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Eat Like a White Man: Meat-Eating, Masculinity, and Neo-Colonialism

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Eat Like a White Man: Meat-Eating, Masculinity, and Neo-Colonialism

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ABSTRACT: Gender Studies scholarship has argued that one significant way contemporary hegemonic masculinities are constructed and reinforced is through meat consumption. Conversely, plant-based diets such as veganism and vegetarianism are considered feminine. This paper builds on an emerging body of research that traces this gendering of meat and plant-based diets to British colonialism in India. Drawing on ecofeminist and postcolonial theory, it shows how British colonizers feminized Indian dietary cultures, specifically Hindu vegetarian diets, to reinforce their own sense of masculinity. Through critical analyses of marketing and media, it demonstrates how these colonial gendered food images continue to populate contemporary imaginations. Finally, it considers some potential current implications of these constructions of diet and gender, including the effect of a patriarchal food system on the climate crisis.

KEYWORDS: gender; masculinity; femininity; Hinduism; ecofeminism; British colonialism

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INTRODUCTION

In 2011, Esquire food editor Ryan D'Agostino published a cookbook titled *Eat Like A Man: The Only Cookbook A Man Will Ever Need*, featuring a large slab of grilled meat garnished simply with a sprinkle of salt on the cover. Amazon's recommended section beneath this cookbook features similar books with comparable covers that are seemingly targeted at white men. Flip to the introduction of any one of these books and you will find descriptions that equate cooking with wilderness survival skills or carpentry. Culinary utensils are often described as "tools" or "hardware". Some even suggest that being able to cook will help the reader seduce women. These images evoke a frontier masculinity characterized by whiteness, self-sufficiency in the wilderness, strength, and individualism, a form of masculinity best demonstrated by men like John Wayne and Teddy Roosevelt (Anahita and Mix 145). In short, by connecting meat cooking with wilderness survival, seduction, and carpentry, these cookbooks emphasize a hegemonic version of Western masculinity.

A quick glance at Amazon's list of vegan cookbooks reveals a very different picture. Not surprisingly, fruits, nuts, and vegetables replace the grilled meat on the covers of these books. White women smile at the reader, surrounded by funky fonts and vegan junk food. Book titles focus on weekly meal planning, quick and easy recipes, and comfort food for the busy mom. Scroll down a little further, and one finds Indian food cookbooks alongside these images of vegetables and white women. This is notable because it contrasts with the complete lack of "ethnic" food in Amazon's list of cookbooks for men. The absence of racial and ethnic diversity in the "carnivorous men" cookbook collection, but its presence in the "vegan female" list suggests that race as well as gender is also a factor in the construction of masculinity through diet.

Although Amazon is by no means representative of Western society at large, these examples suggest a link between food and social constructions of gender and race. What is the role of the Indian cookbook? How does Indian food fit in with this gendering? Drawing on ecofeminist and postcolonial theory, this paper examines the role of food in constructing contemporary Western conceptions of masculinity and femininity. The association between veganism, femininity, and Indian food discussed above hints at food-based *gender* constructions that are influenced by constructions of

race. This paper attempts to articulate that connection, arguing that the Western feminization of Hinduism enforced and perpetuated Western dietary enactments of masculinity, specifically, meat consumption. This paper utilizes ecofeminist theory to contextualize and frame the subsequent discussion of race, gender, and plant-based diets.

This paper builds on a small, but growing, body of work that examines the connections between British colonialism, meat eating, and constructions of masculinity. One of the earliest arguments demonstrating this connection appears in an essay by Carol Adams where she argues that British colonial identity during the 19th century was heavily associated with eating beef ("Mad Cow Disease" 30). Later work by Parama Roy elaborates on this by discussing the gendered and racialized nature of Mahatma Gandhi's vegetarian diet ("Ghandian Grammar of Diet" 62) and Swami Vivekananda's focus on re-virilization through meat eating ("Virile Emergency" 256). Most recently, an article by Vasile Stănescu suggests a historical pattern wherein conservative and alt-right Americans emphasize consumption of meat and dairy products during times of instability (i.e. recession, fear surrounding immigration) to reassert white privilege (103). Stănescu points to the British colonialism of India as one example of historical precedent for that pattern. This paper differs from the literature by using an ecofeminist lens and focusing on how British colonizers feminized Indian dietary cultures, specifically Hindu dietary culture, in order to reinforce their own sense of masculinity.

