



M(e)a(t)sculinity

Investigating Veg(etari)an Men's Understandings of Masculinity

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Abstract

Using focus group methods, this project examines six men's experiences of becoming vegetarian and the unique interaction between two identities commonly assumed to be in conflict: vegetarianism and masculinity. Included in this report is an overview of the contemporary debates in gender theory, with specific attention paid to men and masculinity. Seen through the lens of poststructural gender theory and the notion of multiple masculinities, this report demonstrates how vegetarian men challenge, negotiate and assert themselves as men both within the dominant culture and within their own vegetarian communities. This project bridges two existing bodies of work - poststructural gender theory and critical animal studies - to bring a more nuanced and better-articulated critique of gender to existing studies of the relationship between meat and masculinity and to offer this examination of meat consumption and gender performance as an illustration of the valuable applications of poststructural gender theory within critical animal studies.

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Introduction

Starting Here

Someone once told me that good social science research should “start where you are” and so, with that in mind, when I set out to conduct research for the completion of my master’s thesis, I decided upon a topic that was important and relevant to my own life experiences as a young, vegetarian male, living in North America. Likewise, this also seemed to be the most logical and important starting point for writing this thesis.

Examining my experiences and the social phenomena that appeared most saliently within them, it became clear that the relationship between meat and masculinity was a topic which, beyond being personally interesting, presented an opportunity to examine gender construction in a unique way. This project employed focus groups methods to examine the lived experiences of vegetarian men in an effort to build upon a body of feminist literature that examines the relationship between meat and masculine gender performances.

Besides providing the basis for my interest in studying vegetarian men, it is important to disclose my position in relation to the research topic upfront; to dispel any notion that this is a detached, “objective” research project that seeks to simply report on an interesting social phenomenon. To the contrary, this is an explicitly “critical” project that takes a particular political position on both gendered and sexual oppression and the oppression of animals in modern industrial and postindustrial societies. My research begins from the expectation that my readers understand both the intense suffering of non-human animals and the importance of thinking, writing and working toward their emancipation. In later sections, I will address - from various theoretical perspectives - how these understandings intersect with my particular research

questions. For now, it is vital to explain how I arrived at the decision to study this particular social phenomenon.

Unpacking Gender and Becoming Vegetarian

I was first introduced to my understanding of gender as a social construction during my undergraduate degree. I researched and wrote about gender as a set of beliefs and practices that define who or what men and women are. I was first introduced to the notion of “sex/gender roles”: rigid, dichotomous classifications of what women and men ought to be. While I valued the work done by feminist social constructionists and queer theorists to study women and women’s oppression under the binaries of role theory, I was particularly drawn to the work of Men’s Studies authors such as Michael Kimmel, Michael Messner and Raewyn Connell. These pro-feminist authors spoke to me (as a man) more directly and encouraged me to think about patriarchy and systems of gendered oppression as victimizing both women *and* men by setting up impossibly narrow and rigid definitions for how we ought to be - and imposing swift penalties for deviance. In addition, these authors helped me to expand my models for understanding gender to include a multitude of different, relative and interactive gender performances. Although some might argue that the oppression of men within gendered landscapes pales in comparison to that of women or LGBTQQIA (lesbian, gay, trans, queer, questioning, intersexed and asexual) persons, it might be more accurate to say that while men possess enormous privilege over women and LGBTQQIA persons, they also suffer costs (anxieties, stresses, crises) to maintain their gender dominance. While the oppression of “straight” men is different from that of women or LGBTQQIA persons, it is nevertheless interrelated; gender liberation requires that they be addressed in tandem. Still, because it is the

topic with which I most identified and, because of my social standpoint, the topic on which I feel I have the most authority to speak (or write, as it were), I chose to focus both in my undergraduate work and in this thesis project on men and masculinity.

Having never really fit in as a “real man” (an experience that I later learned was common due to the impossibility of achieving the cultural standards of masculinity), I was intrigued by Connell’s (2005) discussion of multiple, fluid and competing masculinities; I could see how at different times, in different contexts, and amongst different male peer groups, my experiences as a man could be variously classified along Connell’s (2005) continuum as exemplifying “subordinated”, “complicit”, “marginalized” or even “hegemonic” masculinities. Although Connell (2005) did not coin the term, she is credited with advancing the near-ubiquitous concept “hegemonic masculinity”: a culturally- and historically-specific set of “masculine” traits stressing competitiveness, aggression, stoicism and dominance of which boys and men are taught to aspire. In many ways, “hegemonically” masculine traits mirror the male “sex/gender roles” previously explored by psychologists and sociobiologists (see chapter: “Competing Explanations”, below). By putting hegemonic masculinity within the context of multiple, competing masculinities, Connell’s theory for understanding masculinity (discussed in further detail in the following chapter) was especially useful for making sense of my own place within male peer groups, illuminating the interactions I had with both men and women, and putting in perspective my role in the oppression of women and others under patriarchy. As a result, I set about to change my own behaviour and attitudes, to dismantle (as much as possible) my assumptions about what it means to be a “man”, and to assist in creating safe spaces for non hegemonically masculine men, women and others.

At the same time, during my undergraduate coursework, I was also learning about the treatment of non-human animals within our various relationships with them. Whether it was as food, clothing, entertainment or companions - again and again, I was challenged to face the reality of how our relationships with animals affected not just them (through routinized commodification, enslavement and murder) but reflected back upon us (environmentally, economically and morally) as well. I thought about and gave serious consideration to the rational, logical and ethical arguments of animal rights theorists such as Peter Singer and Tom Regan. However, it was through reading the appeals of writers such as Bob Torres, Patrick Hossay and Vandana Shiva, who talked about the commodification of nature (which includes animals and animal bodies) and the environmental and political-economic destruction that the “animal industrial complex” (Noske 1997) wreaked that I was finally convinced to become vegetarian. While I could feign ignorance or ambivalence about the interests of non-human animals, I could not idly ignore the effects of animal agriculture on humans and the environment.

Although I was already not regarded among my male peers as being especially “masculine,” in a hegemonic sense at the time, becoming vegetarian (and later vegan) allowed me to experience the social consequences of visually and, in some circumstances, actively (while eating in public) transgressing the gendered expectations of what or who a “real man” is - after all, “real men” eat meat, not salad; they are hunters, not foragers; and they are aggressive and bloodthirsty, not compassionate, least of all toward animals. I was tenaciously challenged by my male peers, who attempted to convince me that becoming vegan was a mistake; that it was frivolous and/or that animals did not ethically matter. I heard comments, disguised as concerns, that it would lower my testosterone, make me sick and/or weak. Most disparaging of all,

however, were my experiences of being “gay-baited” (Kimmel and Mahler 2003) or ridiculed with homophobic claims that somehow my being vegan was connected to being non-heterosexual. This offended me - not because I was afraid of being regarded as non-heterosexual but because of the set of assumptions that lay beneath it: that vegetarianism is “womanly,” that compassionate men are lesser, and that homosexuality was something to be feared or repudiated. These experiences made me aware of the complex and multifaceted relationship between masculine gender performances, homophobia, sexism and animal exploitation and convinced me that it was a phenomena worth examining in more detail.

It is worth noting at this point that my experiences of becoming vegetarian are nevertheless couched in privilege. As a White, able-bodied, middle-class, mostly gender-conforming human male with visibly heterosexual relationships, I have not experienced the same level of oppression as a queer-identified man, or a non-White man - to say nothing of the relative oppression of women and, worst of all, non-human animals. Due to the constraints posed by graduate work, however, I will be focusing exclusively here on the experiences of White, able-bodied, straight, vegetarian men - the group which I know the most about, and, in my view, best demonstrates the ways in which privilege (over women and animals) and subordination (to other, more “masculine” men) work. Becoming vegetarian is interpreted as a challenge to the system of gender privilege that legitimates men’s dominance over “inferior” men, women and animals.

This project, therefore, is my attempt to “start where I am” and understand the complex interactions between animal exploitation - principally, because of its ubiquitousness, through the act of eating animal flesh - and masculine gender performances. In particular, I am interested in

answering some of the questions that I was forced to come to terms with as I navigated the conflicting expectations of masculinity and vegetarianism¹.

On Critical Approaches to Sociology

As stated above, this project is informed by critical methodologies and theories - it is imperative, then, to explain why this is an important thread in my research. According to Steven Beuchler, “critical sociology begins with a value commitment to create and use knowledge to promote emancipation” (2008:326). It is useful to unpack what is meant by a “critical sociology”; not simply because this is the tradition in which I am writing, but because - since their humble beginnings and still today - social scientists have had to contend with charges of bias and subjectivity, as though these were intrinsically detrimental to the value of their research. Critical sociology directly meets and counters these charges.

Discussions about the importance of pursuing a truly critical sociology have persisted for many decades. Robert S. Lynd, writing in 1939, entreats us to bridge the gap between “scholars and technicians” (1) - or what we might today call academics and activists - by making value-based decisions about what is researched, about what social problems need solutions, and about who our research will benefit. As he states:

There would be no social sciences if there were not complexities in living in culture that call for solution. And it is precisely the role of the social sciences to be troublesome, to disconcert the habitual arrangements by which we manage to live along, and to demonstrate the possibility of change in more adequate directions. (Lynd 1939:181)

¹ It should be noted that the word “vegetarian” is used as an umbrella term throughout this project to describe the experiences of both vegetarians and vegans. Although there can sometimes be a wide margin of difference between the two identities within radical/activist communities, the marginalization and stigma of both identities in relationship to the dominant meat-eating culture can be quite similar and, for this reason, they have been collapsed as simply “vegetarian”.

Lynd condemns scholars who make claims of objectivity or withhold value-laden critique, stating that by doing so “he [sic] is staying his hand at the point when the culture is most in need of his help” (Ibid 185). While he concedes that doing “troublesome” research will no doubt invite claims of bias, he provides a useful metaphor to illustrate the importance of making valued decisions in social science research, stating: “the stubborn fact remains that we sail inevitably into the future ... and drifting is more dangerous than choosing the course that our best intelligence dictates” (Ibid 186).

Lynd’s concerns are echoed by Howard S. Becker, whose 1966 presidential address at the annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems, titled “Whose Side Are We On?” begs us to consider just that. He “argue[s] that [objectivity in research] is not possible and, therefore, that the question is not whether we should take sides, since we inevitably will, but rather whose side we are on” (Becker 1967:239). Becker points out that studying an oppressed group is likely to elicit sympathy from the researcher and therefore invite accusations of researcher bias. He recommends that while social researchers should point out to their readers when they have only studied the problem from the perspective of one affected group, they should nevertheless attempt to be fair, logical, systematic and to keep their conclusions from overstepping that which is immediately obvious from the findings. He writes that in the long-term, such one-sided studies will be produced by many researchers from multiple different perspectives of a particular social problem, expanding our whole understanding. In the meantime, he recommends that:

We take sides as our personal and political commitments dictate, use our theoretical and technical resources to avoid the distortions that might introduce into our work, limit our conclusions carefully, recognize the hierarchy of credibility for what it is and field as best we can the accusations and doubts that will surely be our fate. (Ibid, 247)

This “hierarchy of credibility” holds that social actors near the top of socioeconomic hierarchies are assumed to have the highest degree of credibility, and those near the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy are assumed to have the least. While journalists, politicians and celebrities are often able to escape charges of bias (because they often represent the socioeconomic elite), many social researchers (because they publicize the voices of underprivileged or marginalized groups) ally themselves with those persons who are regarded as having little credibility and therefore expose themselves to charges of bias. Becker is thus realistic about the extent to which social researchers can separate their research from their “personal and political commitments” (Ibid), and while he recommends a plan for pursuing social research that is nevertheless informed by scientific procedures, he recognizes that this will not protect researchers from accusations of bias.

Joe Feagin’s 2001 presidential address to the American Sociological Association demonstrates that these debates have persisted over time. His address sets out an agenda for sociology which might well be regarded as a programmatic plan for carrying out the appeals of both Becker, and Lynd, before him. He entreats social scientists to return to a commitment to social justice, to continue a countersystem approach to social research - not just in terms of critiquing the status quo, but in suggesting alternatives, as well, to be reflexive and self-critical about biases and values and, to focus on large, complex sociological problems (Feagin 2001).

This research project is informed by Feagin’s agenda: it is committed to promoting animal rights and social justice along gendered lines, it is critical of both the destructive practices of meat-eating (as well as other forms of animal use) and hegemonic constructions of masculinity, it promotes vegetarianism and compassionate masculinities as countersystem

alternatives, it is self-reflexive in that it incorporates and challenges my own experiences of becoming vegetarian and it seeks to answer complex sociological questions about animal exploitation and the nature of gendered divisions in vegetarian communities. I have shared my experiences, disclosed my biases and stated outright that I am on the side of the oppressed - as all social researchers committed to the goal of liberation and social justice ought to be.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Because of the uniquely intersectional nature of this proposed research project, it is necessary to provide two separate but interrelated theoretical framings: both an exploration of different models for understanding gender, generally, and masculinity, specifically; and an overview of existing literature linking gender with social constructions of meat and meat consumption. In addition, in order to adequately carry out an intersectional approach to studying vegetarian men, it is necessary to first merge two bodies of relevant theoretical literature: ecofeminism and poststructural feminism. The former, ecofeminism, has concerned itself with meat-eating as a practice which physically destroys and consumes the environment and most predominately female animals - because of their ability to produce milk and eggs (see Dunayer in Adams and Donovan 1995) - while symbolically consuming women and non-heteronormative men. The latter, poststructural feminism, critically examines gender practice as a social construction and performance - where gendered power relations are reproduced through interactions between individuals and groups of individuals (Butler 1990). Therefore, this project takes a poststructural and ecofeminist approach to the problem of negotiating and reconciling two identities that appear to be in conflict (at least according to dominant constructions): masculinity and vegetarianism.

