts prior to becoming vegan:

Before I was vegan, I started to look at all the negative impacts of the things I was being a part of. It wasn't really in line with what I was claiming to be. So I felt like it was the more logical decision to go the route that caused the least amount of harm and made the most sense to me, I suppose. I felt that, in a broad sense, it was just the right thing to do.

Like other men in this study, Roy suggests that his veganism helps to achieve a sense of congruence between his behaviors and values. He suggests he feels some responsibility for perpetuating the harms of animal production by consuming animal products. And he describes his decision as “logical.” The narrative Roy provides does not reveal much about how emotions factor into his determination of what is logical, although we may suspect that to some extent, they do. Later in the interview, he addresses the influence of his own emotions on his decision to be vegan:

I feel like I definitely didn't do it [become vegan] too much for emotional reasons. You know, I felt like it was more logical to make this decision. You know, after doing enough research into it, research that I hadn't done before. And you know, I feel like most people are logical about it and some might make the choice irrationally, you know. I think some people do make big changes to their belief systems irrationally.

Although Roy's veganism was primarily motivated by health concerns, he does cite ethical concerns as influential factors. It is possible that Roy equates emotions with irrationality, or considers emotions to be opposed to logic, and would therefore find emotion language to be ill-suited to accurately reflect his experience given the amount of thought put into his decision. In drawing clear distinctions between emotion and reason, we are left to wonder the extent to which emotions are involved in his actual lived

experience, and whether or not this element of his experience is affected by constructions of masculinity. Regardless, Roy himself does not consider emotions to be an important part of his experience, and this appears to be a common theme throughout most men's narratives.

This is not to say that emotions are absent from the men's narratives. Emotions such as guilt, disgust, anger, and sadness are implied by many men in diverse situations. However, when emotions do enter the discussion, they typically enter in a secondary or indirect way. Kevin, for example, explains how a video on factory farming "sickened" him, rather than saying "I felt sickened." Regardless, in this instance it is relatively clear that he feels a sense of disgust. Other narratives are less formulated. Emotions are suggested by certain tones, rather than the actual words being said. Interestingly, these more emotional moments always seem to center around the treatment of animals in factory farms.

For the more ethically motivated vegetarians, it is not uncommon for the animals' emotions to enter explicitly into the discussion. In these instances, the men suggest they are troubled by the emotions they perceive the animals to be experiencing under certain factory farming conditions and situations leading up to slaughter. Robbie provides an example where he expresses empathy for animals in factory farms:

I can see myself being that animal and how, what emotions that bring up and just, fear going through them, at that moment. And, you know, all the time leading up to that in close quarters and probably sleeping where they use the bathroom, and, you know, just, you wouldn't want to live that way, so why should you treat them that way? Just because they can't talk doesn't mean that they don't feel.

Other men who are ethical vegetarians echo Robbie's concerns. Animal fear, in particular, is frequently cited as unnecessary and produced in cruel situations. Like many others, Robbie's tone also implies a sense of disgust at the conditions in which the animals live. Although the men express empathy for the animals' emotions and imply, through their narratives, that this evokes some emotional response within themselves, these examples appear to function predominantly to argue that the animals are sentient and, therefore, should not be treated as they are.

Even among the more ethically motivated vegetarians, the narratives appear to downplay the importance of more emotional moments in shaping their attitudes and experiences. Maxwell, for example, explains that vegetarianism for him is about "caring more." He then elaborates on this description:

'Cause, by eating that way, you help with saving the environment, you help save animals from cruelty, and you help save tax payers money on medical costs. Because we spend almost a trillion dollars on, on people who don't have insurance and can't pay anything. Here in the United States. So that would help a little bit at least.

We may infer that Maxwell intends his description of "caring more" to imply a sense of consciousness and concern for issues larger than himself. That said, he follows up his statement of "caring more" with language of "saving" vulnerable groups in society, rather than expounding on anything emotional. In other cases, some men's experiences with vegetarianism appear nearly devoid of emotion, at least superficially. Corey, for example, explains to me that his vegetarianism is motivated largely by ethical concerns for the treatment of animals and the environment. Although his dietary practices are related in part to his Buddhism, he still relies on science, and science alone, to make the case for vegetarianism: "If everyone was a vegetarian, we would end world hunger. It's a basic

form of science: trophic levels. I have to eat one plant to live; a cow has to eat thirty. And I eat one cow, well, that's a waste of energy." Corey justifies vegetarianism as more energy efficient than consuming meat and provides scientific information to do so. On one hand, it makes sense to invoke scientific discourse if the goal is to present a persuasive argument to "everyone" about the benefits of vegetarianism. On the other hand, this is a very rational way to speak about what appears largely to be a moral problem. He circles back to this topic later in the interview and emphasizes the influence of science on his decision to be vegetarian:

At this point, even if I wasn't a Buddhist anymore, even if I didn't have these same beliefs—like scientifically, scientific fact, it would be easy to end world hunger. . . . So even if I didn't have all these other philosophical and religious reasons, I feel like me as a person, as a science, I wouldn't ever eat meat again.

Corey's desire to improve global access to food is commendable. That said, in describing the reasons for his vegetarianism he minimizes the importance of spiritual and emotional concerns to his experience. Rather, he seems to give scientific knowledge nearly all the authority to legitimize his practices. Of course, a scientific approach is of critical importance if we are to better understand the problem of food scarcity, and many other social problems for that matter. In regards to the elements of individual, subjective experience, however, a scientific perspective seems limited. Nevertheless, for most of the men in this study, emotions do not appear to figure in prominently while reflecting on and speaking about their experiences with vegetarianism.

Aaron, however, stands out as an exception to this larger pattern. He describes himself as "very emotionally connected with nature and everything in the world," and explains that his consciousness of emotion does indeed impact his vegetarianism. Aaron

explains something similar to a belief in the transmigration of souls, where he will perceive “the emotions of the animal before they died,” which prevents him from consuming meat. Although other men who are vegetarian in the larger society may share similar or additional examples that directly integrate emotion into their experiences, Aaron is the only participant in the present study who considers emotions to be central to his vegetarianism.

Attention to the presence of emotions in the process of becoming vegetarian and the justifications given provide some clues into how masculinity may be implicated in men’s experiences with vegetarianism, or at least in the ways they speak about their experiences. It is possible that, unlike Aaron, most of the men in this study have internalized and/or are reflecting dominant expectations of men not to discuss emotionality. The next theme, “I don’t want to cause friction,” delves deeper into these men’s presentations of self and examines the extent to which masculinity and emotions may or may not be implicated in them.

“I don’t want to cause friction”: Self-Presentation and Stereotype Avoidance

Nearly all of the men in this study define vegetarianism as an individual experience. They emphasize how being vegetarian is the “right choice” for them, or “makes the most sense” from their perspective. Brent even states that vegetarianism is “different for every person.” Yet the men also mention profound societal impacts that the practice of vegetarianism makes possible, and although these do appear to be an integral part of the individual meaning-making process, the “personal” nature of their vegetarianism seems to extend beyond these more psychological aspects of experience. Through the use of the word “personal” to preface their attitudes and beliefs, the men’s

narratives reveal important implications for social interactions in relation to their vegetarianism.