ECOFEMINISM: RACE, GENDER, AND PLANT-BASED DIETS

Ecofeminist work by authors such as Bina Agarwal, Vandana Shiva, Carol Adams, Aviva Cantor, Gena Corea, Greta Gaard, Laurel Holliday, Marti Kheel, and Constantia Salamone unpacks the relationships between food, speciesism, gender, and race (Gaard 125). Ecofeminism is a subdiscipline within feminism that emphasizes the connection between patriarchy and domination of the natural world. Ecofeminists argue that there is an inherent connection between the systems that perpetuate inequality and injustice for women, people of color, people with disabilities, members of the LGBTQ+ community, etc., and the systems that perpetuate the domination of nature (Mallory 176). For example, Shiva argues that the capitalist patriarchy has stolen control of food production and distribution

from Third-World women through corporate globalism (17). This is harmful because in doing so, it has replaced women's sustainable and biodiverse agricultural practices with white male-dominated corporations, monocultures, ecological and economic destruction, and food insecurity (Shiva 19). In other words, systems of power that benefit white, Western, male-run corporations simultaneously harm women, people of color, and the environment.

Many ecofeminists argue that Western patriarchy justifies the oppression of groups it perceives as inferior by feminizing and naturalizing them, such that they become symbolically submissive and inanimate, and therefore "naturally" oppressed (Mallory 175). This serves to define and delineate who and what is and should be oppressed by patriarchy. This is important in this research because it frames the discussion of the feminization of Asian religions, specifically Hinduism, and provides theoretical support for the argument that Western masculinity defines itself against the practices of that "feminized" religion.

Some ecofeminists focus specifically on human consumption of other-than-human animals as one important example of how this patriarchal domination of nature plays out in everyday life. Vegetarian ecofeminists "explore the connection between meat eating and the domination of women" and other subordinated groups (Yudina and Fennell 57). This perspective is especially relevant because it argues that meat eating is an important way in which patriarchal systems of domination are expressed and reinforced in typical daily activities such as eating.

Ecofeminism is also grounded in physical praxis and thus provides a discussion of real-life implications of the theories it details. Significantly, ecofeminism argues that we must interrogate the connections between systems that dominate oppressed peoples as well as nature in order to create "a healthy, sustainable, and just relationship... between humans and [nature]" (Mallory 176). In other words, a discussion of the relationship between systems of domination and oppressed groups including the natural world is necessary to bring about positive change, both socially and for the environment. This point is relevant because this paper lays out ways in which these definitions of masculinity that contrast themselves against supposedly feminine religions and diets have real world implications, specifically, environmental damage.

One potential counterargument draws from Agarwal's

contention that any actual connection between women and nature is rooted in their material reality, i.e., the ways in which women and nature physically interact (Agarwal). She warns against essentialism when making arguments about symbolic forms of oppression, asserting that gender inequality has many forms, and that all those forms do not stem from one source, for example, colonialism (Agarwal). This is relevant here because this research draws connections between colonial suppression of people of color, femininity, and nature, arguing that the three are interlinked and have repercussions into the present day. It would be easy to generalize from this argument that all forms of oppression across the globe can be linked back to colonialism, thereby falling into the trap of *essentialism* described by Agarwal. However, while colonialism was, and still is, a powerful force for domination, this research does not claim to make statements about the creation of all forms of oppression – its focus is instead on one way in which Western hegemonic masculinity defines itself. Gender and racial inequality are complicated, and although colonialism certainly did not create these forms of oppression, it did reinforce and perpetuate them by generating new ways for white Western men to enact these power structures.

THE GENDER OF FOOD

Western traditions of gender equate eating meat with manliness within hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinities are the most exalted forms of masculinity in any given society – they justify systems of inequality and dominance by naturalizing a certain form of masculinity as inherently dominant over all other forms of masculinity and femininity (Pascoe and Bridges 18). Western hegemonic masculinity places dominance, rationality, violence, and sexual prowess as the ultimate markers of powerful masculinity. Meat-eating symbolically demonstrates many of these characteristics because it implies that the eater has conquered another body. As Calvert explains, "meat-eating can be seen to feed into the patriarchal structure of human-male supremacy, celebrating a primitive masculinity and normalizing aggressive characteristics by tying them to male, gendered ('natural') behaviors" (19). In other words, men attempt to demonstrate their allegiance to hegemonic masculinity by eating meat, the act of which symbolically suggests that they have violently dominated a body.