Poststructuralism: Setting the Stage

Recent literature which examines the relationship between meat and masculinity does a fantastic job of highlighting social constructionist notions of sex, gender and sexuality (Sobal 2005; Potts and Parry 2010; Parry 2010; Buerkle 2009; Rogers 2008), drawing on such pivotal

“Men’s Studies” writers as Michael Kimmel, Michael Messner and Raewyn Connell. Much of this literature, in turn, draws upon the philosophical and theoretical legacies of poststructuralism and queer theory and, principally, on the forerunners of this body of thought: Michel Foucault (1984) - who theorized broadly on the concepts of power and power relations - and Judith Butler (1990) - who applied this more specifically to the deconstruction of gender practice. These two pioneering theorists provided much of the philosophical foundations for an expansive school of thought known as “queer theory” - a theory of sex, gender and sexuality that argues that these concepts are fluid, ever-changing, socially constructed and contextual. Queer theorists (especially Butler) identify gender as a “performative” practice - a (sometimes unconscious) production and reproduction of gendered “discourses” being performed with and on the body.

According to Foucault (1984), various social institutions (academic or medical disciplines, organized religion, etc.) produce supposed “Truths” about social reality. Namely, in this case, taken-for-granted, “common sense”, dominant (and hence hegemonic) ideas about gender and sexuality take the form of fixed, strictly-defined, mutually-exclusive and dualistic categories (male/female, masculine/feminine, straight/gay). Foucault calls these Truths “discourses” or “discursive constructions” and argues that, contrary to the “grand narratives” of previous social theories (Marxism, second-wave feminism), power is not always held and wielded, but instead – and more often – (re)produced relationally through discourses acting on and through individuals and groups. In this sense, Foucault argues that individuals become what he calls “docile bodies” for the performance and relational (re)production of discourses and, hence, power relations. In a sense, all of us become active participants in the oppression of ourselves and others.

Butler (1990), focusing on gender, calls these discourses “regimes of (gendered) intelligibility”. The discursive constructions of “intelligible” gender practice create boundaries for what is deemed to be acceptable within the realm of possible gendered expressions. Persons who do not conform to or (re)produce these discursive regimes through their own “docile bodies” thus become “unintelligible” and are subjected to policing and (sometimes violent) retaliation. In this context, intersexed, queer, two-spirited and trans people (to name a few), instead of demonstrating the arbitrary and constructed nature of fixed sex, gender and sexual categories are rendered “unintelligible” - thought of as outside of the boundaries of accepted, normalized discourses. As Butler (2001), Kessler (1998) and Hird (2003) point out: intersexed individuals, “unintelligible” bodies and performances are reconfigured (often surgically) to conform to the existing discourses - despite (or perhaps because of) the ways in which these “unintelligible” bodies expose the constructedness of these discourses.

It is, therefore, necessary to examine, in a basic way, how poststructural theories of gender came about and how they fit into the debates on gender acquisition - to not only better comprehend how my interest in and analysis of the data collected by this research project is laid out in this report, but also to understand how modern Western masculinities are perceived (by some) to be under threat (indeed, in “crisis”) and in need of defense. The creation of poststructural theories of masculinity, however, are, in many ways, a response to the existing theories of the time (Brittan 1989). In the following sections, drawing upon various Men’s Studies authors and others, I sketch out a variety of competing theories of sex and gender identity - particularly masculine gender identities - and put these different ideas in conversation with each other. In doing so, I demonstrate why my project draws so heavily upon Connell’s

(2005) model of multiple, hierarchical masculinities and highlight why I rely on the language of poststructuralism vis-a-vis gender “discourses”, “performances” of masculinity and “regimes of (gendered) intelligibility” (Foucault 1987; Butler 1990) throughout my project.

The Dominant View: Binaries of Sex/Gender/Sexuality

It is important, at the outset, to distinguish among sex, gender and sexuality as conceptual frames of reference and demonstrate the wide margin of difference between the dominant, binary view, on the one hand, and poststructural feminist / queer perspectives on the other.

According to the dominant, North American view - based heavily in pop cultural interpretations of medical, biological and psychological sciences - “sex” refers to the biological and physiological differences between people and is typically organized around two supposedly dichotomous and mutually-exclusive sex categories: males and females. Also within this view, “gender” refers to the attitudes, behaviours and ways of conducting oneself that are typically mapped directly onto sex differences to create psychological and (as we shall see) social gender “identities”. These gendered identities are commonly thought to be split dualistically between “masculinity” and “femininity” with the former associated with the male sex and the latter with the female. “Sexuality”, finally, refers to the specific sexual desires of individuals for certain bodies and/or gendered identities. Although heterosexuality (desire for the “opposite” sex and gender) has generally been presented as the only “natural” or viable option, increasingly, *tolerance* for “same-sex” relationships has begun to spread throughout the modern Western world. According to the dominant model, biological differences between males and females determine the gendered identities of men and women and create the sexual desire between

physiological opposites (West and Zimmerman 1987). Each of these three frames of reference has been strongly critiqued by poststructuralist feminists and queer theorists for their adherence to rigid, dichotomous categories and the ways in which gender and sexuality are taken for granted as a natural consequence of sex differences.

Taking biology as the starting point, a number of poststructural feminists, including Kessler (1998), Hird (2003) and Fausto-Sterling (2000), argue that binary sex categories are not as neatly organized as popular medical and biological sciences would have us believe. Instead, humans are sometimes born with ambiguous chromosomal and genital variations. According to Hird (2003), between one to two percent (1-2%) of live births in the United States each year exhibit some chromosomal and/or genital “abnormalities”, and a good portion of those are not easily classifiable as possessing either male or female genitalia. This “present[s] a profound challenge to those cultures dependent on a two-gender system” (Hird 2003, 1068). Because gender is commonly mapped onto sex differences, “intersexed” persons interrupt and challenge the notion of mutually-exclusive, dualistic frameworks for both sex categories and, as a consequence, dominant gender constructions.

Many transgendered (a category that often includes intersexed people) and even transsexual people likewise challenge the dominant, dualistic frameworks of sex (male/female) and gender (masculinity/femininity), while at the same time complicating the “nature versus nurture” debate (examined below). By reconfiguring either their gendered identities, their bodies, or both, trans people subvert the “normal” configurations of sex and gender and expose the degree to which these categories are exclusionary and (largely) socially constructed. It is important, however, to note that recent trans literature critiques the social sciences for offering

exactly this constructionist analysis. Indeed, many transsexual people, including Serano (2007) and several interviewees in Namaste (2011) object to being employed or used by social constructionists to argue that gender categories are entirely socially constructed. Their own documented experiences recount what Serano (2007) refers to as a “intrinsic inclination” - a psychological and, arguably, biological compulsion to transition from one sex/gender (their “assigned sex”) to another, “opposite” sex/gender (their “subconscious sex”). In both cases, however, transgendered people (including binary-conforming transsexual people) do more to undermine the biological assumptions made by the dominant notions of sex and gender than they do to support them. Certain transgendered people, including genderqueer and/or bigendered people, do in fact directly and consciously challenge the notion of dichotomous gendered categories, demonstrating their constructedness and supplanting them, instead, with an infinite number of possible gendered identities and performances (Butler 1990). Indeed, even transsexual people (who, according to Serano, are the least likely to endorse a social constructionist perspective) demonstrate the degree to which sex and gender are nevertheless fluid concepts; their transition between the two is a physical manifestation of exactly that fluidity (Fausto-Sterling 2000)².

Queer theory likewise presents its own sets of challenges to the dualistic paradigm of sexuality. Instead of the either/or binary of heterosexuality and homosexuality, queer theory reconceptualizes sexual desire as existing on a continuum (Sullivan 2004). Rather than having a singular, identifiable and static sexual preference, people may move along a continuum of desire

² Trans literature demonstrates, as well, that the rich and varied experiences of trans people cannot be easily collapsed into a single viewpoint or perspective on contemporary gender debates. I have tried to be attendant to this point (and to take note of my own “blind spots” in regards to examining trans people from outside) and will return and delve further into this literature for additional insights into the nature/nurture disciplinary divide in the following section.

throughout different periods in their lives and in different contexts. According to queer theory, sexual preference is fluid, changing and multiple; it is every bit as varied as gender identities themselves.

While it is typical for there to be a large gap between popular, dominant assumptions and critical theory on a variety of topics (e.g. politics, economics, history), the troubling aspect of this difference in thinking about sex, gender and sexuality is not simply the fact that the taken-for-granted assumptions marginalize and hence oppress people who do not fit within the rigid frames of the assumed categories, but that these dominant understandings are justified and reinforced by certain aspects of particular scientific and academic disciplines. In the following section, I examine the ways in which biological and social sciences differ and conflict on the topic of gender.

Disciplinary Differences

As with most social matrices (e.g. race, sex, class), models for understanding gender (and specifically masculinity) are myriad. Competing explanations from different disciplines struggle against one another in what might be simplified (and greatly so) as a debate between “nature” (biological determinism, essentialism) on the one hand, and “nurture” (socialization, psychoanalytic development) on the other. Throughout much of the Nineteenth Century, biology, evolutionary psychology and sociobiology dominated these debates (Kimmel 2011). Spurred by Darwinism and the simultaneous development of rudimentary psychology and sociology, many so-called “social Darwinists” or sociobiologists took the emerging explanations of gendered difference being offered by the “natural” sciences as indisputable fact and, moreover, justification for gendered inequality (Kimmel 2011). For nearly a century, the measurable

physiological/biological differences between males and females were offered as causal evidence that gender inequalities were naturally determined. The social sciences, on the other hand, have tended to question these so-called causal connections between physiology and gender inequality, arguing that although male and female bodies are different (and indeed they are), this does not adequately explain or justify women's oppression under patriarchy. Michael Kimmel concludes a lengthy discussion of these debates thusly:

Biological research holds significant sway over our thinking about the two fundamental questions in the study of gender: the differences between women and men and the gendered inequalities that are evident in our social lives. But from the perspective of a social scientist, the biologists may have it backward. Innate gender differences do not automatically produce the obvious social, political, and economic inequalities we observe in contemporary society. In fact, the reverse seems to be true: Gender inequality, over time, ossifies into observable differences in behaviors, attitudes, and traits. (2011, 55)

Indeed, the idealized male "sex role" and "hegemonic masculinity" itself (both of which are examined below) appear to be much more a product of social reproduction and the effects of consecutive generations of male privilege than they are a natural consequence of innate, biological and physiological differences.

Writing as a social scientist, I concern myself mostly with the social and social-psychological explanations of gendered social difference and inequality. Specifically, I am interested in examining the construction, maintenance and performance of hegemonic and other forms of masculinity through a poststructural lens. While biology and, more specifically, *bodies* certainly play a part in determining gendered social differences, they do not necessarily *cause* gendered inequalities and definitely cannot be presented as the sole determinant of differing gender identities. The issue is not whether gender is based on (or referent to) physical differences between males and females (indeed, it often is), but the way in which assumptions

about gender identities are made according to biological or physiological categorizations and, even more importantly, the relative value ascribed to those gendered differences. Serano (2007) argues:

The major problem with the binary gender system is not that it is a binary (as most physical sex characteristics and gender inclinations appear to be bimodal in nature) but rather that it facilitates the naive and oppressive belief that women and men are “opposites” ... the idea that women and men are “opposite” sexes automatically creates assumptions and stereotypes that are differently applied to each sex... (104)

Furthermore, if we consider the wide variety of gendered identities, sexualities and different ways of “doing” (West & Zimmerman 1987) or “performing” (Butler 1990) gender - just amongst men - we see that “the differences *between* women and men are not nearly as great as are the differences *among* women or *among* men” (Kimmel 2011, 4, emphasis added).

Competing Explanations, (De)Constructing Masculinity

In this section, I will explore competing sociological and psychological theories of masculinity, using Brittan’s (1989) “Masculinity and Power” as a guide for this discussion. While I focus mostly on social scientific models for understanding masculinity and ultimately settle on Connell’s (2000, 2005) poststructural theory of multiple, competing masculinities, I nevertheless situate the various explanations within the interdisciplinary debates from which they have emerged. Gender and - specifically, for my purposes, masculinity - is a hotly contested conceptual problem and one that will probably never be conclusively “solved”. As I will continue to demonstrate, attempts to pin down or explain gender expression in such concrete ways only frustrates struggles for social justice and sexual/gendered emancipation (which, although nebulous and conflicted, remains nevertheless the goal of all critical feminist thought).

Writing over 20 years ago, Brittan identifies three competing emphases in the study of masculine gender identities which he names “the socialization case”, “the masculine crisis theory” and “the reality construction model” (1989, 19). Although the language of these three proposed categorizations is less common in modern historiographies of theories of masculinity (see Connell 1987, Kimmel 2011), I would argue that, at their core, the debates remain more or less the same. Indeed, even the relatively recent literature of trans people and theorists is nonetheless couched within (and in conversation with) these models of understanding. Although there are efforts to bridge the gap, the study of sex, gender and sexual identity remains stretched across a disciplinary chasm.