Certain stereotypical images of vegetarians seem to operate in this regard. From “health junkies” to “hippie dippies,” the men describe numerous images of vegetarians who do not appear to conceive of their vegetarianism as personal. Rather, the men describe images of other vegetarians who appear overly emotional and feel entitled to control the behaviors of others. By emphasizing the personal nature of their own vegetarianism, many men distance themselves from these more stereotypical images of vegetarians as authoritarian and irrational. In particular, the men’s narratives reveal two slightly different but closely linked images, which I refer to here as the “PETA extremist” and the “preachy vegetarian.”

The PETA extremist. One image that emerges from the men’s narratives is the idea of vegetarians as overemotional, zealous radicals. Jimmy Lee terms this the “PETA extremist” stereotype:

I think there’s a strong stereotype of vegetarians and vegans, umm, as very, umm, kind of left evangelicals, like left preachy, sort of individuals, who are the “meat is murder,” who are the “we’re gonna dump blood,” you know, whether it’s real or fake on you. . . . And like, while I might agree with some of PETA’s causes or end goals, they are so extreme.

Jimmy Lee describes an image of vegetarians as fundamentally radical in their attitudes and behaviors. Echoing these points, Roy recounts watching videos about vegans on the Internet:

I used to watch videos of people who were against veganism, you know. And some of the first few people I remember seeing were, like, Freelee, the banana girl. You know, people were attacking her ‘cause—and this was a video that went viral too—people were saying that people who aren’t vegan should, uh, be forced to go vegan or something like that, like

going against free will. . . . I feel like that's kind of what, you know, maybe some people think of vegans? . . . Rather than someone who, you know, is more reasonable. . . . And you know, besides that, I think a lot of people have images that, if they're against veganism, they might have images of people going into restaurants and stuff and, you know, being rude or whatnot. Because I've seen videos of that too. Actually going into restaurants and yelling at the people eating in restaurants—the extreme side of things, I guess you could say.

In this description, Roy also depicts an image of vegans marked by extremism. He speculates that vegans may be perceived as wishing to control others' dietary practices, and suggests that they may be viewed as irrational and histrionic in their efforts. With this in mind, these men do consider how these images relate to their own presentations of self as vegans.

Given the image of the “PETA extremist,” Jimmy Lee and Roy explain the value of the term “plant-based diet” to circumvent the potential stigma of veganism. Although he describes his diet as vegan throughout our interview, Roy acknowledges some value to describing it as plant-based instead:

I feel like there's a negative connotation to the word vegan. I think a lot of people—I don't know—they become very defensive when they hear someone's vegan, you know? And using the term “plant-based diet” seems to be a more accepting term in the field. 'Cause that still means, you know, essentially, a vegan diet, you know? But you can be plant-based and not be like, uh, choosing not to wear . . . [animal] products and stuff like that. “Plant-based diet” is purely used for health reasons.

Roy perceives greater acceptance of the term “plant-based diet” among other scientists, and suspects this is related to its specificity; whereas “vegan” may encompass a wide range of behaviors, many of which may be ethically motivated, “plant-based diet” refers specifically to food consumption, “purely used for health reasons.” Nonetheless, Roy

does not really seem to prefer one term over the other. Jimmy Lee, however, is more intentional in his efforts to distance himself from certain stereotypes:

I sometimes have the need, and I think there is very much a public need, to where if you're not that kind of individual, and you are vegetarian or vegan, to overcome the stereotype of either being, umm, kind of a PETA extremist . . . or the, uh, hippie dippie vegetarian-vegan. . . .

I think, one of, you know, the reason—one of the compounding reasons I like to use “whole foods, plant based,” even though that does sound like, kind of a left-loaded term, is because it does help divorce it from PETA.

Both Roy and Jimmy Lee are health vegans, so it makes sense that they may wish to distance themselves from images associated with more ethical vegans. But even Robbie, an ethical vegan, chose to use alternative language to disclose his vegan status to his father to avoid what he describes as “going all progressive on him.” With this in mind, all of the vegans in this study confront certain stereotypes, and most engage in similar strategies to minimize or deflect stigma.

Aaron, however, stands out as an exception among the vegans in the sense that he does not mind appearing in an exaggeratingly emotional way, at least to certain audiences. He explains how some of his friends affectionately call him the “angry vegan friend,” and he embraces this label:

I like to make jokes, and I'm like, “I hope you hear the dying screams of that animal as you take a bite into that burger.” And sometimes I joke and I'm like, “I'm gonna throw this chicken wing at you, so you feel the pain that chicken did.” . . . And I'm just joking, of course.

Aaron emphasizes that he is indeed just joking, but I then ask him if there is an element of truth to any of his jokes. He responds by noting that

There is. But at the same time, everybody has rights to do what they want, to eat what they want. It's just, for me I'm very conscious about the products I buy, the things I put into my body. . . . But I'm not gonna

shame other people who eat meat, because some people need it, some people like it. Do your thing. I'm not gonna keep that from, like, keep someone from being my friend just because they eat meat. Like, that's ridiculous. But, if my friends wanted to go vegan or vegetarian I could certainly help. [laughs]

It is important to note that Aaron presents himself in an exaggeratingly emotional way to his friends, people with whom we may assume he is comfortable and feels reasonably secure. Although he admits there is some truth lurking behind his jokes, he emphasizes others' rights to eat animals. As will be shown in the next section, the ways in which Aaron follows up his discussion of his joking behavior is mirrored by nearly all of the men in this study. However, not all men are responding to images of vegetarians that they perceive to be particularly unrestrained and emotional. Rather, the image of the "preachy vegetarian" replaces the emotionality of the "PETA extremist" with what appears to be elitist intellectualism.

The preachy vegetarian. By far, the most common image that emerges in the men's narratives, either implicitly or explicitly, is the image of the "preachy vegetarian." The idea that vegetarians are pretentious, judgmental, and actively seek to change others' dietary habits is widespread. Kevin describes this stereotype:

I think there's the stereotype that vegetarians are, number one, very vocal about their vegetarianism. And there's a kind of elitism embedded in the decision to be vegetarian, almost like for whatever reason, that makes you better or more moral or more interesting or I don't know, whatever you want to call it, than meat-eaters.

Kevin continues, discussing how this image impacts him.

So I don't want to have that attitude—I don't have that attitude. I don't want to come across as having that attitude. Umm, and I also don't want to make people think that I'm trying to colonize their diet. [laughs] Even though I think it's in our best interest to all be vegetarian. [laughs harder]

So, uh, I—those are the two concerns. So, to avoid elitism and to avoid coming across as preachy.

