Carol Adams has written extensively on the sexual politics of meat, arguing that women and other animals are both sexualized and commodified to facilitate their consumption (both figuratively and literally) by those in power. One result has been the feminization of veganism and vegetarianism. This has the effect of delegitimizing, devaluing, and defanging veganism as a social movement.

This process works within the vegan movement as well, with an open embracing of veganism as inherently feminized and sexualized. This works to undermine a movement (that is comprised mostly of women) and repackage it for a patriarchal society. Instead of strong, political collective of women, we have yet another demographic of sexually available individual women who exist for male consumption.

Take a browse through vegan cookbooks on Amazon, for instance, and the theme of “sexy veganism” that emerges is unmistakable:

Oftentimes, veganism is presented as a means of achieving idealized body types. These books are mostly geared to a female audience, as society values women primarily as sexual resources for men and women have internalized these gender norms. Many of these books bank on the power of thin privilege, sizism, and stereotypes about female competition for male attention to shame women into purchasing.

To reach a male audience, authors have to draw on a notion of “authentic masculinity” to make a highly feminized concept palatable to a patriarchal society where all that is feminine is scorned. Some have referred to this trend as “heganism.” The idea is to protect male superiority by unnecessarily gendering veganism into veganism for girls and veganism for boys. For the boys, we have to appeal to “real” manhood.

Meat Is For Pussies (A How-to Guide for Dudes Who Want to Get Fit, Kick Ass and Take Names) appears to be out of print, but there are others:
Then there is the popular tactic of turning women into consumable objects in the exact same way that meat industries do. Animal rights groups recruit “lettuce ladies” or “cabbage chicks” dressed as vegetables to interact with the public. PETA routinely has nude women pose in and among vegetables to convey the idea that women are sexy food. Vegan pinup sites and strip joints also feed into this notion. Essentially, it is the co-optation and erosion of a women’s movement. Instead of empowering women on behalf of animals, these approaches disempower women on behalf of men.

In sum, vegan feminism argues that women and non-human animals are commodified and sexualized objects offered up for the pleasurable consumption of those in power. In this way, both women and other animals are oppressed under capitalist patriarchy. When the vegan movement sexualizes and feminizes vegan food, or replicates the woman-as-food trope, it fails to acknowledge this important connection and ultimately serves to repackage potentially threatening feminist collective action in a way that is palatable to patriarchy.

Corey Lee Wrenn is a Council Member for the American Sociological Association’s Animals & Society section. This section facilitates improved sociological inquiry into issues concerning nonhuman animals and is currently seeking members. Membership is $5-$10; you must be a member of the ASA to join.

Cross-posted at the Vegan Feminist Network.
You might also like:

Marry Me, a Short Film by Michelle Lehman

(https://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2011/05/15/marry-me-a-short-film-by-michelle-lehman/)

Formula for a Successful American Movie

(https://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2011/12/29/formula-for-a-successful-american-movie/)
John Donne • 2 hours ago

Just as a personal aside, I am a man and have been vegan for just over a decade. My wife became a vegetarian and then a vegan after we met. But whenever people find out that we are vegans, it is always assumed that I became vegan because of my wife.

Anna • 2 hours ago

"This has the effect of delegitimizing, devaluing, and defanging veganism as a social movement."

If this is true, that's fantastic news! The means justify the ends sometimes after all. The sooner this misguided, extremist social movement cannibalizes itself, the better truthful and balanced views towards animal product consumption can be heard.

courtney • 3 hours ago

"This works to undermine a movement (that is comprised mostly of women) and repackage it for a patriarchal society."

I would also like to see some evidence supporting this claim.

You can certainly find instances of feminization of veganism, and the sexy vegan business is just about as frustrating as the sexy yoga business - the benefits are for everyone. But there has also been increasing attention paid to veganism as a high-performance diet for athletes rather than weight loss, which is encouraging.

I wouldn't classify Isa Chandra's first few cookbooks - Veganomicon and Vegan with a Vengeance - as conforming to female gender norms. Her Post Punk Kitchen is pretty radical. She does, however.
mention from time to time her lifelong struggles with weight as a diagnosed health issue, as well as the ability to make vegan food just as fat-laden as omnivorous varieties. So, I would grant her an exemption from this list.

zeep • 4 hours ago

"Vegan feminism"? The idea that women should be on some kind of restrictive and meagre diet seems pretty firmly part of the patriarchy to me.

The bitter irony anyway is that eating a diet of pure carbs leaves you anything but skinny.

Corey Lee Wrenn • zeep • 23 minutes ago

Due to the toxic nature of animal products, it is more accurate to find eating an animal based diet restrictive, meager, and patriarchal.

Ryan David • zeep • 2 hours ago

"The patriarchy" is not a valid explanatory concept in the social sciences. If it is taken seriously by people at this blog, they are exposing themselves as ideologues and not scholars.

zeep • Ryan David • an hour ago

I'm not a scholar or an ideologue, and haven't "exposed" myself as anything. Jeez. I'm pointing out an inconsistency in the argument that veganism can somehow posit itself as against the patriarchy. No opinion on either veganism or patriarchy necessary.

Jeff • 2 hours ago

One corollary to the feminization of veganism is the association of sports with meat consumption -- baseball viewing revolves around hot dogs, football is about wings, etc. At Nationals Park I could never count on more of a meal than french fries. But capitalism cuts both ways on this -- when I moved to Seattle I found to my delight that the Mariners' stadium sells local Field Roast veggie sausages alongside regular hot dogs and brats. My veggie dinner there was delicious, but more than that I appreciated the recognition of vegetarians’ existence at baseball games, and giving us a chance to be part of a classic American sports experience just like the meat-eating fans. If that came about due to the vendors wanting more profit and targeting an underserved consumer niche, well, I'm fine with that.

Corey Lee Wrenn • Jeff • 23 minutes ago

If you are interested in this topic, someone recently published an article on this correlation! About meat, vegetarianism, and football culture...sorry the title escapes me now.

Meghan • 4 hours ago

I'm surprised to hear you say veganism is made up of mostly women. That is not my experience anecdotally. I'd love to see that statistic.
I agree about the problems with PETA's use of the male gaze as an activism tool but would point you to vegan resources like the Thrive Diet and VeganBodybuilder. I think if you looked at ANY set of cookbooks they would be catered mostly to women, not just vegan cookbooks.

Corey Lee Wrenn  ➦ Meghan  •  24 minutes ago

80% of animal rights activists are female, I think vegans in general are a tad bit more gender balanced than that, however.