Since animal bodies are, in this model, associated with femininity, meat eating also implies sexual prowess and

dominance by symbolically and literally consuming a feminized body (“Feminist Vegan” 308). One example of this in mainstream media is a 2007 advertisement for the fast-food chain restaurant Carl’s Jr. In this advertisement, teenage boys rap a song about “flat buns” while their teacher dances on her desk (Orange County Register 00:00:07–00:00:27). “Flat buns” here refers both to Carl’s Jr.’s new flat burger buns, and the boys’ teacher’s buttocks. The masculine attitude and attire of the teenage boys, the sexual objectification of the teacher, and the comparison of the teacher with a burger suggests that eating meat is associated with sexual conquest and the achievement of hegemonic masculinity. As this example demonstrates, meat-eating reinforces hegemonic notions of masculinity and normalizes conceptions of masculinity that highlight violence, sexual prowess, and dominance.

It is important to expand on the connection between animal bodies and femininity. Western traditions of gender and race typically view the bodies of subordinated groups, specifically women, as animalistic. Cary Wolfe argues that Western societies categorize bodies into four genres: humanized human, animalized human, humanized animal, and animalized animal (“Feminist Vegan” 312). Importantly here, the most powerful groups are categorized as humanized humans while less powerful groups are categorized as animalized humans (“Feminist Vegan” 312). This usually means that white men are humanized humans while women and other subordinated groups are animalized humans. In other words, “in a patriarchal, meat eating world...women are animalized” (“Feminist Vegan” 304).

This is often more explicit for women of color, as they have historically been stereotyped as “closer to nature”, “wild”, and “animalistic” (Mann 16, Collins 56-57). For example, the African American dancer Josephine Baker (1906-1975) became famous in Paris during the 1920s with her performance in *La Revue Nègre* where she danced in a jungle setting wearing only a skirt made of banana leaves (Collins 26). The setting and costume were meant to tie Baker to ape imagery, reinforcing the already rampant stereotype that Black people, especially women, were closer to being animals than they were to being human (Collins 56-57).

The connection also goes the other way; nature, including other-than-human animals, is feminized within this model of patriarchy (“Feminist Vegan” 308). One clear example is the language used to describe nature. The Earth is often called “Mother Earth,” soil is “fertile,”

and weather phenomena are often gendered as female: from 1953 to 1979 the US used feminine names for all hurricanes (NOAA). Another example is biblical tradition surrounding animal “husbandry” and sacrifice. Although the gendered rules and rituals surrounding both animal husbandry and sacrifice in the Bible are nuanced, at the core of all of them is the idea of masculine control over feminized nature (Ruane 4). Both animal husbandry and sacrifice allow the, usually male, human domesticator or slaughterer to regain some control over reproduction, which is traditionally considered a feminine phenomenon (Jay 37). Patrilineal societies influenced by Christianity also grant men total control over property, which historically has included land, animals, and women (Jay 35). In historical Western, Christian societies, therefore, animals are linked with women both symbolically, since each are valued mainly for their reproductive capacities, and legally, since both are considered men’s property. Thus, again, when men consume other-than-human animal bodies, they demonstrate their dominance over that which is considered feminine.

The act of eating vegetables is also feminized. This is most apparent in cultural depictions of plant eating wherein men that eat plants are considered emasculated. For example, Adams describes a 2006 Hummer advertisement where a man buying tofu at a supermarket is so concerned about the fact that he may be perceived as un-masculine that he immediately goes out and buys a Hummer to “restore [his] manhood” (“Feminist Vegan”, 310). Calvert offers another example, wherein the male host of a TV show based around eating meat jokingly orders a salad using an effeminate voice (24). She argues that “[t]his caricatured enactment of femininity...simultaneously mocks vegetarian/vegan lifestyles, women, and masculinities that deviate from the hegemonic norm” (Calvert 24), showing that Western societies consider plant-based diets to be feminine and emasculating.

In sum, Western hegemonic masculinity is partly defined by its relationship to food and the natural world. When men eat meat, they are symbolically partaking in an act of domination over the natural world and women. This is because women are generally considered “closer to nature” and “animalistic,” especially women of color, and because nature is considered feminine. Therefore, by literally consuming a feminized body, (white) men symbolically demonstrate their place at the top of a hierarchy that places women, people of color, and nature below them. Relatedly, plant-based diets are considered

feminine and emasculating. This could simply be because such diets do not include the symbolic domination of subordinated groups. However, this paper will argue that there is a larger history behind this gendering of plant-based diets. The following section unpacks this history and argues that the feminization of religions that practice vegetarianism, specifically Hinduism, has contributed to this gendering and construction of hegemonic masculinity that values meat consumption.