The Socialization Case

The first of the three bodies of theory analyzed in this section is influenced heavily by proponents of the “nurture” side of the gender debate. Despite the name, the socialization case is, in fact, heavily influenced by psychologists. The socialization case posits that, at birth, children are assigned to a sex category (male/female) according to their biological differences, raised within an established gender division (of labour and everything else) and inculcated with gendered expectations about how boys and girls, men and women ought to act (Brittan 1989; Kimmel 2011). To proponents of the socialization case, these expectations are commonly called gender or sex “roles” (Brittan 1989, 19-20). The fact that gender and sex are commonly substituted for one another in this literature (according to Brittan) is telling of the scant attention paid to the difference between the two concepts. Connell’s (2005) model of western “hegemonic masculinity” is based on the attitudes and behaviours that make up the “male sex role” as it is defined by socialization theorists.

It is important to note that, in contrast to socialization theories, for Connell, “hegemonic” masculinity is culturally and historically specific. Globalization and the export of American-style capitalism has led to an increasing homogenization of cultures, including an increasing homogenization of models for masculinity (Connell 2005). Even still, according to Connell (2005), ideas about which particular version of masculinity is the most highly-prized or valued still nevertheless changes according to differences in geography, culture, race and class. The majority of research in the area of “sex roles” has examined only the hegemonic configuration of masculinity specific to modern “American” (White, middle-class, Christian) culture and, in many cases, has attempted to generalize or universalize this data as a “naturally” occurring paradigm of “male” behaviour.

According to David and Brannon (1976), “traditional”, American masculinity - which, in this case, is taken for granted as the “male sex role” - can be described by four phrases or mantras: “no sissy stuff” (repudiate femininity and emasculation, stigmatize homosexuality); “be a big wheel” (accumulate wealth, success, power and status; compete, especially with other men); “be a sturdy oak” (avoid emotions and vulnerability; remain calm and stoic in the face of adversity) and “give ‘em hell” (act aggressively and take risks). Levant et al. (1992) similarly summarize “hegemonic masculinity” according to seven principles: restricting emotions, avoiding being feminine, focusing on toughness and aggression, being self-reliant, making achievement a top priority, being non-relational or independent, objectifying sex, and being homophobic. For the celebrated sociologist and dramaturgical theorist Erving Goffman, “there is only one complete, unblushing male” in America:

A young, married, white, urban, northern heterosexual, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports. Every American male tends to look out upon

the world from this perspective... Any male who fails to qualify in any one of these ways is likely to view himself ... as unworthy, incomplete and inferior. (in Kimmel, 1994)

Goffman's last point is precisely the consequence of the popular adherence to the socialization case. According to socialization theorists, men raised in a culture that praises and idealizes the "male sex role" (as they define it) learn to self-attribute masculine gender identities according to the expectations set out for them by socialization agents: parents, teachers, friends, employers and so on tell men that - first of all - they are a type of human being narrowly classified as a "man" and - second of all - "men" ought to act in a particular "masculine" manner (Brittan 1989, 20-21). Men who are incapable of living up to these expectations are, under the sex role paradigm, considered inadequate or, simply, failures.

In many ways, the cultural authority that imbues psychology, as a "natural" science, has given rise to such ideas about masculine gender identity and provided a pathway to reifying a particular configuration of hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, one interpretation of Pleck (1982) demonstrates that in trying to define masculinity and distill it down to a generalizable list of principles or attributes, psychology has in fact played a role in "constructing" or concretizing a particular version of masculinity.

Brittan (1989) agrees: while the sex role paradigm does a good job of defining a *particular* "hegemonic" masculine identity, it fails to properly articulate the full spectrum of variability that is introduced by different individuals, groups, and cultures. Brittan takes issue with the psychological argument that "[sex] roles are added to biology to give us gender" (Ibid, 21) and argues that the entire process "come[s] very close to completely encapsulating gender and sexuality in social strait-jackets" (Ibid). Brittan states that three major assumptions,

explained below, underpin the socialization thesis and argues that these assumptions render it narrow and restrictive to the point of near obsolescence.

First, the gender socialization theory assumes that gender attribution or the socialization of gender occurs always and exclusively within childhood. Children are represented as malleable and impressionable, completely dominated by the socializing influence of parents, institutions and others. At some juncture, the child matures into an adult and begins to self-attribute their gender identity to themselves. In essence, the socialization case assumes that adults have stopped learning sex roles altogether; they are merely a part of the socializing agencies, responsible for reproducing the gender order for the following generation. While this may indeed be true of specific individuals or even groups of individuals at one particular time or another, this is very clearly not the case, in general. If we examine the general tendency toward an increasing fluidity of gendered expression and a blurring of gendered boundaries (in modern North American culture, at least), we see that men and women are constantly renegotiating and reevaluating what it means to be gendered subjects. Shifts in culture, technology, economics and politics change our social realities and interact dynamically with men and women's sense of what constitutes "masculine" and "feminine" activities, behaviours, attitudes and codes of dress - for better or worse.

Secondly, the socialization theory assumes that there is a very clear gender division (of labour and of nearly everything) that structures children's socialization as either boys or girls. The child's placement into one of these two categorical groups of supposedly dualistic gendered realities - which are themselves constituted by the supposedly dualistic physiological differences between males and females - is not as simple or clear-cut as some proponents of the socialization

case would have us believe. As I have demonstrated above, many intersexed newborns simply do not fit the binary biological sex categories of male or female. They cannot, therefore, be assigned the “applicable” gender identity, or socialized according to any definitive “role”. In much the same way, the very existence of some transgendered people (as well as some transgendered, bigendered, or genderqueer individuals, themselves) challenge fixed gender divisions; demonstrating the constructedness of these categories.

Finally, in failing to abstract gender and sex away from one another, the socialization case either ignores and marginalizes LGBTQQIA identities as “deviance” or else attributes it entirely to improper socialization. Instead of taking issue with the unfeasibility of the sex roles themselves, the issue, for socialization theorists, is the degree to which men and women fail to meet the expectations placed on them. Writing in 1982, Pleck (who, according to Connell, would later abandon the male sex role identity model entirely) criticized psychologists heavily for employing the “male sex role identity paradigm” in studies of men and masculinity. This method for defining and evaluating the “nature” of men is, in his view, complicit in moulding boys and men according to the often-negative characteristics of the male sex role (homophobia, misogyny, dominance, etc.) as it is laid out above. In his attempts to reform his discipline, Pleck (1982) argued that psychologists ought to focus on the extent to which boys and men are strained by the expectations themselves; entreating fellow psychologists to adopt his “sex role strain paradigm” and to problematize the construction of masculinity itself (much of which they had a hand in defining, and hence “constructing” in the first place). The male sex role identity paradigm, however, despite being challenged and refuted by both social scientists and even some psychologists, remains pervasive - both amongst psychologists obsessed with pathologizing

“gender dysphoria” and amongst a transphobic, heterosexist popular culture. Pleck’s (1982) “role strain” paradigm - examined in the next section - did, however, impact on some psychologists, who were eager to explain the causes of such profound masculine gender anxieties.

The Masculine Crisis Theory

In contrast to the socialization thesis, the masculine crisis theory takes a psychoanalytical approach to explaining men’s gender “crisis”, or what Pleck (1982) refers to (more accurately) as a “gender role strain”. According to Brittan (1989), the “masculine crisis theory is founded on the observation that both men and women deviate from the master gender stereotypes of their society” (25). On the surface, this observation appears accurate; however, the way some psychologists and other adherents of the psychoanalytical theory explain the supposed “crisis” that this deviation causes (for men especially) is very troubling. The basic argument focuses on the father/son relationship, arguing that as industrialization forces fathers out of the home or local community for work, the son is stripped of his interactions with his primary male role model. As a result, according to crisis theorists, the son is reared almost exclusively by his mother (demonstrating the heterosexist assumptions underpinning the argument), who is supposedly incapable of painting an accurate picture of an attainable masculine identity for her son. As a result, boys begin to develop “improper” gender identities, which, for many crisis theorists, troublingly includes things like sentimentality, empathy and homosexuality - the antithesis of the “male sex role” identified above. While many crisis theorists, including clinical psychiatrist Anthony Clare (2001) and Christian minister (and author of “Healing Homosexuality”) Leanne Payne (1995) are content to lay blame either on industrialization or the

rise of feminism (and deindustrialization, too, for increasing the role of women in the workforce), Beynon (2002) points out that the notion of a supposed “crisis” in masculinity predates even these social and economic upheavals, arguing that crisis is in fact inherent in the construction of masculinity itself. Whatever the supposed origin, masculine crisis theories - which, according to Brittan (1989) flourished in the immediate aftermath of the civil rights and feminist movements of the 1960’s - are commonly constructed around a complex amalgam of psychoanalytic theory (including the Oedipus complex), sex role attribution (or socialization) and “cognitive approaches to gender acquisition” (Brittan 1989, 28). For the most part, the masculine crisis is explained as a breakdown or failure on the part of boys to resolve their Oedipal complexes. Brittan compares the “achievement of men who somehow have successfully negotiated the pitfalls of inappropriate gender identifications” to “the runners in an obstacle race” (1989, 27):

Before modernization and industrialization, the path and obstacles to manhood were well defined and understood, but this is no longer the case. The old certainties about the male sex role, the fragmentation of social life and consciousness means that the old rules are no longer of much use because they are continuously rewritten and reinterpreted ... (Ibid)

The masculine crisis theory places its emphasis on finding a psychoanalytic solution to the supposed problem of the Oedipal complex. To do so, according to Freud - and, confusingly, many psychologists to this day - boys must break their Oedipal fixations on their mothers by internalizing their fathers’ threats of castration (Brittan 1989, 29). Without the father present, however, the fixation continues into adulthood, which creates the “masculine crisis” - as men are “feminized” by their continuing relationships with their mothers.

There are, of course, obvious issues with the masculine crisis theory. First of all, the crisis theory mythologizes an ahistorical yesteryear of unambiguous male sex roles, without

providing any evidence that boys and men in these periods possessed a healthier “male psyche” - or a sense of themselves as men (Pleck 1982; Brittan 1989). Indeed, the phenomenon of absent fathers is hardly unique to this particular time period. In addition to the fact that men’s role in reproduction is minimal (they have the ability to impregnate women and simply leave), war, famine and economic hardships (hallmarks of every human civilization) have, always and everywhere, separated some groups of fathers from their sons. The entire argument - that boys supposedly mature into confused, misguided men because they lack male role models - assumes that fathers are both necessary and, in fact, paramount to boys’ successful psychological development. However, as Brittan (1989), citing Pleck, points out, there is very little verifiable evidence to suggest this is the case. Boys raised predominately or exclusively by women develop just as healthily as their counterparts.

Secondly, the “masculine crises” theory still relies on the pseudoscience of Freudian psychoanalytic theory to explain men’s gender anxieties. According to the masculine crisis hypothesis, successful gender development occurs through the resolution of the Oedipal complex. The assumption that this is necessary for proper development creates two separate but equally troubling logical consequences. Firstly, the “sex role” model of masculinity identified above is again taken as an acceptable and, in fact, “natural” ideal for boys and men to live up to. Fathers’ supposed anxieties about their sons’ attractions to their mothers and the looming threat of castration stands in for many of the negative traits of the male sex role identified above, such as dominance, possessiveness, and violence or the threat thereof. Conversely, the sons’ “fixations” on their mothers must be severed - a literal repudiation of everything they have until that point associated with femininity. Boys who are able to successfully “resolve” the Oedipal

complex are said to be properly navigating the “obstacle course,” to use Brittan’s analogy, of gender development. The second consequence, therefore, is that this model of development is reified as both natural and therefore preferable to some gender-equitable alternative. It is taken for granted that this is how men ought to develop - by repudiating and devaluing women and femininity and living in perpetual fear and anxiety of other men.

Finally, the masculine crisis theory implicitly blames women for their own oppression under patriarchy. Taken to its logical conclusion: if changes in political and economic life have led to women predominately or exclusively raising boys - who later become the patriarchal oppressors of women - then women are responsible for their own subordination. As Brittan (1989) says, for the crisis theorists, “it is she who reproduces the gender system, and it is she who is the creator of an insecure male gender identity” (31).