Here, Kevin deliberately envisions the impression he projects as a vegetarian and compares this to his idea of the preachy vegetarian. He suggests some degree of intention to avoid presenting himself in a way that comports with this generalized, dominant image. In a joking manner, he shares his belief that all of society stands to benefit from practicing vegetarianism—the humor seems to lie in the contradiction between the sympathy to “preachy vegetarians” that his belief implies, and his desire to avoid presenting himself as such. While it is unknown if Kevin engages in any actual interactional and/or emotion work in this regard, we may suspect that the image of the preachy vegetarian exerts some degree of influence over the ways in which he acts and interacts in relation to his vegetarianism in at least some instances.

Other men describe their experiences in ways that have the effect of distancing themselves from certain stereotypical images, but this does not appear to be intentional or even conscious. Two patterns emerge as part of this process: in addition to suggesting the “personal nature” of their vegetarianism, the men explicate their acceptance of non-vegetarians. In particular, they express some degree of tolerance for killing and/or eating animals. Consider, for example, how Kip describes his experience as a vegetarian:

I don't, um—for people who subsist, um, there are some tribes, uh, in Alaska and certain areas, that live by the land, that subsist, and, you know, I think, I try not to judge that. I try to think in terms of what's right for me. Um, and I'm not a person who proselytizes a lot. . . . So, my decision [to become vegetarian] was based really on what I feel is right for me. . . . I think we have to do what's right for us. And I can't think of any of our friends who are vegetarian or vegan. None of them. And I don't judge them. I just choose to live the way I choose. And, if people ask me about it I tell them, but, um, that's kind of where it stands.

Kip, like many others in this study, suggests his vegetarianism is driven primarily by individual preferences. In so doing, he implies that he has no intention or desire to change the dietary practices of others and does not necessarily discuss his vegetarianism unless asked. Corey provides further insight in this regard:

I have absolutely no problem with anyone that's not a vegetarian. I—I don't seek out to make other people vegetarians. . . . For me, if that's how they want to live their life I have absolutely no right to tell them they're even wrong. Umm, as long as they're not hurting another human being and stopping them from doing what they want. I mean, I don't like the idea that they're just killing animals, essentially needlessly, but, that's the lifestyle that we've had for the last two-thousand years. It's not my place to try to stop them.

Like Kip, Corey explains his lack of judgment of non-vegetarians. He also articulates the importance of mutual respect among humans for each other's rights, despite disapproval of killing animals. Many men emphasize the importance of acknowledging others' rights, or choices, to kill and/or eat animals. In these cases, particularly for more ethical vegetarians, there are some limitations to this. While they express disapproval of factory farming, they still emphasize the "choice" or "right" of others to kill animals for food on small farms or in the wild, even when they are completely opposed to the act of killing in general and reject the idea of a hierarchy of species.

Robbie echoes Kip and Corey. He finds the conditions of animals on factory farms to be morally reprehensible, and expresses discomfort with the killing of animals in general. Nonetheless, he prefaces his concern for animal welfare by stating, "Animals kill other animals to eat." Once he describes his issues with factory farming, he explains that "if someone wanted to have their own farm and their own animals," then this person has "the choice" to slaughter their animals for meat. Robbie explains that he *personally*

would never kill another animal, because he could never intentionally inflict pain on another creature. Nevertheless, he feels compelled to legitimize such behavior to a certain extent. As part of this discussion, Robbie opens up about an internalized sense of gender he feels in relation to sharing his concerns for animal welfare:

It does feel feminine to talk about . . . the treatment of animals, and, you know, like that. But, it's just something you gotta get over, I guess. You know, like, you just have to go beyond the social gender roles, you know. . . It just feels like it's not what I'm supposed to do. But I don't care, you know? . . . I don't know why I feel that way, um, I guess it just is that it's seen as—or people think of the treatment—talking about the treatment of animals as a woman thing, I guess. Umm, but it's not.

Robbie shares his perception that it is feminine to express concern for the treatment of animals to the extent that he does in our interview. He feels some societal constraint acting upon him, but appears to recognize these constraints as constructed. He also appears to attempt to demonstrate masculinity to follow up his statements of feeling. Nonetheless, Robbie provides some insight into how internalized expectations of gendered performances may affect men who are vegetarian, especially those who are more ethically motivated. It is not unreasonable to imagine that in other situations, Robbie may not be as inclined to speak about his concern for animal welfare because he may feel that his masculinity will be called into question. Robbie is unique among the other men in this study, however, in sharing these feelings.

With these stereotypical images and the “personal” prefacing of their attitudes and opinions in mind, it is not surprising that all of the men in this study emphasize that they almost always choose to disclose their vegetarian status only when it is directly relevant to some food-related situation. In spite of this emphasis, most enjoy discussing their vegetarianism when the topic is broached by others. Corey, for example, appreciates the

opportunity to share information about vegetarianism with anyone who expresses interest, especially if it leads into a discussion of Buddhism. Jimmy Lee welcomes questions about his veganism, particularly if he can shed light on the nutritional aspects. Newly vegan, Robbie explains that he enjoyed “educating” a friend whom he recently invited to his home for dinner, helping him to “see things in a different way.” Although the men differ in exactly what they enjoy most about discussing vegetarianism, they all value sharing relevant information with others. There is the sense that they are spreading awareness of important issues by providing useful and enlightening information. That said, it is important to reiterate that most indicate not doing so unless asked.

Considering gender. When discussing their vegetarianism with others, many men suggest that gender plays a role. More specifically, they suggest that men and women respond differently to learning about their vegetarianism. Some men, for example, express an expectation for women to be more accepting of their vegetarianism, or at least more receptive to the idea. Corey describes his perception:

Women I feel are much more accepting. Or if not more accepting, just, “Oh, okay. You’re a vegetarian. Moving on.” Whereas men will tend to linger on it. “Oh, you’re a vegetarian. That’s weird.” Or, there always appears to be some sort of comment. Some sort of something.

The men do experience some difficulty verbalizing exactly how and to what extent they perceive men and women to respond differently to their vegetarianism, but many do express this perception nonetheless. They also provide various explanations as to why this is the case. Aaron, for instance, suggests that women are more interested in talking about diets, and vegetarianism is frequently seen as one way to lose weight. Gabriel provides some additional nuance into the gendered nature of this matter. As a Lyft driver,

he is frequently asked to provide recommendations for restaurants. When he offers vegetarian suggestions, he finds that men often respond less favorably when they are alone versus with women. In addition, most of the men in this study perceive women to be more sympathetic to issues of animal welfare and hence more amenable to the idea of being vegetarian.

This element of the men's experiences reveals that the men in this study are impacted by what they perceive to be dominant images of vegetarians. Whether intentionally or not, they distance themselves from these images in the ways they speak about their vegetarianism and present themselves in relation to it. The extent to which masculinity is involved in these self-presentations is not entirely clear, although many of their narratives would suggest that gender has some degree of influence. To help provide further insight into the role of masculinity in these men's experiences, the next theme more directly explores the men's overall conception of gender and how this relates to their vegetarianism.