GENDERED BODIES, COLONIALISM, AND RELIGION

Why has masculinity defined eating plants as feminine? So far, this research has introduced a theoretical framework on which to support the following conclusions and examined the ways in which certain diets are gendered. However, the question remains: *why* are these diets gendered? What historical processes led to these gendered conceptions of food and these conceptions of gender that depend on food? This next section attempts to answer these questions. It argues that Western colonialism's rejection of Asian supposed effeminacy reinforced and perpetuated certain dietary enactments of Western hegemonic masculinity, specifically, meat consumption.

The connection between femininity, nature, and race discussed above has implications beyond constructions of womanhood, permeating into constructions of masculinity so that masculinities that deviate from hegemonic norms become feminized and thus subordinated. Western hegemonic masculinity is undoubtedly white (Collins 185-188). Kimmel notes that, "the masculinity that defines white, middle class, early middle-aged, heterosexual men is the masculinity that sets the standard for other men, against which other men are measured and, more often than not, found wanting" (qtd. in Han 84). Thus, an immediate disqualifier for participation in hegemonic masculinity is being not white. This means that men of color face various controlling images that define their masculinity in opposition to white masculinity (Collins 149-180). For Black and Latino men this often means they are hypersexualized and seen as uncontrollably violent (Collins 151). For example, Vogue magazine released a cover in 2008 depicting a large, angry looking LeBron James dribbling a basketball while holding onto the petite, white, blonde-haired model Gisele Bündchen by her waist. This picture was highly controversial because it drew on the old, slavery-era idea that Black men rape white women because they are unable to control their

anger and "animal urges" (Collins 152). Conversely, Western society stereotypes Asian (including Indian) men as weak, feminine, and asexual (Han 85).

This stereotype is visible in media images that depict Indian men as weak, awkward, and unable to get a girlfriend. For example, the character Dopinder in *Deadpool* (2016) is in competition with another man for the woman he loves but is unable to attract her, presumably because of his small physique and awkward demeanor. His inability to win over the object of his affections puts his masculinity into question, especially as it is compared against the main character's hypermasculinity and hypersexuality. Thus, his love story and inability to conform to conceptions of masculinity that value hypersexuality are essentially made into a joke in the movie, demonstrating how Western media depicts Indian masculinity as inferior and effeminate.

These images have a specific historical context and stem from constructions of Indian masculinity that were meant to help the European nation states control and colonize India (Sinha). Beginning in the mid-1700s and continuing for the next two hundred years, Britain actively invaded and colonized India to reinforce their global commercial, political, and military power (Rahman et al. 3). During this time, Britain instituted English legal and educational systems against the will of the people of India, intending to indoctrinate Indian citizens into British cultural norms and strengthen British rule (Rahman et al. 4).

An important, although not immediately visible, aspect of the education system was Christian indoctrination. Early curriculums were rife with Christian references and scriptural teachings, despite the British government maintaining that its educational system practiced religious neutrality (Viswanathan 80). The Charter Act of 1813 allowed Christian missionaries to openly preach in India, ending the façade that British colonization was religiously neutral (MisirHiralall 85). Christianity was seen as a civilizing force, bringing the supposedly savage Indian people into the modern century, and ultimately, under the control of the British government (MisirHiralall 86-87).

British commercial and military interests in India in the 18th century motivated them to depict Indian people in a way that justified the practice of colonization (Chen 194). In 1978, Edward Said introduced the concept of *orientalism* to describe how Asia was represented as

“other” to the West, and how this representation was used to justify colonialism. In brief, European colonizers in the Middle East and Asia discursively created an image of “The Orient” as entirely other, and the opposite of the West (Said 88). This discourse defines the West as rational, active, and modern, and “The Orient” as irrational, passive, and backwards, thereby placing Western cultures in a position of power and hegemonic control over Asian cultures (Said 88-89). In other words, “because of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action” (Said 88).