Seen through the lens of anti-oppression and critical theory, the “crisis” appears, instead, as a gradual stripping away of male privilege and the replacement of rigid, dichotomous sex roles with fluid, more equitable gender relations. The changing landscapes of economics, (increasing female participation in the workplace, affirmative action, wage and work equality) politics (suffrage, women’s and LGBTQQIA liberation movements) and domestic life (women increasingly demanding equal participation from men in domestic chores) have only very slightly begun to close the gender inequality gap - and even then, almost exclusively within industrial and post-industrialized states. Still, as this gap is slowly closed, men are left with the difficult task of continuing to justify their privilege, which has, for too long, been a hallmark of hegemonic masculinity. As Brittan puts it:

By giving such a heavy emphasis to psychology, the analysis of masculinity moves away from consideration of the social relations of patriarchy by focusing on the subjective experience of men who cannot function properly in the modern world. So men fight war, engage in the most ferocious competition, play games, rape and live their lives pornographically because they no longer know how to cope with their desires. To be sure, they did all these things in the past, but this was always in the context of an identity which they supposedly experienced as possessing an enduring reality (1989, 28)

A telling example of the degree to which some men feel threatened by the changing gender landscape can be seen in the so-called “mythopoetic men’s movement”. As a reaction to second wave feminism and the perceived “crisis in masculinity” that it supposedly accelerated, the mythopoetic men’s movement (and the so-called “Men’s Rights Movement”), spurred by “Jungian” (Freud's apprentice) author Robert Bly (*Iron John: A Book About Men*, 1990) has sprung up throughout Canada and the United States. The immense popularity of Bly’s book and the movement it represents - which, unsurprisingly also attracts right-wing Christian fundamentalist groups such as the Promise Keepers - speaks to both the immense gender anxieties men experience and the failure of psychological approaches to gender (despite their pervasive cultural authority) to properly address men’s changing realities.

Both the socialization case and the masculine crisis theories rely heavily upon the idea that gender is something that is done to us as children. In the former, gender is socialized into us according to the most readily-identifiable primary sex organs or genitalia at birth. There is no account for deviation in this model. In the latter, gender is a psychological process of identifying with and hence learning from the sex roles of parents. Deviance from sex roles is explained as a strain caused by changes to the social fabric of our modern civilizations. In both cases, the models present us with binary, dualistic and static ideas about sex differences and gender identities. Boys and girls / men and women are treated as discrete, mutually exclusive categories which are overlaid onto a perceived discrete sex division. According to these models, gender is

learned and imprinted on us from a young age; “things are done to [us] by parents and other socialization agencies, and that once done, nothing can reverse or subvert what is done” (Brittan 1989, 34).

There is, however, a progressive movement - at least in the social sciences - away from the static, categorical definitions of how, precisely, gender is perpetuated and experienced by groups of people toward a more nuanced and interpretive framework for understanding how individuals themselves perpetually redefine and renegotiate gender. Following the trends set by the development of social research on other oppressive matrices, long-outdated theories of sex and gender that relied on essentialism or biological determinism - such as the “sex role” theories popularized by early psychologists - have gradually been replaced by social-constructionist and poststructural theories of sex, gender and sexuality (Brittan 1989; Pleck 1982; Connell 2000; Connell 2005) which value and place importance on individuals, social relations, subjectivity and agency - at least within critical social theory. Using Brittan’s language, we might say that these theories make up the “reality construction model” (1989, 36-41).

The “Reality Construction Model” and Poststructuralism

The reality construction model does away with the idea that gender is something *done to us* as children, replacing it instead with the idea that gender is something that *we ourselves do* - everyday and in every interaction (Brittan 1989, 36-37). According to the reality construction model, we are “doing gender” constantly; we embody a “performance” of gender that is produced and reproduced through our exhibition of gendered behaviours, codes of dress and interactions with others (West & Zimmerman 1987; Butler 1990). While there is a great deal of knowledge about “proper” ways of being gendered that is imparted to us by agents of

socialization (including institutions and discourses of intelligible gender performances) - especially in our youth - the fact remains that we, as individuals, are capable of interpreting these “proper” ways of “doing” gender and acting on our own - whether that means to affirm them and conform or to instead resist. “Gender”, in this sense, “is not static - it is always subject to redefinition and renegotiation” (Brittan 1990, 37).

Much of the research that led to the creation of this body of theory comes from so-called “marginal cases” - or those who do not fit into the proscribed “normal” categories of sex, gender or sexuality (Brittan 1989, 37). For certain individuals who identify themselves with a non-dominant gender, sexual identity or sexual preference, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered/trans-sexual, queer, questioning, intersex or asexual (LGBTQQA) people, resistance to these norms is a way of life. Incapable or unsatisfied with fitting into the rigid dichotomies of sex and gender, many LGBTQQIA individuals create their own ways of expressing their gendered and sexual lives. It is from the observations gleaned from examining these non-dominant ways of “doing” gender that the reality construction model (or, more simply, social constructionism) comes about. For example, Kessler and McKenna write:

It is easier for us to see that transsexuals ‘do’ (accomplish) gender than it is to see this process in nontranssexuals. The transsexuals’ construction of gender is self-conscious. They make obvious what nontranssexuals do ‘naturally’ (1978, 114).

Kessler and McKenna - perhaps because of the age in which they were writing and the relatively fewer accounts of trans people available to them - erroneously use the example of “transsexual” people to illustrate their point. The argument (when properly applied to the example of certain transgendered people), however, remains compelling; even if it is not representative of the full spectrum of trans experiences (particularly transsexual or “stealth” trans people). This does not

denote that doing gender comes “naturally” to what Kessler and McKenna (erroneously) call “nontranssexuals” - quite the contrary. As Brittan puts it:

Even though we take our own gender identities for granted, even though we naturalize sexual differences by giving them the status of facts, we are nevertheless always in the business of putting together our sense of gender [...] immutable reality is an accomplishment which, like all other human accomplishments, is tentative (1989, 38).

We might call men and women who identify their gendered lives according to the dominant norms associated with their primary sex organs “gender-normative” or, to use a term that gets beyond the framework of the dualism between normative and non-normative: “cissexual” (Serano 2007). The lives of some transgendered individuals (as well as other LGBTQQIA individuals) make apparent the performance and negotiation of gender through interaction and interpersonal relations. They demonstrate that this act of “doing” gender is ubiquitous and unending. Cissexual people may be less conscious of the fact that they - like LGBTQQIA people - are constantly renegotiating and reproducing gender; they, too, are “doing” gender constantly.

In recent years, a surge in trans literature - both from trans authors themselves and studies of trans people which forefront their voices - has complicated reality construction perspectives somewhat (Serano 2007; Namaste 2011). Serano (2007), whose work has been touched on above, points out that social constructionist perspectives, while attempting to provide avenues for gendered emancipation (by deconstructing sex/gender dualisms), may in fact be ignoring or - worse - silencing certain trans people. In addition, she argues that, in attempting to deconstruct sex and gender dualisms, poststructural theorists create a new nature/nurture intellectual dualism within the field of gender studies. Serano (2007) and others (Namaste 2011) are every bit as critical of biological determinist and Freudian psychoanalytic theories of gender

as Men's Studies authors (Bittan 1989; Connell 2005; Kimmel 2011), however, they argue that many sociological (including social constructionist) explanations of gender collapse the wide variety of trans experiences into one, homogenous model; which is then used - or, bluntly, exploited - to make the case for a purely social constructionist account of gender³. Serano (2007) provides her own anecdotal experiences (which she assures readers are typical or at least representative of many other trans experiences) of transitioning along the male-to-female "spectrum" to demonstrate the way in which sex hormones affected her gendered life. She states that taking estrogen made her more empathetic and emotional, more likely to cry, improved her sense of smell (especially increasing her appreciation of flowers) and reduced her sex drive (Serano 2007, 67-71). In addition, Serano offers accounts of trans men whose experiences are reciprocal: "they almost universally describe an increase in their sex drives ... male-type orgasms ... a decrease in their sense of smell and more difficulty crying and discerning their emotions" (2007, 72). Serano is careful, however, to point out that a large degree of difference exists between individual accounts of hormone treatments and argues that these differences mirror the gendered differences between cissexual people (2007, 73). Serano argues that both biology and socialization are at work in the creation of a dualistic model of gender. She writes:

it seems to me to be more accurate to say that in many cases socialization acts to exaggerate biological gender differences that already exist. In other words, it coaxes those of us who are exception (e.g., men who cry often or women with high sex drives) to hide or curb those tendencies, rather than simply falling where we may on the spectrum of gender diversity. By attempting to play down or erase the existence of such exceptions, socialization distorts biological gender difference to create the impression that essential differences exist between women and men. Thus, the primary role of socialization is not to produce gender difference, de novo, but to create the illusion that female and male are mutually exclusive, "opposite" sexes (2007, 74)

³ Indeed, there are times within this very report where I might be accused of doing the same.

This thesis attempts to keep the voices of Serano (2007) and other trans(sexual) men and women (Namaste 2011) in mind, however, I am not so quick to dismiss social constructionist and poststructuralist perspectives on gender as Serano seems to be, offering: “poststructuralists simply deconstruct [transsexuals] into nonexistence” (2007, 155). Instead, I believe that poststructural accounts can explain a great deal about sex and gender and, in fact, can provide invaluable insight into the lives of certain transgendered people - specifically bigendered and genderqueer people. Finally, I would argue that poststructural and social constructionist theories of gender offer the best opportunity for gendered emancipation. Indeed, Serano herself admits that socialization “creates the illusion that female and male are mutually exclusive, ‘opposite’ sexes” (2007, 74), so it stands to reason that this would be the best place to begin the process of deconstructing a system that excludes the “exceptions” - including many trans people, women and men.

While social constructionism might at first appear to supplant the socialization theories and masculine crisis theories of gender acquisition, it in fact serves to better illuminate and cast a more realistic lens upon these differing ways of explaining gendered practice. For instance, while the socialization theories see gender as a completely learned practice that is enforced upon children, many social constructionist theories point out that even the process of being socialized as a boy or girl is an opportunity for gendered negotiations to occur. While parents and other agents of socialization may attempt to teach a coherent gendered identity to boys or girls according to their perceived sex differences, children, too, make their own contributions to their understanding of themselves as gendered persons. The traits that are stressed by socializing agents may be incomprehensible or distasteful to the individual child, who rejects, resists or

replaces them with his or her own preferred ways of “doing” gender. “Tomboys” (girls who play with and dress like boys) are just one example of this.

With regards to the “masculine crisis”, reality construction theories have a different - and perhaps better - way of explaining “gender strain”, as well. Instead of the anxieties or “strain” being created by a child or adult’s inability to meet idealized gender expectations, social constructionist theories of gender suggest that the strain is created by the very idea of an idealized gender practice itself; the categories themselves are the problem. Indeed, for LGBTQQIA persons, sexual and gender identity and/or gender practice is and always has been strained (at least within the recent history of Western civilizations). For cissexual, heterosexual men, however, this experience is fairly new. For the most part, heterosexual men do not have to negotiate or self-consciously construct their gender because they “tend to function within contexts where heterosexuality is taken for granted. It is only when they are confronted with the unexpected that they have to put a lot of effort into their gender commitments” (Brittan 1989, 40).

Furthermore, even when they do interact with people who have different and alternative gender identities, they do not usually suddenly accept the idea that gender is an accomplishment; they may feel uncomfortable or hostile, but they do not immediately change their [taken-for-granted, determinist and dualistic perspectives on gender/sex] (Ibid 40-41).

However, cissexual and heterosexual men are increasingly forced to do what Brittan calls “identity work” as the increasing visibility and tolerance of individuals identified as LGBTQQIA exposes the tentativeness of their gender identities. Coupled with women’s struggles for equality, the perceived “crisis” in masculinity may simply be the manifestation of men’s struggles to justify the continued reproduction and maintenance of a gender hierarchy that

privileges “hegemonic” forms of masculinity at the expense of absolutely everyone else - including, as Rogers (2008) points out (below), animals and the environment.

Multiple Masculinities

While many writers, including Kimmel (1987) and Brittan (1989) had already begun applying social constructionist theories to the study of men and masculinity, Connell’s “Masculinities” - first printed in 1995 - remains the most frequently-cited text in this area of study - and for good reason. Connell’s book widely expanded the then-burgeoning field of Men’s Studies (and what she calls the “Men’s Liberation” movement). According to Sobal (2005), Connell (2005) replaced the essentialist, “singular masculinity” analyses of “sex role” theories and dualistic social constructionism (where one set of male traits is proposed as the singular dominant ideal) with the relativist, “multiple masculinity” analysis informed by more fluid social constructionist and poststructuralist accounts of gender performance (where a multitude of different ways of being or “doing” masculinity coexist at once).

Multiple masculinity models, like the poststructural critiques of a unified femininity or essential “Womanhood” (Butler 1990, Haraway 1985), propose that the wide range of social and political “intersections” under which masculinity operates fundamentally alters the ways in which individuals experience their own masculine identity or ways of understanding themselves as “men”. Race, class, ethnicity, geography all impact on gendered expectations, creating a wide variety of gendered experiences for different groups of men. Unfortunately, this recognition of multiple masculinities can easily be “collapsed” into what Connell calls “a character typology” (2005, 76) of masculine identities. Along with the recognition of multiple masculinities (working-class *as well as* upper-class, rural *as well as* urban, vegetarian *as well as*

meat-eating) comes a risk of a different type of “oversimplification” (Ibid). It is tempting and perhaps too easy to begin characterizing these different masculine identities as separate, essentialist microcosms unto themselves, that there is just *one* working-class masculinity, *one* vegetarian masculinity. To the contrary, many different working-class masculinities exist and within those frames of reference, individuals will always complicate matters further. For, as Connell points out, there are “gay black men and effeminate factory hands, not to mention middle-class rapists and cross-dressing bourgeois” (Ibid).