"Masculinity was not a barrier to me becoming vegetarian": Masculine, Vegetarian Identity and the Resolution of Gender Threats

When it comes to their ideas about gender, the men in this study express sensitivity to sexism and wish to avoid sexist self-presentations. Overall, the men appear to understand gender in ways less rigid than traditional constructions. Some describe themselves as being unaffected by "gender stereotypes," "not concerned with gender evaluations," and opposed to "gender labels." Those who are in romantic relationships with women express the importance of an egalitarian distribution of housework. Some men even critique the gender binary. Many men do, however, incorporate some more

traditional elements of gender into their definitions of masculinity, namely the ideas that men are providers and protectors of less powerful others.

In regards to the intersection of gender with their vegetarianism, Brent articulates what most of the men imply when he says that “masculinity was not a barrier to me becoming a vegetarian.” Corey shares his perspective on the belief that meat consumption is essential to masculinity:

Eating meat is part of being a man. You have to show the dominance. You have to want to shoot guns. You have to want to kill animals for some reason to be a man. And that, like I said, I just find it silly. That doesn't make any sense to me that to be a real man, you have to do all of these things and you can't do all of these other things. That's ridiculous.

Corey feels that the association between meat and masculinity exists in the larger society, and connects this with images of violence and domination. In so doing, he rejects these elements of masculinity and restrictive definitions of gender overall. This perspective is common throughout the men's narratives, and many men use specific examples, especially of the representation of meat in the media, to make their points. Brent, for instance, observes that “the meat industry will use [ads that say] real men eat bacon, you know, cheeseburgers or whatever, because they want you to buy that product.” Not surprisingly, all the men in this study take issue with constructions of meat as an essential property of masculinity.

That said, many men incorporate traditional ideas about masculinity as protection into their self-conceptions as vegetarians. Aaron, for example, describes himself as something of a “father figure” and explains that his vegetarianism is about “taking care of mother nature.” Roy directly incorporates the element of men as protectors into his perspective as a vegetarian:

I guess a man is seen as, like, a protector, right? I don't want to sound sexist or anything, but like, in a relationship, you know, the man is supposed to be the protector of women, right? I guess that's what people view as, like, a man, or manly. And I feel like, why should it stop at just us? Why abuse other lesser creatures, right? It's not really strength to, like, pay someone to kill animals for you, I guess. So I feel like it's not very manly to do that. . . . In my mind, I feel a man shouldn't have to, you know, prey on the weak, I guess. And that includes lower life, I guess.

Most men in this study emphasize how the process of consuming meat which has already been killed is not an indication of strength, or by association masculinity. Roy's comments are especially interesting here, and reflect the perspective of a few others, in that he takes this a step further and incorporates the relationship between masculinity and protection into his vegetarianism. That said, the men do not convey the sense that their identities as vegetarians are at odds with their identities as men.

Despite the compatibility of these constructions to them, many men still report experiencing some level of hegemonic masculine tensions regarding their vegetarianism in the past. Importantly, the men explain that they are surrounded by similar others in general, and do not face frequent challenges to their vegetarianism; therefore, it is imperative to consider the role of context in this regard. For example, Corey recalls attempting to join a fraternity in college and was "not really made fun of" for his vegetarianism but "got poked at." He suggests that his vegetarianism stood out as "weird" because "it's just not something that comes up very often," an interesting point to consider given the hypermasculine setting of the fraternity and the exaggerated demonstrations of masculinity promoted therein.

Most of the time, the men in this study consider any resistance to be harmless joking, and suggest little to no emotional stake in these interactions. Maxwell, for

instance, explains that his coworker frequently jokes about how he “can’t help someone” or “lift something heavy” because he is vegetarian. Although these comments, particularly those involving physical strength, may be considered possible challenges to his masculinity, Maxwell does not appear to interpret them as such. Rather, he participates in the banter and finds it amusing.

In the few instances where resistance is perceived more seriously, it appears that the men’s vegetarianism is seen as something of a deviant “tipping point” towards delegitimization and, perhaps, emasculation. Kevin provides an example of an interaction with a stranger on Facebook:

I was—and it’s a terrible decision—it was during the election last year, and someone had made a disparaging comment about Hillary Clinton. And I don’t, uh, remember the context, but I made—I responded to that comment, it popped up in my newsfeed, and I provided input where I felt that I was knowledgeable about the subject matter. It had something to do with immigration or something like that. And I responded in a very non-abrasive way. And I was immediately met with many insults [chuckles], directed at my character, uhh, because I was defending Hillary Clinton. And so, the last comment stuck with me. And I thought this was interesting. He said, “I bet you’re vegetarian, too.” And it was just that one comment at the end of this very long list of insults, and I thought, “This is really interesting.” I mean, this is someone who doesn’t know anything about me. Umm, was, uh, calling me, you know, a number of pretty terrible names. And I didn’t call him names. I just provided, you know, input. And I think, and this is all conjectural, but maybe it was the fact that I was defending a woman, I was—I didn’t feed into that hypermasculine Trump ethos. Um, I was defending, you know, people who don’t look like me, who don’t speak my language. And um, it fascinated me that the last insult, the last sting, had to be about your diet. And it was a comment about vegetarianism. Of course, I am vegetarian. [laughs] But he didn’t know that. So I thought that was, uh, fascinating. It’s almost like to be considered masculine, or hypermasculine, or alpha, you have to have that kind of symbolic dominance in your diet, where you’re eating lots of meat. So, and there’s a type of violence embedded in that. Because to get it on your plate you have to kill, you have to dominate, umm, and I totally reject that. So, that’s pretty profound.

The stranger's comment about vegetarianism is intriguing for multiple reasons. For one, he indicates that he suspects Kevin is vegetarian—he does not know this for certain. Does vegetarianism epitomize the political left? Or is the stranger perhaps reacting to what he perceives to be a “preachy vegetarian”? For the purposes of this study, Kevin does indeed make sense of this experience in light of gender. Like many men in this study, he recognizes that dominance and violence are central components of certain constructions of masculinity, and these become embedded in certain constructions of meat. With this in mind, he “totally rejects” these ideas. He later describes his own sense of masculinity:

I don't think we should lose sight of things like, uh, compassion and treating women equally and, uh, being caring. Things that we seem to emphasize and extol to a certain extent in society, but then again these deeply rooted ideas of what it means to be a real man or a real woman get in the way. . . . So, rejecting that kind of closed off view of what it means to be a man, to me, um, is part of my male code. [laughs] So, rejection is a very big part of my masculinity.