This discourse was specifically gendered. British colonizers created controlling images of Indian people that feminized them and thus supposedly justified their domination, allowing the British to continue their project of imperialist colonialism (Sinha). However, these controlling images were nuanced. The British specifically feminized Hindu culture while masculinizing Muslim culture (Chen 195). This established a belief that the British had “nobly interceded to protect Hindus from their Muslim oppressors” and created an impression of “an effeminate Hindu people sheltering behind the shield of the [British] Raj” (Chen 195). This, again, functioned to justify colonization and commercial exploitation of India. Simultaneously, British scholars were erasing ethnic and religious diversity within India by positing that Hindu culture was the center of India and Indian culture (Chen 196). They thus created a cultural depiction of India that erased heterogeneity and replaced it with an image of a homogenous, effeminate, Hindu culture.

This was not met without resistance – one major aspect of resistance to British colonial rule within Indian and Hindu cultures was to reemphasize and reclaim masculinity (A. Roy and Hammers 552). However, it had a strong influence on Western conceptions of Indian and Hindu cultures, so much so that the stereotypes of all Indians being Hindu and all Hindu men being effeminate linger today.

The stereotype of effeminacy was particularly potent, affecting Western perceptions of all aspects of Hindu culture including vegetarianism. For example, Oliver Goldsmith equated Indian people’s vegetarian diet with their supposed effeminacy and cowardice in battle (“Virile Emergency” 257). In his widely popular book, *History of the Earth and Animated Nature* (1774) Goldsmith argues that “the Indians have long been remarkable for their cowardice and effeminacy....Many tribes among them eat nothing that has life....The vigour of the Asiatics is,

in general, conformable to their dress and nourishment” (qtd. in “Virile Emergency” 257). In other words, Goldsmith equates vegetarianism with effeminacy and, by implication, meat-eating with strength and military success. His opinions were not uncommon, and many British aristocrats involved in the colonization of India echoed his sentiments (“Virile Emergency” 256-259). The correlation between vegetarianism and femininity/weakness was so strong that it filtered into British educational systems and was taken up by Indian people educated in those systems (“Virile Emergency” 258). Some of those people became key players in the struggle for Indian sovereignty, and their respective philosophies were heavily influenced by their perceptions of the connection between diet, femininity, and strength, although in very different ways.

Two of those key players were Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) and Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948). Gandhi and Vivekananda both accepted the premise that vegetarianism led to a sort of weakness, however they interpreted the consequences of that premise in very different ways. Vivekananda accepted the dominant Indian Nationalist rhetoric that argued that Hindu men were effeminate and needed to reclaim masculinity in order to overthrow their oppressors; one important way to do this was eating meat (“Virile Emergency” 258, A. Roy and Hammers 552). Conversely, Gandhi explicitly rejected meat precisely because of its affiliation with Nationalist masculinity (“Ghandian Grammar of Diet” 67). Vegetarianism was one aspect of Gandhi’s greater effort to symbolically feminize the masculine Nationalist struggle against British colonial rule, and thus steer the resistance movement towards non-violence (“Ghandian Grammar of Diet” 62). Both men were Western-educated and therefore serve as important examples of the prevalence of the Western perception that vegetarianism was effeminate because of its association with Hindu culture.

At the same time as the Western world was developing perceptions of Hindu culture and people as effeminate, it was also constructing its own versions of hegemonic masculinity based in opposition to subordinated masculinities. Since masculinity is a socially constructed concept, it has nothing concrete on which to define itself. Therefore, it often defines itself by what it is *not* rather than what it *is* (Pascoe and Bridges 43). Subordinated masculinities are thus important ways in which hegemonic masculinities define themselves – in simple terms, hegemonic masculinity does the opposite of whatever

subordinated masculinity does (Pascoe and Bridges 43). The above quote by Goldsmith clearly demonstrates that British colonizers were quick to associate dietary habits with constructions of gender and moral fiber. Thus, they created a version of hegemonic Western masculinity that relied heavily on meat-eating and the domination of other-than-human animals to assert British strength and dominance (“Virile Emergency” 256-259).

One manifestation of this was the widespread practice of tiger hunting (Sramek 659). Hunting tigers proved to be an important way for British men to prove their masculinity while simultaneously asserting their dominance over a symbol of Indian Indigeneity (Sramek 661). This connection between domination over animals, domination over Indians, and assertion of masculinity suggests that constructions of British masculinity were heavily dependent on constructions of subordinated Indian masculinities. Thus, the British equated meat-eating and general animal domination with strength and courage, partly because this was the opposite of what they perceived to be the feminizing effects of a vegetarian diet on men practicing Hinduism.