Connell’s model for multiple masculinities, then, draws heavily on poststructural ideas about gender being renegotiated and reproduced relationally through individuals performing gender themselves. Although individuals are heavily influenced by various institutions and institutional discourses they are constantly engaged in the construction and (re)production of power relations amongst and between different men and groups of men. Masculinity is not a single continuum of gendered existences, a constant and fleeting quest to attain or achieve “maleness”; instead, it is an evolving, relational practice of performance and maintenance. Following Butler (1990) and other poststructural feminists (Haraway 1985; Fausto-Sterling 2000), Connell is especially attendant to the idea of placing bodies back into gender theory. Indeed, all of the construction and (re)production of gender practice is performed through and with physical bodies; there can be no subjective experience of gender without individuals’ embodied experiences. She is critical of social constructionism, which “had the odd effect of disembodiment sex” (2005, 51). She writes,

Social constructionist approaches to gender and sexuality ... provide an almost complete antithesis to sociobiology. Rather than social arrangements being the effects of the body-machine, the body is a field on which social determination runs riot. (Connell 2005, 50)

Bodies are an inescapable and therefore important aspect of gendered practices. Bodies are simultaneously located, on the one hand, as much more than a biological determinant of gender dimorphism (as essentialists and sex role theorists would argue) and yet, on the other, as far more than a blank slate on which gender is imprinted (as socialization theorists and some social constructionists would argue). Bodies “age, get sick, enjoy, engender, give birth” (Connell 2005, 51): they are both the landscape on which gender is performed and the viewpoint from which gendered lives are lived. The challenge for poststructuralist writers (a category in which I include Connell) is to be realistic about the embodiment of gender (the extent to which gender refers to differently-sexed bodies) without letting sociobiological assumptions about anatomical destiny sneak back into social theory. So, while a general pattern of bodily difference casts two recognizable sex categories (male/female), the breadth of genetic and hence physiological possibilities is not reducible to *only* two categories. Likewise, while the general physiological configurations of men’s and women’s bodies necessarily limits - or, at the very least creates barriers for - certain gendered practices, these boundaries are almost never insurmountable. The cases of intersexed and trans people demonstrate this clearly. The fact remains, however, that “the physical sense of maleness and femaleness is central to the cultural interpretation of gender” (Connell 2005, 52). Masculinity is referent to male bodies; it includes, but is not limited to “a certain feel to the skin, certain muscular shapes and tensions, certain postures and ways of moving, certain possibilities in sex” (Ibid, 52-53). This does not preclude non-male persons from performing masculinity, of course, but it creates barriers for which particular masculine performances are available.

Connell treats the singular masculinity model, exemplified by psychoanalytical and sociobiological descriptions of the “male sex role” as just one particular instantiation of “hegemonic masculinity”. Goffman’s “unblushing male in America” represents just one particular hegemonic ideal. Connell states that “hegemonic masculinity” represents:

[t]he current configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (2005:77).

While a multitude of masculine performances exist, “hegemonic” masculinity emerges as the most highly valued expression of what popular discourses (often exercised by the media) and gender regimes of intelligibility hold to be constitutive of ‘being a man’ within the culturally- and historically-specific context. In this sense, the adoption of the Gramscian term, “hegemony” is apt, as these discourses represent the taken-for-granted, common sense ideal of masculine performances. Which particular masculine ideal is considered “hegemonic” is constantly in flux. As the foundations of patriarchal domination change (through economic or political shifts), an opportunity is created for a new hegemony to emerge in its place. Connell (2005) demonstrates that men are relationally-defined according to their ability (or lack thereof) to perform masculinity according to dominant ideas of “manhood” and/or “manliness” within their specific historical and geographical context. Additionally, men’s intersectional identities and gender performances may place them in any one of a variety of different characterizations of multiple masculinities. In order for the multiple masculinity model to remain “dynamic” (Connell 2005, 76), different masculine performances must be examined in terms of the gender relations between performances. Through such an examination, it becomes clear that different masculinities occupy “subordinate”; “marginalized” or “complicit” positions (explained below), when defined in relation to a specific hegemonic ideal.

The performance of hegemonic masculinity is structured predominantly around the repudiation of femininity; as with all dualisms, the two concepts are constructed in opposition to one another - with a manufactured or constructed mutual exclusivity. Thus the successful performance of masculinity is not as much about 'being a man' as it is about 'not being a woman' (Kimmel 1994). A successful performance of hegemonic masculinity involves the subordination and oppression of both women and all things considered feminine. Gay men are also included in this repudiation, since their sexual preferences and stereotypical gender performances are associated with femininity. Connell (2005) explains that gay men embody a "subordinate" masculinity, which is hierarchically organized as the antithesis of the hegemonic ideal.

Subordinate masculinities, Connell explains, are used to define what is specifically not masculine or what is at odds with the hegemonic ideal. Because hegemonic masculinity is used to legitimize the domination of women, conflating other subordinate men with women or gender regimes of femininity becomes an especially potent process for simultaneously deriding some groups of men while, at the same time, propping up the dominant one. This is an example of how power is (re)produced relationally amongst men. Connell (2005) uses the example of gay men to explain this point; because most gay men are perceived (narrowly) by popular, Western culture as not performing masculinity properly or as being feminine, they are cast as the "other" against which dominant masculinities are compared and, ultimately, reinforced.

This boundary between dominant masculinity and subordinate masculinity is policed through taunting, teasing, name-calling and, sometimes, violent abuse and death (Kimmel 1994; Connell 2005). As Kimmel and Mahler (2003) point out, "shy, bookish, honor students, artistic,

musical, theatrical, nonathletic, geekish, or weird” boys are subordinated for failing to adequately perform hegemonic masculinity (1445). As Kimmel (1994) has written elsewhere, men embody gender regimes within what he calls “homosocial communities of manhood” – men perform their masculinity in the company of – and for the benefit of – other men, against whom they are measured and compared. Kimmel and Mahler (2003) write that homophobia “is far less about the irrational fears of gay people, or the fears that one might actually be gay or have gay tendencies, and more the fears that heterosexuals have that others might (mis)perceive them as gay” (1445). Homophobia, “gay baiting”, insults and abuse become methods for actively policing the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity, while the fear of being perceived as gay (and thus rendered unintelligible within the homosocial communities of manhood) becomes a form of self-policing. Kimmel and Mahler put it succinctly:

[A]s an organizing principle of masculinity, homophobia—the terror that others will see one as gay, as a failed man—underlies a significant amount of men’s behavior, including their relationships with other men, women, and violence. One could say that homophobia is the hate that makes men straight (2003:1445).

“Complicit” masculinities are those masculinities which are defined as not being particularly hegemonic, but which nevertheless benefit from a “patriarchal dividend” (Connell 2005, 79): an advantage or privilege that is gained from the overall domination of women, subordinated and marginalized masculinities. Masculinities that are constructed in such a way as to realize the patriarchal dividend without having to face the risks of accountability or resistance from the oppressed majority are hence “complicit” in the patriarchal power structure. Connell notes that social theory must convene ways of theorizing about the masses and, in terms of numbers, the greatest majority of men fall into this complicit power relationship with hegemonic masculinity. These men are intimately connected with hegemonic masculinity by way of the benefits they reap from patriarchy (hiring preference, higher wages, political representation,

etcetera) and yet do not perform hegemonic masculinity themselves. Complicit masculinities take on all forms, but, in relation to the hegemonic ideal explored throughout this section of the paper - in the context of mainstream North American society - we might say that White, heterosexual, working- and middle-class masculinities are likely to fit this role. Despite the fact that many of these men are compassionate, respectful and kind they may, nevertheless, find it difficult to understand the demands of those struggling against the patriarchal power structures of hegemonic masculinity:

A great many men who draw the patriarchal dividend also respect their wives and mothers, are never violent towards women, do their accustomed share of the house work, bring home the family wage, and can easily convince themselves that feminists must be bra-burning extremists (Connell 2005, 79-80)

Finally, Connell (2005) discusses marginalized masculinities, masculinities that may follow the same patterns of hierarchy, dominance and control as hegemonic masculinities, but are nevertheless set aside or ostracized from the dominant homosocial community. This marginalization is usually organized around race or class; physical or material differences which prohibit certain men from being inducted into the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant (privileged) group. She writes:

Marginalization is always relative to the authorization of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group. Thus, in the United States, particular black athletes may be exemplars for hegemonic masculinity. But the fame and wealth of individual stars has no trickle-down effect; it does not yield social authority to black men generally (Connell 2005: 80-81)

As a response to those who critiqued the original publication of “Masculinities” for imposing its own rigid categories of men, she notes that these categorizations of “hegemonic” and “marginalized” masculinities are not fixed, unchanging character types that men embody or achieve, but current configurations of gender practice that are steeped in their own historic and cultural realities. Men, as individuals, can move throughout these categories just as the categories themselves can be altered or changed (Connell 2005: 81). This is not to say that the

fluidity of masculine gender expressions makes it simple or easy for individual men to move between multiple gendered identities, nor that historical and cultural shifts are rapid. Indeed, this very project examines the consequences for men who attempt to shift from one masculine identity (one in which meat consumption is revered and celebrated) to another (in which meat eating is both avoided and morally opposed) and should be seen in the larger context of a shift in popular ideas about what constitutes being a man.

It should be noted that individual men may embody a great number of different masculine identities, which position them differently among the relational hierarchies of gendered power relations. They may shift among “hegemonic”, “subordinate”, “complicit” and “marginalized” many times throughout the course of their lives or even in the same day. Although certain factors such as race, class and physiology are unlikely to change overnight (unless one travels - changing the geographical context in which their gender is being performed), men’s positions relative to other men and women can be altered radically through even seemingly minute dynamic changes. For instance, a man who holds a particularly esteemed job position or office embodies a certain type of masculinity while at work - a “managerial masculinity” perhaps. Outside of the employment relationship, however, this masculine identity ceases to have any influence. If he is fired or demoted, the power relations between him and his formerly-inferior staff will undoubtedly be altered - his previously hegemonic “managerial” masculinity might well change to a subordinated “stay-at-home father” masculinity or an “unemployed” masculinity. Likewise, men’s simultaneous embodiment of multiple masculinities is unlikely to be visible or to even maintain importance always and in every instance. Men who embody both a complicit working-class masculinity and a subordinated homosexual masculinity are unlikely to have the latter impact their social standing significantly (beyond the inner,

psychological stress that comes from being “in the closet”) unless they are “out” about their sexual preferences. The upshot of this, of course, is that men who embody a predominately subordinated or marginalized masculinity may engage in the same oppressive policing of others or take up important markers of a hegemonic performance in order to gain access to a higher hierarchal position in the relational power structure. Behaviours such as gay baiting, verbal and physical abuse and attitudes such as racism and machismo become important routes of access for otherwise non-hegemonic men to find themselves on the power end of a relationship between competing masculinities. Again we see that oppressing others becomes a particularly important tool in accessing and propping up hegemonic masculinity.

Women, LGBTQQIA people and other non-hegemonic men (including but not limited to racialized men) are not the only persons subordinated or marginalized by hegemonic masculinity; nonhuman animals are often used as props in the performance of masculinity - principally (due to its ubiquitousness and celebration in male-dominated spheres) through the consumption of their flesh. The following section analyses the ways in which meat is prefigured as a key component in the performance of hegemonic masculinity, how meat is employed as a symbol for male dominance and how meat eating becomes an especially important point of conflict between vegetarian and non-vegetarian masculinities.

Meat and Masculinity

The connections between meat and masculinity on a theoretical level extend from the most obvious and directly symbolic relationship between the exploitation and conquest of nature (Fiddes 1991) to the more abstracted and nuanced relationships between the dichotomization of masculinity/femininity and meat/vegetables (Adams 1994). I focus here on the theories offered

by Nick Fiddes and Carol Adams, which have remained the most authoritative accounts of the relationship between meat and masculinity - and provide justification for my inclusion of the poststructural theories of gender, explored above. It is my hope that this thesis report bridges two bodies of work - poststructural gender studies and Critical Animal Studies - to bring a more nuanced and better-articulated critique of gender to existing studies of the relationship between meat and masculinity and to offer this examination of meat consumption and gender performance as an illustration of the valuable applications of poststructural gender theory.

Nick Fiddes' (1991) book, *Meat: A Natural Symbol* theorizes that meat is used as a symbol for the human control of nature and that men's consumption of meat (and the celebration thereof) stands in for the gendered domination of nature by men. In his view, "domination of the natural world, as represented in the meat system, antecedes sexual domination, providing both a model and a metaphor for men's control" (Ibid, 161). Fiddes stresses that as human populations move into urban settings and divorce themselves from nature, we (men especially) turn to meat consumption as a method for demonstrating our domination of nature - a key aspect of the successful performance of hegemonic masculinity. In doing so, we (re)produce the value placed on violence, domination and selfishness, subsuming these under an idealized "meat-eating" masculinity.

A social anthropologist, Fiddes posits one possible explanation for the centrality of meat within masculine discourses, writing:

The answer to my initial question—"why do we value animal flesh so highly, in spite of the consequences for the creatures involved?"—has, in effect, been that we do not esteem meat *in spite* of the domination of sentient beings. Rather, excepting the qualms that we may (individually) feel when faced with our responsibility for a living animal's death, we (as a society) esteem meat so highly partly *because* of that power. It is not that we each consciously exult in our mastery of nature whenever we bite into a piece of flesh, but we are brought up

within a culture which has regarded environmental conquest as a laudable goal, and which has deployed meat as a primary means to demonstrate it (Fiddes 1991: 228).