Like other previously described perspectives, Kevin challenges the rigidity of traditional gender constructions and takes issue with the sense of “male dominance” symbolized by meat. By incorporating traditional elements of femininity into his construction of masculinity, it seems from this example that Kevin's sense of masculinity helps to protect against, or at least to make sense of, possible threats to his gender made by others. However, not all men may necessarily respond in this way. Kevin is rather unique in the sense that he acknowledges the important role that “deeply rooted ideas” of gender still play in our everyday lives. Although the men in this study largely reject traditional expressions of masculinity, some remain prone to reproduce them if challenged.

When confronted with the idea that vegetarianism and masculinity are incompatible, some men rely on hegemonic ideals and discourses to justify their diets. In

so doing, they express that it is simply incorrect to associate meat with masculinity. The most common justification for this view is the argument that plant foods, rather than meat, help to promote physical strength. Multiple men cite vegan athletes, namely bodybuilders, who they argue become stronger due to their veganism. The implication of these examples is that the relationship between meat consumption and the development of physical strength is exaggerated, if not false; plant foods, on the other hand, may better assist in achieving this goal.

In addition to the topic of physical strength, a couple men provide more biological justifications to refute the linkage between meat and masculinity. Roy argues that the consumption of animal products may actually be feminizing at a hormonal level:

You know, there are very large concentrations of mammalian estrogen in all these animal products, much more than in plant foods. And, you know, eating plant foods has been shown to increase testosterone levels. . . . The more I read into it, stuff like gynecomastia could be related to, uh, consumption of, like, dairy and chicken, because of their high levels of mammalian estrogen. Because mostly, for like chicken for example, we eat mostly the breast . . . and that's where a lot of the estrogen is concentrated.

Jimmy Lee makes a similar claim that meat consumption may be harmful to masculinity on a biological level, but instead addresses the topic of sexual performance:

It [vegan food] doesn't affect, like, it doesn't make you impotent. Or actually, well, meat can. . . . Meat-based diets are much more associated with erectile dysfunction, which is one of the most interesting things, and personally I think one of the best marketing tools that plant-based associations should latch on to. . . . Meat adversely affects, you know, genitalia, both from a cancer point of view and from an impotent point of view. And, obviously, doesn't have anything to do with my masculine genitalia.

In these examples, the men draw on hegemonic masculine ideals to argue against the essentiality of meat to achieve them. The men often follow up these arguments by stating

that they do not find these claims important to their own sense of masculine identity, which seems to imply a level of indifference to the possible reassurance that knowing such information may provide them. Nevertheless, they cite these benefits as legitimate arguments against the association between meat and masculinity, in favor of vegetarian diets.

One interesting challenge, cited by two men, involves suspicion of the role that their romantic partners—who are women—play in shaping their decision to become vegetarian. Kevin explains how his family expressed concern over the influence of his wife when he decided to become vegetarian:

They [my family] were kind of concerned because it was early in our marriage, and I think they sort of felt that maybe my wife was colonizing my diet. And so I—I didn't mention it explicitly, but I had to, you know, I had to explicitly reassure them that this has nothing to do with the influence of my wife. I was already, you know, leaning in that direction.

Earlier in the interview, Kevin does credit his wife for having some partial influence over his decision; here, however, he experiences pressure to emphasize to his family that his wife “has nothing to do with” his ultimate decision. In so doing, he quells anxieties over threats to his autonomy posed by an overly controlling wife. Jimmy Lee, whose girlfriend studies nutrition and taught him about veganism, describes a similar situation:

When I chose to go vegan, she [my girlfriend] was really worried that I was doing it, like, for her. Or that I felt coerced into doing it for her. And I, I, you know, I always, even still now I have to tell her, like, “No, like, I appreciate your concern, and while you're a catalyst, I'm doing—I'm choosing it.” Like, I don't know if I could have done it without her, without, kind of, some of the in-depth nutrition knowledge, and some of the help, especially in the beginning. But, I made that choice very consciously. I was never, you know, felt pressured or coerced by her—quite the opposite.

In this case, the unease over the influence of Jimmy Lee's girlfriend is felt by his girlfriend herself. He recognizes the influential role that she played in the initial stages, but emphasizes that he felt "quite the opposite" of pressure or coercion by her. Rather, he describes his decision as a conscious choice, establishing a firm sense of autonomy and rationality.

All in all, the men do not face challenges to their vegetarianism that appear to threaten their masculine identities to any considerable degree. None of the men think of meat on necessarily gendered terms, and they construct masculine identities that are compatible with their identities as vegetarians. In situations where their masculinity is called into question by their vegetarianism, they are easily able to demonstrate rationality, autonomy, and other traits demonstrative of hegemonic masculine ideals.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study, broadly stated, is to explore the role of gender in men's experiences with vegetarianism. With this in mind, it is probable that much of the findings are not necessarily about gender *differences* per se, although we may still speculate about the extent to which the men's experiences are structured or influenced by masculinity.

For example, the sense of awareness described by the men and the effort to reduce inefficiencies in animal production and consumption are likely to be expressed by women as well. Jabs et al. (1998) find that information was "indirectly" influential in providing a sense of awareness leading to the adoption of a vegetarian diet among a sample of nineteen vegetarians, two-thirds of whom were women. In this study, however, information—and the sense of awareness it provides—seems to be more important and salient for the participants; it seems more accurate to characterize this as "knowledge" rather than information, so to speak, as this information seems to be an integral part of a rather sensory experience that is internalized and developed over time. That said, this sense of awareness certainly does not disrupt any man's sense of masculinity, as men have traditionally been considered experts and authorities of knowledge. It is not surprising, therefore, that the men in this study do indeed enjoy discussing their vegetarianism with others when asked, and view themselves as educators in these situations. Further, the men's efforts to reduce excesses and inefficiencies in animal production and consumption are discussed in ways suggestive of a rational calculation, where they express abilities to weigh the evidence and make a logical decision. To this end, their decisions to become vegetarian are most often discussed very matter-of-factly,

largely absent of individual emotion. It thus seems that the men's vegetarianism is entirely compatible with hegemonic constructions of masculinity, not only in terms of subjectivities but through self-presentations as well.

We may also expect to see a sense of rational decision-making present in women's experiences; women make rational decisions, after all. Nevertheless, the extent to which emotion is involved in the process of making said rational decisions may vary by gender. In this regard, McDonald's (2000) phenomenological study of "becoming vegan" examines in part the role of emotion in this process. She describes "catalytic experiences" in which cognition and emotions interact in response to some stimulus and eventually influence individuals to adopt veganism. Although McDonald (2000) is not interested in gender in her analysis, the more emotional experiences she cites are clearly expressed by women, whereas an example from a man is provided to show how emotions are not always part of these "catalytic experiences." As far as the experiences of the men in this study are concerned, we may reasonably expect the removal of meat from their diets to have some level of emotion attached to it. For the more health motivated, we may imagine how the removal of meat might be accompanied by a sense of loss or perhaps even pride. For the more ethically motivated, we may envision numerous scenarios in which emotions such as disgust, sadness, guilt, and so on factor into their experiences as vegetarians. Furthermore, the marginal status of vegetarianism in society may be expected to produce some challenges, which may also be expected to produce some emotion in turn. Although we do see evidence of these phenomena in this study, emotions generally do not structure the forefront of these men's experiences, from their perspectives.