In sum, contemporary constructions of masculinity that position hegemonic white masculinity in opposition to subordinated Indian masculinity are historically situated and partially expressed via dietary habits. British colonizers constructed a version of masculinity that emphasized meat eating and other-than-human animal domination in opposition to their construction of effeminate vegetarian Hindu masculinity. Generalizing this stereotype of effeminate Hindu men to the country of India justified the project of British colonialism by creating the idea that feminine India needed a patriarchal protector. The stereotypes of Hindu male effeminacy and meat-eating equated with masculinity linger in contemporary representations of Indian men as weak and in contemporary constructions of masculinity that emphasize a hyper-meat-based diet for “real men,” respectively. Therefore, contemporary Western hegemonic masculinity partially constructs itself against subordinated Hindu masculinity, and expresses that through excessive meat consumption.

IMPLICATIONS

This construction of hegemonic masculinity within Western culture has three important implications for contemporary society and social structures. First, it contributes to the maintenance of *orientalism* by

perpetuating the myth that Indian religions and peoples are feminine. Representations of Asian cultures that draw on *orientalism* depict those cultures as totally different from Western cultures, thereby othering Asian cultures in a way that simplifies and reduces them (Mudambi 278). The continued use of *orientalism* in fashion and film clearly demonstrates this point. Western fashion perpetuates *orientalism* and contributes to the continued colonization of India (Nagrath 362). Nagrath argues that the Western Oriental gaze defines Indian fashion as feminized and less important than Western fashion (362). As Indian fashion is devalued, Western fashion is simultaneously glorified and popularized in India, further exacerbating the idea that Indian fashion is “exotic” and “other” (Nagrath 363-364).

Similarly, cinematic representations of India in films such as *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) other India and Indian people in a way that lets the Western audience comfortably commodify the *orientalized* subject of the film (Mudambi 275). Although the movie depicts starving children and extreme poverty, it does so in a way that glamorizes and decontextualizes the harsh conditions so that the audience consumes the message that slum life in India is difficult without truly confronting and taking responsibility for the impacts of colonialism and capitalist imperialism (Mudambi 281-283). These media representations of India perpetuate racist myths about Indian people, while also concealing the continuing process of colonization. Since the media representations are created within a patriarchal Western culture that partly defines hegemonic masculinity against an image of an effeminized India, Western constructions of gender contribute to the maintenance of harmful systems of *orientalism* and colonialism.

Second, Western hegemonic masculinity that perpetually defines itself against anything considered feminine upholds patriarchy and systemic oppression. Ezzell argues that “gender is... a matter of power, a matter of life and death” because the ways we construct gender create “systems that are male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered” therefore subordinating women and anyone or anything considered feminine (189). Thus, the maintenance of patriarchy harms not just women, but all subordinated groups. For example, Kazyak found that gay men in rural America specifically distance themselves from what they perceive to be stereotypical gay effeminacy in order to fit in within their community (368). These men believe that being gay is necessarily associated with femininity, and so take active steps

to act and dress “straight” (i.e. masculine) so that they can belong in the rural US (Kazyak 368). This example reveals how sexism and homophobia are distinctly related, however this is just one example. Patriarchy is also closely linked to transphobia (Matsuzaka and Koch 32), oppression under capitalism (hooks 121-122), and as discussed, the maintenance of racial hierarchies. All systems of oppression are interconnected, so to maintain patriarchy is to maintain every other system of oppression (hooks 121-122). Therefore, it is imperative that the Western hegemonic masculinity that defines itself against femininity is discarded in favor of more healthy forms of masculinity.

Finally, Western hegemonic masculinity that is enacted partially by consuming large quantities of other-than-human animal meat plays a role in the perpetuation of climate change. According to a recent study by the United Nations, “[a]nimal agriculture is the second largest contributor to human-made greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions” (Climate Nexus par. 1), with cattle making up 65-77% of those emissions (Mbow et al. 62). If a person replaced the beef in their diets with plants, the amount of greenhouse gases they produce would reduce by 96% (Climate Nexus par. 2). Constructions of gender that encourage meat consumption and persuade men that they will become effeminate if they eat plants make it less likely for those men to switch to a plant-based diet. Therefore, the version of hegemonic masculinity described here contributes to the continuation of climate change by discouraging people from making dietary choices that would positively impact the environment.