The power that is imbued within meat and meat consumption is necessarily related to the performance of hegemonic masculinity, which is itself an expression of power, domination and control - a point that Fiddes himself acknowledges in a chapter titled “The Joy of Sex”. In it, he contrasts men and women, animal and human, civilization and wilderness according to the “nature-culture dichotomy” examined elsewhere by Birke (1986). He shows how, according to this dichotomy, “women are equated with nature and with animals; men [by contrast] are powerful, human and civilized” (Fiddes 1991: 153). The typical table, which is employed by Birke (1986), as well as by both Fiddes and Adams looks something like this:

men	women
culture	nature
civilization	wilderness
meat	vegetables

This basic table might extend quite far and include many other hierarchical dualisms theorized by other ecofeminist authors, however, this small table is sufficient to demonstrate the relationship and highlight the specific dualisms at issue in this project.

Our relationship with meat, however, is complex and paradoxical. Meat is presented, on the one hand, as a symbol of men’s domination and conquest of nature; men are hunters, farmers, trappers and fishers - they exploit the natural world to achieve their own ends. Yet, meat has increasingly become a highly-systematized convenience food; the application of scientific management techniques as well as the ever-expanding technological apparatus of modern

industrial farming means that fewer meat consumers interact with animals - the product (meat) is increasingly “fetishized”, to use a Marxist term, commodified into sealed packages, bereft of any “referent” evidence of the animal it once constituted (Adams 2003; Torres 2007).

Although Fiddes attempts to demythologize the “man-the-hunter/woman-the-gatherer” paradigm using anthropological and historical evidence, at the same time, he seems to indicate the existence of an essential “Manhood” that is mapped directly onto the subject of “Men”. This essential “Man” is assumed to need to eat animal flesh as a way of reconnecting with an ahistorical masculinity, steeped in the killing and dominating of nonhuman animals. Although Fiddes refutes popular arguments surrounding the value of hunting and the necessity of meat consumption for our (human) evolutionary success, he nevertheless relies upon the example of “Man the hunter” as a tool for explaining gendered attitudes about meat eating (Fiddes 1991:145-151). Although Fiddes critiques the specific relationship between meat and masculinity, he stops short of critiquing the concept of an essentialized “masculinity” in general and instead leads readers toward the sex role theories that dominate popular ideas about gender.

Fiddes’ theory, then, is useful as a starting point for understanding the cultural connections between meat and masculinity but does not offer an adequate framework for understanding masculinity as a social construction. Fiddes provides an exceptional exploration of the ways in which meat consumption is used as a tool in the performance of what Connell (2005, 2000) might call “hegemonic” masculinity, but fails to piece apart how masculinity is socially constructed. He does not critically analyze what it means to be a man, nor how different groups of men utilize meat-eating as a tool for representing themselves as men. Indeed, a reading of Fiddes’ book provides no indication that different individual men or groups of men interact

with meat in different ways. Instead of viewing masculinity as a landscape of multiple fluid and changing categories of different masculinities, Fiddes reifies the hegemonic ideal by virtue of excluding other possibilities. Fiddes does a good job of critiquing and explaining how dualistic thinking creates associations between meat and masculinity (as opposed to vegetables and femininity), but, in the final analysis, (re)produces a dualism between men/masculinity and women/femininity - an uncritical position all too common in “sex role” theories of gender.

Likewise, Adams’ (1994; 2003) perspectives on meat and masculinity come from the dualistic second wave notion of sex and gender (as socially-constructed yet fixed, mutually-exclusive categories) but her theories are nevertheless helpful to understanding the relationship between meat and masculinity. Indeed, the majority of relevant studies of meat and masculinity (Sobal 2005; Stibbe 2004; Buerkle 2009; Parry 2010; Potts and Parry 2010; Rogers 2008; Merriman 2010) reference Adams and her work on meat and masculinity heavily. As an early forerunner of this theoretical tradition, Adams’ (2003) notion of the “absent referent” is particularly useful. Here, she precedes Torres’ (2007) application of Marxist notions of commodity fetishism to the animal-industrial complex and adds a gender critique to it. She points out that both women and animals are oppressed in similar ways through a cycle of objectification, fragmentation and consumption (Adams 2003). This cycle works on both a metaphorical level - through the production of pornography (where women’s bodies are objectified, specific parts or fragments of their bodies sexualized, and then viewed or consumed by the male audience) and a literal level (where animals are treated as objects instead of living beings, are physically dismembered or fragmented and then eaten or literally consumed). The objectified, fragmented consumables (pornography and meat) are only vaguely referent of their

original subject-beings (women and animals), who are rendered absent through the process. Throughout her books, Adams offers numerous examples of advertisements, commercials and other cultural artifacts that demonstrate the overlap among language, attitudes and practices that oppress both women and animals, irrespectively of each other, and simultaneously.

Echoing Fiddes, Adams (1994) argues that meat occupies the top position in a hierarchy of foods, while plant-based foods are regarded as the lowest-value foods. Similarly, flesh foods are associated with masculinity and plant foods are associated with femininity. Adams (2003) explains this dualism drawing on the culture-nature dichotomy employed by Birke (1986) - using the categories of “A” (masculine) and “Not A” (feminine), where femininity is aligned with plants, nature, empathy and emotionality, and masculinity with meat, domination of nature, rationality and reason (2003). Adams (1994, 36-38) demonstrates the interesting relationship between meat and masculinity by observing that in times of war or famine, meat foods are generally reserved for men; food is rationed and women are expected to either go without or go hungry to feed male soldiers, workers, husbands and sons. She provides a particularly insightful example, explaining that for women, who remain the primary food preparers, failure to provide meat for dinner has been and is used as a justification for domestic violence (Adams 1994, 48). However, like Fiddes, Adams’ treatment of “Women” as a unified, essential and fixed category of persons mark her work as both problematic and seriously antiquated, given the preponderance of critical poststructural feminist critiques (Haraway 1985, Butler 1990). For this reason, while I am personally and academically indebted to Adams’ groundbreaking work, I have reworked her theoretical framing of gender with the poststructural alternatives outlined in the previous section.

Empirical Studies of Gendered Vegetarianism

This project is situated within a small but expanding body of literature that explores the relationship between meat consumption and the performance of masculinity. Much of this research is couched in what Connell calls the “‘ethnographic moment’ in masculinity research, in which the specific and local is in focus” (2005, 9). Indeed, this project itself can be seen as contributing to an expanding ethnography of vegetarians - specifically vegetarian men (Hirschler 2011; Merriman 2010; Potts and Parry 2010). Particularly useful empirical studies of the relationship between meat and masculinity include Sobal’s (2005) examination of the “foodlife” of married couples; Buerkle’s examination of the silencing of “metrosexual” masculinities in food advertising; Potts and Parry’s (2010) examination of internet news story comments on the phenomenon of so-called “vegansexuality”; Parry’s (2010) examination of masculine performances in popular cooking television programs; Rogers’ (2008) discourse analysis of television advertisements; and Stibbe’s (2004) discourse analysis of “Men’s Health” magazines.

Almost all of these studies use a social constructionist or poststructural model for explaining masculine gender practice and nearly all of the authors draw on Connell’s multiple masculinities model for making sense of the gendered relations between “hegemonic masculinities” and the various masculine identities that conflict or struggle against them, including vegetarian or vegan masculinities, environmentally-conscious masculinities, urban and metrosexual masculinities and even married masculinities. An exception, Sobal (2005) provides gender explanations from both “singular” (sex role) and “multiple” (Connell 2005) models of masculinity in his examination of intersections of meat consumption and marriage “foodlife”. The only study analyzed that actually endorses a male “sex role” model of masculinity is -

perhaps not surprisingly - a positivistic examination of attitudes *toward* vegetarian and vegan men and women conducted by two psychologists (Ruby & Hiene 2011). The study, which asked respondents to rate the attractiveness of people based on written descriptions of their behaviours (including diet) was based on a set of predefined, tautological assumptions about which adjectives corresponded to attractive traits of men (“rugged”, “virile”, etcetera) versus women. Also not surprisingly, Ruby & Hiene (2011) received more mainstream media coverage than any of the other studies examined. This suggests that psychology and psychoanalytic theories of sex and gender continue to have more cultural authority than sociological explanations of gender; compared with social constructionism and poststructuralism, sex role theory continues to hold a dominant position within popular gender discourses.

As a potential response to the cultural monopoly of sex role theories, many of the articles examined use critical discourse analysis methods to deconstruct and critique popular discourses of masculinity. Both Rogers (2008) and Buerkle (2009) focus on television advertisements, overlapping significantly in their discussion of Burger King’s “Manthem” - a parody of the women’s liberation movement ballad “I am Woman” by Helen Reddy. Rogers (2008) examines three advertisements (Del Taco’s “Feed the Beast”; Hummer’s “Tofu” and the aforementioned “Manthem”) using an ecofeminist and, based on his use of Connell’s model of multiple masculinities, poststructuralist lens to discuss the extent to which all three ads tap into a popular discourse of the “crisis” in masculinity. The “crisis” here is exemplified through a profound anxiety on the part of the men portrayed in the ads at the deterioration of a mythologized “primitive” masculinity by the feminizing influence of the environmental and animal rights movements. Rogers writes that:

These advertisements constitute environmentalism as a threat to hegemonic masculinity ... Nature is the “absent referent” (Adams 2003) while nature’s typical dualistic partner, the feminine, is re-articulated with civilization to become the most overt “enemy” named in the advertisements (2008, 282).

For Buerkle, in contrast, the threat is posed by “metrosexuality”, but the crisis is nevertheless the same - the legitimacy of the connection between hegemonic masculinity and meat consumption is under threat from the “feminizing” influences of - in this case - effeminate, well-groomed, health-conscious urban (read: civilized) men.

The ads, then, constitute a backlash against the women’s liberation movement, feminism and the environmental and animal rights movements - all of which are conflated with each other in the advertisers’ discursive construction of the threats facing men. In reality, this is an obfuscation of the real threats facing corporations that profit from the oppression and exploitation of women, the environment and animals. The advertisements deliberately play on the existing anxieties of men to represent the purchase of their products as an act of gendered revolution. Buerkle writes that, “Meat’s importance in masculine culture ultimately plays a role in a resurgence of *traditional* masculinity against metrosexual effeminization by re-asserting an innate link between males and animal flesh” (2009, 82, emphasis added). This re-assertion is readily apparent in the so-called “New Carnivore” movement examined by Parry (2011). According to Parry, popular television cooking shows have engaged in their own backlash against a growing tide of sentimentality and compassion for farmed animals; these shows “disparage farmed animals and emotional concern for farmed animals, belittling them as feminine; simultaneously, slaughter and meat-eating are presented as inherently masculine, and celebrated as such” (Parry 2010, 382)

The solution to this crisis is presented as the consumption of a particular product - either meat (especially beef) or some other consumable item that stands in for meat (the Hummer, for instance, “balances” out the fact that the driver is an environmentally-conscious tofu-eater). Meat consumption helps men reclaim or restore their supposedly-threatened masculinity by returning them to a state of primitive, “natural” masculinity. As opposed to women, who carefully navigate the social landscape of gender performance, men are presumed to be bestial, animalistic and primitive, motivated only by instincts. The “fortification” of this meat-eating performance is instrumental in maintaining the hegemonic dominance of heteromale men.

Men’s cognizance of their food choices and appearance - their gender performances - jeopardizes heteromale hegemony by questioning the presumption that “men are men” and have a natural right to their privilege ... Celebrating a retrograde masculinity eschews the suggestion that men have a gender rather than a sex, presupposing that they - unlike women - act merely on the intrinsic impulses of a “real man” rather than out of concern for social proscription. (Buerkle 2009, 90)

However, while the majority of women and metrosexual men may continue to eat meat (albeit in smaller quantities and typically not as the centerpiece of gastronomy and nutrition), a small but growing number of vegetarians (especially vegetarian men) constitute an even greater threat:

Vegetarianism, whether motivated by concerns over individual human health, environmental sustainability, or animal rights, is a threat to hegemonic masculinity. Eating meat not only metonymically manifests class privilege and male privilege, and is not only used to symbolize virility and primitive masculinity - its association with hunting and the outdoors, as well as the obvious (though generally hidden) domination of animals involved in its procurement or production, make the eating of meat a central symbol of human control over nature, of “power-over” and the “master identity” (Rogers 2008, 297).

Vegetarian *masculinities*, then, especially threaten to undermine the legitimacy of a hegemonic masculine performance that necessitates the domination of animals and the consumption of their flesh, by demonstrating a performance of masculinity that includes healthy, compassionate living without the domination and control of animals. Vegetarian masculinity challenges the notion that

“gender is something that is ‘done’, at least in part, by dominating non-human ‘others’ (Parry 2010, 393).

While some empirical research exists that documents the process of actually becoming vegetarian - notably, McDonald (2000), MacNair (2001) and, more recently, Merriman (2010) and Hirschler (2011) – to my knowledge, no existing studies examine, in detail, how both the process of becoming vegetarian and the social consequences of doing so are uniquely gendered. Merriman’s (2010) attempt to speak to these gendered differences in the process of becoming vegetarian is far from conclusive (a point he, himself, concedes). In addition, the data produced by his study are focused more around familial relationships than peers (even though both were queried). Merriman states that: “Counter to existing theory, parents and relatives regarded men’s vegetarianism as a healthful demonstration of self-command. For women, in contrast, vegetarianism is unhealthy [or assumed to be a sign of an eating disorder] and demonstrates an inability to manage the body.” (2010:424-425). Although his convenience sample of twenty-three class-privileged university students may have skewed Merriman’s findings, his conclusion – at least regarding this particular sample – nevertheless seems plausible. However, it says little about the peer networks of men - particularly those of vegetarian men.