This is not surprising. We live a patriarchal society where emotions are considered feminine and are therefore portrayed in dichotomous opposition to reason, a traditionally masculine achievement (e.g., Schrock and Knop 2014). For the men in this study, emphasizing the rationality behind their vegetarianism may not necessarily shore up their masculinity—everyone is expected to make reasonable decisions and put emotions aside to some extent—but it certainly does not call their masculinity into question. Emphasizing the emotionality behind their vegetarianism, however, may very well run the risk of emasculation. While emotions may factor into these men's experiences, their refusal to talk about themselves in this way may reflect dominant expectations for men to appear unemotional.

On this note, it is of particular interest to attend to how the “fear” in animals is often cited by the men in this research. When discussed in this way, fear is not disruptive to a sense of masculinity because, first of all, the fear is not their own, but, more importantly, because the men are able to protect animals by not consuming them and treating them well. This is just one example of how “protection” plays out in the men's narratives. Recall, for instance, Maxwell's example of “saving” multiple groups by way of vegetarianism. From an ecofeminist perspective, Kheel (1993) critiques this protectionist approach to environmental and animal ethics for objectifying nature much to the same extent as earlier Western narratives of conquest. The protectionist mentality, or “heroic ethic,” treats nature as a “damsel in distress.” Moreover, it is through *reason* that humans are able to rise above abusive relationships with nature:

Both animal liberationists and environmental ethicists seek to curb the willful destruction of the natural world through another act of human will. Reason is, once again, elevated above the natural instincts and asked to

control our aggressive wills. The same reason that was used to take value out of nature (through objectification and the imposition of hierarchy) is now asked to give it value once again. A sound ethic, according to this view, must transcend the realm of contingency and particularity, grounding itself not in our untrustworthy instincts, but rather in rationally derived principles and abstract rules. It must stand on its own as an autonomous construct, distinct from our personal inclinations and desires, which it is designed to control. Ethics is intended to operate much like a machine. Feelings are considered, at best, as irrelevant, and at worst, as hazardous intrusions that clog the “ethical machinery.” Basing an argument on love or compassion is tantamount to having no argument at all. (Kheel 1993:249)

It is noteworthy that nearly all of the men in this study describe their own understanding of masculinity as encompassing protection, and proceed to describe and legitimize their vegetarianism by appealing to reason. Although it is likely that many vegetarians, both men and women (and many proponents of nature who are not vegetarian, for that matter), share this protectionist mentality, Kheel’s (1993) critique of this protectionist discourse reveals its linkage to patriarchy nonetheless. It appears, then, that patriarchy provides certain discursive resources to men, which some participants in this study use to construct masculine subjectivities in relation to their vegetarianism.

In terms of self-presentations, it is also reasonable to expect that men and women alike face pressures to distance themselves from more stereotypical images of vegetarians. Meat consumption has hegemonic status in society and it is difficult for any vegetarian to challenge that; nonetheless, vegetarianism inevitably critiques this pervasive cultural practice, even if only implicitly. To minimize this critique and distance themselves from more stereotypical images, the men in this study overlook clear contradictions between their beliefs and behaviors. They cite numerous societal benefits to vegetarianism, on one hand, but express their beliefs and behaviors as “personal,” on

the other. Moreover, they express approval of non-vegetarians, emphasizing others' "choices" and "rights." It is possible that gender influences the ways in which vegetarians express approval of non-vegetarians. Aside from invoking a traditionally masculine discourse of rights, most of the men in this study support the right of others to kill animals in at least some instances, and this certainly is not disruptive to masculinity (i.e., to condone hunting). This seems like a particularly glaring contradiction given that most of the ethical vegetarians in this study—all of whom are obviously men—take this position.

It is also interesting to speculate on the extent to which avoiding certain stereotypes of vegetarians may serve to distance the men from more feminizing images. Some men do appear to distance themselves from more emotional images of vegetarians, which may be seen as feminizing. In their article on social movements and emotions, Jasper and Owens (2014) explain how Groves (1997) found that animal rights activists deliberately chose men to represent a heavily women-dominated movement in attempt to avoid appearing too emotional and therefore irrational and illegitimate.

It is important to remember, however, that the men in this study are open to various definitions of gender and take issue with sexism. They do not appear to feel as compelled to meet the standards of hegemonic masculinity as other men may be. Rather, they reject many of the predominant definitions of masculinity in society. With this in mind, they incorporate this rejection of hegemonic masculinity and more traditional elements of femininity (e.g., caring, interconnectedness) into their ideas of what is valuable about gendered experience.

Nonetheless, many men in this study draw on traditional ideas and discourses of masculinity to challenge any possible gender deviance due to their vegetarianism. In so doing, they reinforce more biological definitions of gender and suggest that certain masculine performances actually emanate from bodies. While there is some truth to the claim of biological sex difference—bodies do indeed have differences, and hormones play an important role in biological processes of differentiation—biological essentialism is nonetheless implicit whenever bodies and biology are used to explain culturally variable characteristics of masculinity and femininity. Again, this is not surprising. The current gender order is sustained by deeply embedded biological ideologies. With this in mind, the findings in this study suggest that men who are vegetarian both reject and reproduce hegemonic masculinity in complex ways.

LIMITATIONS

Certain methodological limitations are present in this study. The sample, for one, is small and diverse. It may be more beneficial in the future not only to obtain a larger sample, but to limit the study to ethical vegans, who perhaps experience the most stigma (Thomas 2016). There are benefits to the diversity of the sample, however, because it seems health vegetarians may have different experiences in terms of emotions. Social desirability bias is another potential problem to consider. Although I tried not to lead informants and to get the full story from their perspective, the men did indeed know that I was interested in looking at masculinity and may have overemphasized the role of gender in their experiences. Further, the avoidance of sexist self-presentations may have been motivated by social desirability. On a different but related note, my gender as the researcher (i.e., a man) may have impacted the stories told by the informants. It is entirely possible that a woman, or perhaps some other person, may have been better able to encourage the men to express their emotions more explicitly.

Arguably, the most problematic limitation is the absence of women in this study and the inability to make any claim about gender differences in the vegetarian experience. Thus, the analysis here is predominantly based on speculation given theoretical arguments and past empirical research. That said, we still have some idea of how masculinity may play out in men's experiences with vegetarianism. Moreover, this leads to many interesting research questions to be answered in the future. For example, narrative analyses of vegetarian experiences with attention to gender differences may shed further insight into some ideas suggested here. Perhaps men and women speak about their experiences with vegetarianism differently in terms of emotion and values. It would

be especially interesting to see if acceptance of killing animals, or violence more generally, emerges as frequently as it does in women's narratives as it does in these men's narratives.