A Western hegemonic masculinity that defines itself partly against a construction of feminized Hindu masculinity gets enacted through the consumption of other-than-human animal meat. An ecofeminist theoretical framework demonstrates that gendered power dynamics reveal themselves in the ways in which people interact with and think about nature; specifically, hegemonic masculinity asserts its dominance by feminizing and naturalizing subordinated groups. This is clearly demonstrated by the ways certain diets are gendered – heavily meat-based diets are considered masculine, while plant-based diets are considered feminine. Importantly, meat-based diets are considered masculine partly because they symbolically demonstrate the domination of the feminized natural world, and by extension, feminized and naturalized masculinities. This gendered dynamic is partly rooted in India’s history of colonization, and the ways in which the British

feminized and naturalized Hindu men in order to justify colonization. The British constructed Hindu masculinity as subordinate and effeminate partly through arguing that the Hindu vegetarian diet weakened and feminized Hindu men. This relationship between femininity, Hindu masculinity, and vegetarianism lingers, and now means that people practicing Western hegemonic masculinity demonstrate their practice by eating lots of meat. This practice has consequences, including the perpetuation of *orientalism*, sexism, and climate change. This suggests that we need a reevaluation of the ways we construct gender and race to eradicate unhealthy stereotypes and power dynamics, and even make progress towards protecting our environment.

Some contemporary constructions of Indian masculinity and veganism potentially hint at a disruption of these power dynamics. While there are very few representations of Indian men in mainstream Western media, and even fewer positive representations, there is a push for more positive representation in Hollywood. The Netflix show *Never Have I Ever* (2020) is one recent attempt at that positive representation. The show centers around an Indian American teenage girl, however her deceased father, Mohan Viswakumar, plays a major role, mostly in flashbacks. Mohan immigrated to California from India with the main character’s mother, and the family is shown partaking in Hindu culture and religious celebrations. The show depicts Mohan as an optimistic and loving man who values his family above all else. Importantly, the show does not depict him as feminized; the actor is good looking, with a strong jaw and traditionally masculine features, and the character takes an active interest in his role as father and husband. In other words, Mohan is a distinctly Indian man who maintains his masculinity but does so in a healthy, non-toxic way. Altogether, the representation of Indian masculinity in *Never Have I Ever* offers Hollywood an alternative to the weak, emasculated, caricature so often presented to audiences in characters like *Deadpool*’s Dopinder.

Outside of media, the vegan community is another area where gender constructions are challenged. For example, vegan men can sometimes engage in a “hybrid masculinity” wherein they actively embrace certain aspects of femininity thereby expanding the definition of hegemonic masculinity (Greenebaum and Dexter 637). A quote by Josh, a vegan man in Greenebaum and Dexter’s study, exemplifies this idea of hybrid masculinity: “There’s no reason that you can’t be a strong male in that often stereotypical view and still be compassionate towards

other people, be compassionate towards animals, [and] be conscious of our environment” (Greenebaum and Dexter 642). Here, Josh is trying to reconcile his desire to be masculine with his values of being compassionate and environmentally conscious, arguing that it is possible to have stereotypically feminine traits while still being masculine. Hybrid masculinity is a complex construct and can unintentionally reinforce gender inequality and normative constructs of masculinity (Greenebaum and Dexter 640). While not a perfect solution to the issues associated with hegemonic masculinity, these vegan men are trying to construct a healthier, less sexist, and more environmentally conscious masculinity.

Although these examples point towards new conceptions of masculinity and diet that are healthier for humans and for the planet, they should not be taken as representations of the end goal. The relationship between diet and gender is still fraught with racialized and colonized norms and therefore necessitates careful dissection and disruption. Thus, there are many areas for future research. How, if at all, have these Western gender norms surrounding diet influenced India and other Asian countries? Is there a relationship between the exporting of Western diets (i.e., fast food, soda, and an emphasis on meat and dairy consumption), changing gender norms, and capitalist imperialism in countries currently designated as “developing”? Can media help steer us towards more healthy conceptions of masculinity and diet and if so, how? How does branding for vegan foods reinforce and/or disrupt the ideologies discussed here? Answering these and many other related questions will help us better understand the unhealthy aspects of the relationship between gender and food, and hopefully guide us towards more sustainable and revolutionary conceptions of that relationship.

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