My own experience of becoming vegetarian as well as the informal anecdotes of vegetarian peers, provides a different conclusion where non-vegetarian, homosocial male peer groups are concerned. Vegetarianism, rather than being viewed by non-vegetarian men as “a healthful demonstration of self-command” (Ibid), is more often dismissed or met with animosity. It is these data - the experiences of vegetarian men living within homosocial communities with non-vegetarians - that I was most interested in collecting and examining; because, as Kimmel

(1994) and other notable Men's Studies authors point out, the "homosocial communities of manhood" where men evaluate themselves and each other's performances of hegemonic masculinity are so integral to the experience of being a man. Additionally, this project examines the homosocial communities of vegetarian men and attempts to understand how masculinity is performed both within and outside of vegetarian communities.

Contributions

As stated above, this project is situated at an intersection of two interrelated fields of study - Critical Animal Studies and poststructural gender studies (specifically, pro-feminist men's studies). This project adds to an ongoing effort amongst some feminists to place importance upon thinking about animals and our relationships with them. While the well-documented relationship between socially constructed meanings about meat and masculinity has been taken up by a number of feminist authors over the last three decades, few have collected data specifically from the perspective of vegetarian men. Putting emphasis upon men's perspectives offers an alternative view of the relationship between meat and masculinities and helps to further develop this area of study in a small, but significant way. My hope is that this project may speak more directly to an audience of men and appeal to them to take both gendered inequality (and their role in perpetuating it) and animal interests more seriously.

When I began this thesis, I had expected to put animals and animal bodies at the centre of this project, however, throughout the course of my research, gender and, specifically, masculinity has taken a more central position as my site of inquiry. The contribution, however, to Critical Animal Studies remains tangible. Critical Animal Studies sets itself aside from non-critical or mainstream animal studies because of its focus on informing activism and challenging

interrelated oppressions. Critical Animal Studies attempts to promote an inclusive, anti-oppressive framework for activists and, to this end, this project can be seen as a small piece of that larger goal. Bringing men, specifically vegetarian men, to the forefront of a debate on gendered power relations, especially within the North American animal rights movement, is crucial to both growing the movement (increasing men's participation) and helping to develop it in a more pro-feminist and inclusive manner.

Objectives and Questions

This research project seeks to, first and foremost, investigate the relationships between masculine gender performances and meat consumption - specifically focusing on the sociological impact of men's refusal to eat meat amongst and within what Kimmel (1994) refers to as "homosocial communities of manhood". In the literature review above, I have outlined some of the existing research in this area that has informed this project, as well as some of the theoretical framings necessary to thinking about both animals and gender.

As indicated above, this research project is informed by my own experience of becoming vegetarian as a young man in the dominant (white/heterosexual/"middle" class) Western cultural context. I know anecdotally that several friends and acquaintances have shared my experience of being ridiculed and "gay baited" (Kimmel 1994; Kimmel and Mahler 2003) as a result of becoming vegetarian. We have discussed the shared experience of feeling excluded from previous peer groups or feeling the need to keep our identities as vegans a secret from coworkers and colleagues. Through this research project, I was able to capture and critically examine these experiences through a group interview or focus group with young (21-34 year old), male vegetarian participants recruited from the local St. Catharines community. In the methods section below, I explain and provide justification for these methodological decisions.

This project answers specific questions regarding both the performance of masculinity (particularly what Connell calls "hegemonic masculinity") and the relevance of animal exploitation - principally manifested through the consumption of animal flesh - to that performance. This project was designed around the following research questions:

1. What kinds of challenges and/or types of gender policing do young men experience when becoming vegetarian?
2. How do young vegetarian men understand themselves as men or as masculine - both within their (vegetarian and non-vegetarian) peer groups and individually?
3. To what extent does the refusal to exploit animals generally (through not hunting, fishing, etc.) or to eat meat, specifically, alter the ways in which young men understand themselves as men or as masculine?
4. Do young vegetarian men have a better understanding of how gender is constructed and/or performed because of their transition toward vegetarianism?

These questions guided the methodological choices and research design (explained below) which, in turn, provided data on both the ways in which the performativity of gender is understood by my sample and the ways in which refusing to eat meat affects this performance. My hope, at the outset of this project, was that I could capture data that showed that vegetarian men's experiences of ridicule and persecution exposed them to - or made them aware of - the performativity of gender and in turn promoted feelings of solidarity amongst vegetarians and/or animal rights activists for other gender-critical social movements such as feminism and queer politics - even if vegetarianism and animal activism are still largely overlooked by these movements.

Methods and Methodology

My proposal for this research project anticipated having two distinct phases of research - beginning with a focus group interview and later reconvening with the same participants in individual, one-on-one, qualitative interviews. The focus group was intended to allow my participants to discuss their collective ideas about men, masculinity and manhood and the relationship between their perceived ideal of manhood and their own choices to abstain from animal exploitation. I was especially interested in collecting data about their shared experiences of ridicule and/or “gay baiting” at the hands of their male peers as this kind of behavior defines the boundaries of what is considered acceptable or - to use Butler’s (1990) language - “intelligible performances” of masculinity. The relevant literature suggests that vegetarianism stands outside of these boundaries; taunting, ridicule and other forms of verbal assault ought to then be a common experience for vegetarian men and those experiences will make for especially compelling evidence to demonstrate the relationship between meat and masculinity. The focus group was also proposed as a method for witnessing the “homosocial community of manhood” in action. Although I asked participants to reflect on their experiences in the context of the larger society - particularly within other homosocial communities - the focus group itself became its own homosocial community, albeit one without clear and present hierarchies. The follow-up interviews were proposed to offer a more in-depth investigation of ideas and concepts that came up in the focus group, without the pressure or anxieties of sharing deep, emotional experiences in a group setting.

I did not, however, follow through with this two-pronged approach. For the most part, this was motivated by research constraints. Before the focus group was assembled, I had already

overstepped the term limits for my Master's program and, as a result of conducting the research in the summer, ran into considerable difficulties with recruiting (see below). By the time the focus group was completed, I had run out of funding for the project and had to compensate participants out-of-pocket. I could scarcely afford to compensate participants for the focus group - which lasted over three hours - and would have been even further burdened with compensation for follow-up interviews. Finally, very few of the participants expressed a willingness to participate in follow-up interviews. Deciding to abandon the follow-up interviews was a tough choice to have to make, methodologically speaking. I was fearful that the quality of data that would be produced in the focus group would not be in-depth or candid enough to paint a sufficiently detailed or thorough enough picture of the very personal, individual experiences of my participants. Going into the focus group, I maintained the possibility that a second focus group or a set of interviews with entirely different participants might be necessary to properly illustrate the experiences of vegetarian men.

On the one hand, abandoning the qualitative follow-up interviews meant that I would have far less time with each individual participant, thus narrowing the scope of detail I could reasonably expect to elicit from the individuals - as well as the group. On the other hand, because I knew I only had access to these participants for the one focus group and (probably) no longer, the questions that I had anticipated asking only in the individual interviews could be addressed to the group as whole. My fears that these questions would be embarrassing or too personal for the participants were unfounded. The group setting seemed to help the participants to find common ground for their experiences, struggles and personal understandings of the research questions. Instead of narrowing the scope of what they were willing to share, the group

dynamics enabled them to build on each other's responses - to commiserate or rejoice as their responses dictated. Quite to the contrary of my fears, the focus group participants provided more than enough candid, in-depth data to properly document the experiences of vegetarian men.

This candor is likely because the participants all knew each other fairly well through various associations (employment, leisure groups, activism, etcetera) prior to attending the focus group - a point I will address in more detail in the next section. In addition, I took measures to ensure that participants felt safe and comfortable, and I took the time to build rapport with each of them outside of the research project. To a certain extent, my expectations that the focus group would demonstrate the manner in which homosocial communities of men operate were validated; the participants joked and poked fun at each other, made inferences about other's masculinity and sexuality and even laughed nervously at some of the more personal questions. However, my fears that this homosocial community would limit the degree to which the participants were willing to open up and share their emotionally-charged experiences were - like my fears that the focus group would not be adequate - unfounded. The participants seemed to have no trouble sharing their personal experiences of becoming and being vegetarian, offering details of even very intense or emotional subject matter. Their candor and honesty surprised me and, after transcribing the focus group, I felt relief about the decision to abandon the follow-up interviews. Carrying out social research is, to a certain degree, about improvising and, in this case, it yielded useful dividends.

There is, however, an important limitation that should be identified here. A number of risks, beyond simply not having enough data, present themselves by my decision to use only a single focus group as the data collection method for this project. A focus group, after all, is not a

convenient way to do several, individual interviews. The data collected from a focus group is co-constituted, it represents a shared, socially-constructed understanding of the topic being examined and, as such, cannot be said to represent any one, single participants' perspective. In the case of this research, which examines masculinity - a topic which is well-understood to be negotiated through shared, homosocial performances - this limitation creates an interesting dilemma. The data collected from the focus group is useful for demonstrating the ways in which my participants negotiated and configured shared ideas about vegetarianism and masculinity, however, this data is also mediated by the performative space of the focus group itself. Within the focus group environment, participants are likely to be influenced or persuaded by each other to adopt a particular viewpoint. Indeed, an entire microcosm of homosocial masculine performances - including a hierarchal organization of credibility - could have emerged within the framework of the focus group itself. Given the appropriate resources, I would have liked to complete a series of follow-up qualitative interviews - both to triangulate my results and eliminate the potential risk posed by the focus group and to broaden the scope of the project.

The Focus Group

Despite the potential limitations, the focus group offers an interesting research method for discussing and studying men and masculinity. As I have pointed out above, focus groups offer a unique opportunity to allow participants to create shared understandings and allow researchers the opportunity to observe group dynamics - which, as the theories of gender presented by Connell (2005), Kimmel (1994) and Kimmel and Mahler (2003) point out, and are so important to understanding masculinity. I chose a focus group as the method for this research because I anticipated that by discussing and sharing their own individual experiences of both

understanding “manhood” and being “a man”, participants would be able to provide each other and myself – as observer and researcher – with the tools for understanding their places within (or outside of) the framework of masculinity. The focus group offered opportunities for participants to build on each other’s ideas and understandings and to create a positive atmosphere for discussing both masculinity and meat-eating (or abstinence thereof) openly.

This focus group was conducted at the OPIRG-Brock Downtown Community Infoshop in St. Catharines, Ontario. The Infoshop is on a major downtown street, in a retail space that has a very organic, lived-in feel. It is a central meeting space and community centre for a variety of social justice activities, including film and documentary screenings, collective and group meetings; speakers series and presentations; and a variety of workshops (computer/bicycle repair, arts and crafts tutorials, information sessions, etcetera). Following the advice provided by Morgan & Krueger (1997) in their ambitious “Focus Group Kit” - particularly “The Focus Group Guidebook” (Morgan 1997) - I arrived early and cleaned up the space somewhat, set out refreshments including some lemonade (it was quite warm in the space), vegan spring rolls and vegan muffins. This provided my participants with a nearby, safe and comfortable environment that was familiar to them - having participated in or organized events in the space before. It also encouraged participation and the free-flow of ideas as the same setting has been (and continues to be) used for similar thought-provoking discussions on a wide variety of topics everyday. Although Morgan & Krueger (1997) point out that it is best for the lead researcher to hire a secondary researcher to act as a moderator, because of a lack of financial and personal resources, I moderated/facilitated and observed the focus group myself. In a sense, I utilized some participant-observation methods, in addition to running the focus group. According to Fern

(2001:79), this is commonplace within academic applications of focus groups. With a USB microphone set up to record the discussions, it was not at all challenging to fill both of these roles.

I paid very close attention, in my role as the moderator of the focus group, to encourage participants to feel at ease and to share their experiences. Fern (2001), as well as Morgan and Krueger (1997), outline a number of considerations that moderators must keep in mind while conducting focus groups - including verbal and nonverbal communication skills. Having examined this literature, I was careful to combine both nonreflective (minimal responses such as “mmm-hmm”) and reflective (clarifying, paraphrasing, reflecting feelings and summarizing) listening styles to ensure that participants felt that their responses were both carefully considered and understood properly (Fern 2001: 81-82). My participants (described in the following section) seemed to respond well to this combination. The former seemed to prompt them to share and to elicit more information from each speaker; the latter was often met with verbal validation or approval - as though the participants appreciated my attempts to synthesize and verify my understandings with them. This type of reflective listening ensures that data are accurate and have been verified with the participants - which is particularly important here because these data have informed the conclusions of this master’s thesis research project.