Future research should also investigate the specific content of stereotypes of vegetarians in the larger society. Qualitative and quantitative approaches would be useful here. Qualitative interviews with meat-eaters may be particularly telling, but quantitative research may help contextualize stereotypes by revealing previously unknown relationships among them and other variables.

In addition, the presentation of the vegetarian self against these stereotypes simply emerged in my research; this seems like an interesting topic for future investigation, not necessarily along gendered lines. Of course, it would be interesting to examine if women are impacted by dominant images of vegetarians differently from men, and if/how this affects women's self-presentations. Further attention may be given to the negotiation of deviant status among vegetarians in interactions and stigma management, in addition to unpacking how vegans may be more stigmatized.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to a growing body of sociological literature in the areas of gender, food, emotions, and animals. Although we separate out these topics for academic and analytical purposes, studies at multiple intersections such as this serve to remind us of the complexity of human lives. In addition, the incorporation of ecofeminism into the theoretical framework of this study is relatively new in sociological research. With all this in mind, the present study shows that men who are vegetarian have diverse and multifaceted experiences which can be analyzed from various perspectives.

Despite associations with meat and masculinity in the larger society, this thesis suggests that men who are vegetarian still find ways in which the elimination of meat from their diet is entirely compatible with predominant constructions of masculinity. The coherence of these identities seems to lie somewhere in the process of choosing to become vegetarian and the justifications they use for continuing their diets. Indeed, the men's narratives reveal the embeddedness of masculinity at all stages of the experience, from the awareness of gaining initial knowledge to ongoing demonstrations of autonomy and control. Of course, this is not to suggest that there is one universal experience of being a man who is vegetarian. The men's experiences in this study are indeed diverse. However, the fact that they experience their vegetarianism *as men* in society appears to be consequential, and this fact has implications that are and will continue to be important to consider.

REFERENCES

- Adams, Carol J. [1990] 2015. *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Andrade, Monica. 2017. "15 Seriously Shredded Vegan Bodybuilders You Should Follow on Instagram." *Men's Health*. Retrieved January 26, 2018 (<http://www.menshealth.com/fitness/vegan-bodybuilders-instagram>).
- Arksey, Hilary, and Peter Knight. 1999. *Interviewing for Social Scientists*. London: Sage.
- Boyle, Joseph E. 2007. "Becoming Vegetarian: An Analysis of the Vegetarian Career Using an Integrated Model of Deviance." PhD dissertation, Department of Sociology, Virginia Tech University, Blacksburg, VA
- Boyle, Joseph E. 2011. "Vegetarianism and Fruitarianism as Deviance." Pp. 266-71 in *Routledge Handbook of Deviant Behavior*, edited by C.D. Bryant. New York: Routledge.
- Burrows, Ben. 2017. "Meet the NFL team that went vegan - and is heading for the playoffs." *The Independent*. Retrieved January 26, 2018 (<http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/us-sport/national-football-league/nfl-playoffs-postseason-tennessee-titans-vegan-parameters-schedule-a8122866.html>).
- Carrigan, Tim, R. W. Connell, and John Lee. 1985. "Towards a New Sociology of Masculinity." *Theory & Society* 14(5):551-604.
- Cherry, Elizabeth. 2014. "Vegetarianism and Veganism." Pp. 772-74 in *Encyclopedia of Social Deviance*. Vol. 21, edited by C.J. Forsyth and H. Copes. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Connell, R.W. 2005. *Masculinities*. 2nd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Connell, R.W., and James W. Messerschmidt. 2005. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." *Gender & Society* 19(6):829-59.
- Creswell, John W. 2013. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, John W. 2014. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Daniel, Carrie R., Amanda J. Cross, Corinna Koebnick, and Rashmi Sinha. 2011. "Trends in Meat Consumption in the United States." *Public Health Nutrition* 14(4):575-83.
- Fausto-Sterling, Anne. 2000. *Sexing the Body*. New York: Basic Books.
- Fiddes, Nick. 1991. *Meat: A Natural Symbol*. London: Routledge.
- Gaard, Greta. 1993. *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Gaard, Greta. 1997. "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism." *Hypatia* 12(1):114-37.
- Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Groves, Julian McAllister. 1997. *Hearts and Minds*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Hesse-Biber, Sharlene Nagy. 2014. *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Jabs, Jennifer, Carol M. Devine, and Jeffery Sobal. 1998. "Model of the Process of Adopting Vegetarian Diets: Health Vegetarians and Ethical Vegetarians." *Journal of Nutrition Education* 30(4):196-202.

- Jasper, James M., and Lynn Owens. 2014. "Social Movements and Emotions." Pp. 529-48 in *Handbook of the Sociology of Emotions: Volume II*, edited by J.E. Stets and J.H. Turner. New York: Springer.
- Kheel, Marti. 1993. "From Heroic to Holistic Ethics: The Ecofeminist Challenge." Pp. 243-71 in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, edited by G. Gaard. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Kilyeni, Annamaria, and Nadežda Silaški. 2014. "Beauty and the Beast from a Cognitive Linguistic Perspective: Animal Metaphors for Women in Serbian and Romanian." *Gender Studies* 13(1):163-78.
- Locher, Julie L., William C. Yoels, Donna Maurer, and Jillian Van Ells. 2005. "Comfort Foods: An Exploratory Journal into the Social and Emotional Significance of Food." *Food & Foodways* 13:273-97.
- López Rodríguez, Irene. 2009. "Of Women, Bitches, Chickens, and Vixens: Animal Metaphors for Women in English and Spanish." *Culture, Language and Representation* 7:77-100.
- Maurer, Donna. 2002. *Vegetarianism: Movement or Moment?* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- McDonald, Barbara. 2000. "'Once You Know Something, You Can't Not Know It': An Empirical Look at Becoming Vegan." *Society & Animals* 8(1):1-23.
- Messner, Michael A. 2004. "On Patriarchs and Losers: Rethinking Men's Interests." *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 48:74-88.
- Moustakas, Clark. 1990. *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Applications*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

- Moustakas, Clark. 1994. *Phenomenological Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Naples, Nancy A. 2003. *Feminism and Method: Ethnography, Discourse Analysis, and Activist Research*. New York: Routledge.
- Nath, Jemál. 2010. "Gendered Fare? A Qualitative Investigation of Alternative Food and Masculinities." *Journal of Sociology* 47(3):261-78.
- O'Doherty Jensen, K., and L. Holm. 1999. "Preferences, Quantities, and Concerns: Socio-Cultural Perspectives on the Gendered Consumption of Foods." *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 53:351-59.
- Reinharz, Shulamit. 1992. *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rogers, Richard A. 2008. "Beasts, Burgers, and Hummers: Meat and the Crisis of Masculinity in Contemporary Television Advertisements." *Environmental Communication* 2(3):281-301.
- Rothgerber, Hank. 2013. "Real Men Don't Eat (Vegetable) Quiche: Masculinity and the Justification of Meat Consumption." *Psychology of Men & Masculinity* 14(4):363-75.
- Rozin, Paul, Julia M. Hormes, Myles S. Faith, and Brian Wansink. 2012. "Is Meat Male? A Quantitative Multimethod Framework to Establish Metaphoric Relationships." *Journal of Consumer Research* 39:629-43.
- Ruby, Matthew B. 2012. "Vegetarianism. A Blossoming Field of Study." *Appetite* 58:141-50.

- Ruby, Matthew B., and Steven J. Heine. 2011. "Meat, Morals, and Masculinity." *Appetite* 56:447-50.
- Schmauks, Dagmar. 2014. "Curs, Crabs, and Cranky Cows: Ethological and Linguistic Aspects of Animal-based Insults." *Semiotica* 198:93-120.
- Schrock, Douglas, and Brian Knop. 2014. "Gender and Emotions." Pp. 411-28 in *Handbook of the Sociology of Emotions: Volume II*, edited by J.E. Stets and J.H. Turner. New York: Springer.
- Sobal, Jeffery. 2005. "Men, Meat, and Marriage: Models of Masculinity." *Food and Foodways* 13(1-2):135-58.
- Sprague, Joey. 2005. *Feminist Methodologies for Critical Researchers: Bridging Differences*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Stahler, Charles. 2015. "How Often Do Americans Eat Vegetarian Meals?" *Vegetarian Resource Group*. Retrieved July 6, 2016 (http://vrg.org/journal/vj2015issue4/2015_issue4_vegetarian_meals.php).
- Talebinejad, M. Reza, and H. Vahid Dastjerdi. 2005. "A Cross-Cultural Study of Animal Metaphors: When Owls Are Not Wise!" *Metaphor and Symbol* 20(2):133-50.
- Thomas, Margaret A. 2016. "Are Vegans the Same as Vegetarians? The Effect of Diet on Perceptions of Masculinity." *Appetite* 97:79-86.
- Twigg, Julia. 1979. "Food for Thought: Purity and Vegetarianism." *Religion* 9:13-35.
- Walker, Teresa M. 2017. "Veggie might: Titans' D gets boost after going vegan." *USA Today*. Retrieved January 26, 2018 (<https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2017/12/20/veggie-might-titans-d-gets-boost-after-going-vegetarian/108771904/>).

West, Candace, and Don H. Zimmerman. 1987. "Doing Gender." *Gender & Society* 1(2):125-51.

Wolfe, Cameron. 2017. "Derrick Morgan and his chef wife inspired vegan movement on Titans." *ESPN*. Retrieved January 26, 2018
(http://www.espn.com/blog/tennessee-titans/post/_/id/24460/derrick-morgan-and-his-chef-wife-inspired-vegan-movement-on-titans).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW GUIDE

Project: Men's Experiences with Vegetarianism

Time of interview:

Interviewer: Jacob Lax

Date:

Interview #:

Place:

Position of participant:

Briefly describe the project. Ensure the informant is comfortable. Discuss and clarify the purpose of the study, the anticipated outcomes for both him and the research, confidentiality protections, etc.

(1) Could you tell me a bit about yourself, including basic demographics like race/ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, marital status, and education? Just tell me about the characteristics you think are important to you.

(2) What does it mean to you to be a vegetarian? *Probe for elaboration on the importance of vegetarianism to identity, lifestyle.*

(3) Can you tell me about why you decided to become a vegetarian? *Probe for elaboration: influential factors, goals, examples of specific experiences, associated feelings, etc.*

(4) How does it feel telling others that you're vegetarian? *Probe for changes in these experiences over time and whether or not feelings differ by gender.*

(5) Can you tell me about any negative experiences you might have had due to being vegetarian? Any inconveniences, misunderstandings, or adverse reactions? *Probe for comparison with more positive experiences.*

(6) How do you feel about the idea that in order to be a "real" man, you have to eat meat?

(7) In your own opinion, what does "being a man" mean to you in general? *Probe for personal conceptualizations of manhood or masculinity.*

APPENDIX B. IRB APPROVAL

IRB
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
 Office of Research Compliance,
 010A Sam Ingram Building,
 2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd
 Murfreesboro, TN 37129



IRBN001 - EXPEDITED PROTOCOL APPROVAL NOTICE

Tuesday, June 07, 2016

Investigator(s): Jacob Benjamin Lax (Student PI) and Vicky MacLean (FA)
 Investigator(s) Email(s): jbl3m@mtmail.mtsu.edu; vicky.macleam@mtsu.edu
 Department: Sociology and Anthropology/CLA

Study Title: ***Exploring men's experiences with vegetarianism***
 Protocol ID: **16-2279**

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the **EXPEDITED** mechanism under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110 within the category (7) *Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior*. A summary of the IRB action and other particulars in regard to this protocol application is tabulated as shown below:

IRB Action	APPROVED for one year from the date of this notification	
Date of expiration	6/7/2017	
Sample Size	30 (THIRTY)	
Participant Pool	Adult (18 or older), identify as male and identify as vegetarian	
Exceptions	Collection of voice recordings permitted. Recording email addresses permitted for participants who express their wish to receive a copy of the final report	
Restrictions	Signed informed consent is mandatory	
Comments	NONE	
Amendments	Date	Post-approval Amendments
	NONE	

This protocol can be continued for up to THREE years (6/7/2019) by obtaining a continuation approval prior to 6/7/2017. Refer to the following schedule to plan your annual project reports and be aware that you may not receive a separate reminder to complete your continuing reviews. Failure in obtaining an approval for continuation will automatically result in cancellation of this protocol. Moreover, the completion of this study MUST be notified to the Office of Compliance by filing a final report in order to close-out the protocol.

Continuing Review Schedule:

Reporting Period	Requisition Deadline	IRB Comments
First year report	5/7/2017	INCOMPLETE
Second year report	5/7/2018	INCOMPLETE
Final report	5/7/2019	INCOMPLETE

The investigator(s) indicated in this notification should read and abide by all of the post-approval conditions imposed with this approval. [Refer to the post-approval guidelines posted in the MTSU IRB's website.](#) Any unanticipated harms to participants or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918 within 48 hours of the incident. Amendments to this protocol must be approved by the IRB. Inclusion of new researchers must also be approved by the Office of Compliance before they begin to work on the project.

All of the research-related records, which include signed consent forms, investigator information and other documents related to the study, must be retained by the PI or the faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) at the secure location mentioned in the protocol application. The data storage must be maintained for at least three (3) years after study completion. Subsequently, the researcher may destroy the data in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity. IRB reserves the right to modify, change or cancel the terms of this letter without prior notice. Be advised that IRB also reserves the right to inspect or audit your records if needed.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board
Middle Tennessee State University
Email: irb_information@mtsu.edu (for questions)
irb_submissions@mtsu.edu (for documents)

Quick Links:

[Click here](#) for a detailed list of the post-approval responsibilities.
More information on expedited procedures can be found [here](#).