In addition, paying attention to visual cues and gazing was instrumental to the focus group moving smoothly. Fern details a wealth of research on eye contact and gazing and makes two useful points on the successful application of these methods to focus group moderation: “as the speakers reflect on what they are going to say, they tend to look away and gaze only intermittently ... as [they] prepare to finish, however, [they] will gaze at the person presumed to

be the next speaker” (Ibid, 83). He continues, stating that speakers will then perform a “reliability check” with the moderator to ensure they can speak next. During this process, the moderator can use eye contact and gazing to encourage speakers to share more (or less, depending on how much they have already said and if others are awaiting their opportunity to speak). He concludes that: “in the focus group context, moderators should be able to use these types of predictable behaviors to help regulate the flow of the group discussion” (Ibid). During the focus group, these visual cues helped to organize the flow of the conversation. Some of the questions encouraged everyone to speak and the participants seemed to organize themselves (who would go next and when) with eye contact. This was also helpful for the participants to communicate to me when they were finished speaking or were looking for me to do some reflective listening. When a participant was particularly struggling to find a word, finish their response or have their long-winded response summarized, they would signal this to me with eye contact - and, as indicated by verbal affirmations, they seemed to always appreciate my interventions.

Although listening styles and eye contact are the most important factors in effectively communicating and moderating the focus group, paying attention to my own and others’ facial expressions, body language and vocalizations proved important too. I used facial expressions (combined with nonreflective listening and eye contact) to elicit more information from participants, demonstrate to them that I was listening (and responding), and to positively reinforce their participation - principally through smiling (Ibid, 84), but also laughing and looking surprised, upset or somber - depending on the tone. Body language was likewise used for the same purposes. Reading my participants’ body language suggested to me whether they

were feeling uncomfortable and/or tense about a particular topic, or relaxed and willing to share (Ibid). Using nonverbal gestures proved an effective and non-confrontational way to redirect the flow of conversation. On a few occasions, I used hand gestures to interrupt participants, to make room for others, or to claim the floor for myself (Ibid). Combining this with body language, I would turn my body to face the speaker, at one point even going so far as to move my chair so I could better face a participant who sat too close to comfortably turn toward. Finally, vocalizations, which were especially useful for nonreflective listening, not only helped to indicate interest and willingness to hear more from participants, but also indicated to me which participants were likely nervous, shy or, conversely, confident and open to sharing (Ibid). Often, these vocalizations signaled a participants' willingness to speak next - a trend that participants seemed to intrinsically notice, as they, too, turned their eyes and/or body to face the expected next speaker. Paying attention to all of these factors helped me to ensure that my moderation was careful, attentive and properly focused. This seemed to help participants to feel comfortable and more willing to discuss the research topic.

It should be noted that, although these tips were useful, they were not nearly as important as trusting my own intuition, feelings and emotions to help guide the focus group moderation. My interest in what the participants had to say, as well as my efforts to understand and connect with each of them was a much better motivator for being attentive, maintaining eye contact and practicing listening skills. Being genuine and present with my participants was much more important than any advice gleaned from these or any other methods texts, although acquiring the knowledge to handle perhaps more-difficult future (group) interviews was still a valuable practice.

My question guide included questions ranging from the participants' own understandings of themselves as men to their experiences of being "gay baited" and ridiculed by male peers for their dietary (and hence lifestyle) choices. These questions were written to be clear, open-ended, and carefully crafted to encourage participation between participants. The question guide that I crafted was organized in a semi-structured, progressive way, a point that my participants proved by anticipating or jumping ahead from answering one question to inadvertently answering the next. On a few occasions, I found myself stopping participants from proceeding so that I could read the question that they had already begun answering. I uttered the phrase "well, actually - that was my next question" or some derivation thereof several times throughout the focus group. As Morgan points out, "communication is a two-way street" (1997:10) and my careful and purposeful moderation, including a focus on fostering positive attitudes (11) between participants, myself and the research project itself, combined with building rapport with participants, was essential for arriving at the experiential data I recorded. My question *guide* was just that - and I often deviated or altered the questions to suit the conversation as it unfolded.

Going into the focus group, I was careful to heed Morgan's advice to "imagine that this opportunity to communicate with your participants is a special privilege that they are granting you" (Ibid:11) - and the rewards of doing so, in the form of rich, candid data, were considerable.

Feminist Methodologies

Although, in the end, I opted not to conduct follow-up interviews, I nevertheless researched techniques for doing so, especially feminist interviewing methodologies, which I incorporated into my focus group along with the questions that I had previously reserved for the planned interviews. Feminist interviewing methodologies are outlined comprehensively by De

Vault and Gross (2006) and Hesse-Biber (2007) in their respective research primers. Hesse-Biber writes, “as a feminist interviewer, I am interested in getting at the subjugated knowledge of the diversity of women’s realities that often lie hidden and unarticulated” (2007:113). Likewise, this project is interested in the “subjugated knowledges” of men’s realities that are often “unarticulated” - namely, knowledge about themselves as men and their experiences with performing masculinity within the competitive power relations of male peer groups. De Vault and Gross point out that, while qualitative interviewing is always a practice of listening to and valuing participants’ knowledge and expertise (2006, 174), feminist scholars must be especially attendant to avoiding generalizing the notion of a universal “Woman” (or, in this case, “Man”) and to underscoring the constructed and problematized state of gender within feminist literature (Ibid:175). I feel that my theoretical framing (above) already speaks to my understanding of these considerations; however, it was necessary to keep these matters in mind - not just during the focus group, but also throughout my observations and in my discussion (below), as well. Indeed, there was a great deal of difference and variation amongst the participant’s views on nearly every topic and I have been attendant to those differences both within the focus group and in this final report.

Hesse-Biber and Leavy outline the fundamentals of qualitative or in-depth interviewing methods in both their invaluable qualitative research primer (2006) and in their feminist research practice primer (2007). In both cases, they stress the importance of active listening and encouraging open-ended discussion (assisted by probes) with participants. Hesse-Biber writes:

The in-depth interview seeks to understand the ‘lived experiences’ of the individual. We are interested in getting at the ‘subjective’ understanding an individual brings to a given situation or set of circumstances. In-depth interviews are issue-oriented (2007:118).

Hesse-Biber and Leavy furthermore point out that an interview is a conversation where information and understanding are gained about a “focused topic” (2007:123) – in this case, men’s subjective, lived experiences of being or becoming vegetarian within their male peer groups.

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2007) state that qualitative interviewing, as opposed to quantitative interviewing - in which the questions are posed by the “distanced” and neutral researcher and answered in brief by the respondent - is characterized by a mutual researcher-researched relationship, where the two parties are seen more as co- participants in a discussion that hopefully answers the researcher’s questions. Hesse-Biber (2006) states that the best way to achieve this level of co-participation is for the researcher to attempt to break down or challenge notions of power and authority that govern the division between the researcher and respondent. She offers two possible solutions that feminist researchers have devised for overcoming these barriers: (1) the researcher shares their results with participants to receive final feedback and make revisions based on participant input and (2) the researcher shares their own background and personal, reflective interest in the research project (Ibid:128).

I decided not to share my results with the participants for two main reasons. First, there seemed to be some disagreement between a few of the focus group participants and myself on the particular language (vis-a-vis performativity and social constructionism) I employed to discuss gender. I feared that in sharing the results with my participants - particularly those few that argued for a more sociobiological understanding of gender - I may have run the risk of further delaying an already-overextended term limit for the project while we decided on a language that we could all agree with. Relatedly, because this project was conducted as part of a

Master's thesis within a graduate program, there were a number of time and financial limitations that barred me from having the opportunity to return to my participants with the completed thesis in-hand - regardless of my concerns around finding a mutually agreed-upon language for talking about gender. The constraints posed by trying to complete this research within the narrow window of time allowed for a thesis project meant that any delay (including seeking feedback from participants) had to be avoided.

Although I was unable to incorporate Hesse-Biber's (2006) first suggestion for achieving co-operation with participants (sharing results), I was able to incorporate her second by sharing my own personal background and reflective interest in the research project with my participants. At the outset of the focus group, I shared my personal experiences of becoming vegetarian and gave a few examples of how this intersected with performing masculinity, especially as it related to homosocial peer groups both in my personal and work life. I began the focus group by saying:

I went vegetarian a long time ago - like 4 or 5 years now - which I know isn't a long time for some of our participants, Richard, but for me it seems like a long time and at the time I was just starting to get to know a new group of [male] friends and I remember it being basically a big thorn in my side to sort of "fitting in" with that crowd. I remember when I showed up one night with vegan cookies and someone said: "How long have you been vegan?" and I said: "A few weeks?" and they were like: "How long you been gay? Huh-huh-huh [mocking laughter]" and so those kind of comments are not - I don't think they're that atypical, I think that they're sort of the norm - and I'm interested to find out if that is the case and I'm interested to find out if that has been your guys' experience as well. Additionally, I think we sort of have to "out" ourselves - and I don't necessarily want to use that language because they're very different things, obviously - but I think about things like work environments - especially male-dominated work environments and these are places where it can be really uncomfortable to be sort of the "odd man out" and if you are vegetarian you are consistently the "odd man out". I remember an experience where I was working in a factory and for Christmas, at the end of the day, before the Christmas shut-down, they gave everybody a [frozen] turkey - and I had to refuse one and say that: "No, I was vegan and I didn't want one" and that was cause for raucous laughter and these sorts of things. So anyway, those are sort of the experiences that I'm interested in tapping into and getting a better understanding of and also where those sorts of things come from and whether those experiences are common - that said, I'm also interested in how vegetarian communities - specifically, communities of men within vegetarian communities - how they operate, and how vegetarian men understand themselves as men... who also happen to be vegetarian (Researcher, Interview, 0:00)

Introducing my own narrative seemed to help the participants to better understand my interests and motivations in the research questions and also worked to establish rapport, foster trust and elicit emotionally-charged responses from my participants. In addition, sharing my own experiences offered an opportunity to explore and incorporate reflexivity - which, as I indicated above, is a vital part of conducting critical sociological research.

Reflexivity, according to Hesse-Biber “is the process through which a researcher recognizes, examines and understands how [their] own social background and assumptions can intervene in the research process” (2007:129). Sharing my own experiences with the participants - and reflecting upon that process now - provides me with some insight into how my own experiences of being White, North American, male, heterosexual, able-bodied and working class (with some middle class privilege) all coalesce and actually create the conditions for not just my own experiences of becoming vegetarian, but my very interest in this research project in the first place. Additionally, my “social background and assumptions” (Ibid) in part led to my recruitment of a fairly homogenous sample of people with similar experiences. While this is advantageous in a smaller project such as this, it is important to take notice and be reflexive about how or why I arrived at these methodological decisions, especially with reference to the participants and recruitment methods - a topic to which this report now turns.

Participants & Recruitment

Because the process of transitioning to vegetarianism is a long and varied experience for each individual and because existing research (e.g. Merriman 2010; Hirschler 2010) shows this process to be more intensely opposed at the onset by others, I felt that the best sample for this research project would be made up of young, vegetarian men. I originally intended to recruit this sample from the student body at Brock University; however, as the winter semester ended and the window of opportunity closed, I decided to change my recruitment methods -combining convenience and snowball sampling techniques. I placed a recruitment poster at a vegan restaurant and bakery called Rise Above and asked the owner to help me find participants from among his clientele. In exchange for his help, I would offer gift certificates for the restaurant as compensation.

This process yielded a sample consisting of six (6) vegetarian or vegan men from the local vegetarian, animal rights and/or social justice communities. Many of the participants knew each other fairly well, and some were even very close friends who had agreed to participate together. In addition to their friendships with each other, I knew some of the participants quite well myself and counted several of them amongst my own friends. While this might appear as a limitation to those who believe social research and social researchers themselves ought to be detached and objective about their research topics and participants, to the contrary, I see it as a valuable opportunity. I had spent approximately two years prior to the focus group living in the community and building rapport with individuals who would later participate in my research. I believe this was the key to eliciting the participants' candid and often emotionally-charged

responses to my questions. Indeed, my personal relationships with the participants undoubtedly aided in my data collection methods.

My youngest participant was 22, and oldest 34, with most clustered in their mid to late 20s. They had been vegetarian or vegan for varying lengths of time - from less than a month all the way up to eleven (11) years. All of my participants identified as (mostly) heterosexual and presented themselves as cisgendered (see Serano 2007) - individuals whose gender performance conforms to their assigned sex - men. All participants except one were born in Canada, although all were White. The single non Canadian-born participant was born in Eastern Europe but raised in Canada. All participants except one were able-bodied. For the most part, this fairly homogenous sample was expected; St. Catharines is not a very diverse city, nor, as a variety of authors in Harper (2010) point out, is the North American animal rights movement a very diverse one, generally speaking. Because of the proximity of Brock University, I expected most of my participants to have some post-secondary education but was surprised to find that four of the six did not. Nevertheless, my sample was made up of extremely well-read, intelligent and educated men, which also helped them to be able to communicate in a clear and effective manner. Again, although the decision to abandon the individual follow-up interviews was made according to research constraints, my participants' openness and willingness to share during the focus group made it clear that there would be few compromises, if any, to the quality of the data collected.

The interested participants contacted me via e-mail or through personal communication and were then provided the invitation to participate and the informed consent forms via e-mail so that they could read and understand all of the terms and conditions - including their right to

withdraw - ahead of time. When they arrived at the focus group, these same documents were provided and the informed consent forms were signed by each participant. Again drawing on the advice provided by Krueger & Morgan (1997), I provided a half hour window for participants to arrive when they were encouraged to talk amongst themselves, eat and drink, and read and sign the informed consent forms. During this time, we agreed that it would be best if I chose pseudonyms for everybody so that they would not try to later ascertain each other's identities, although anyone with a good memory would likely be able to do so (from reading the transcript) anyway. We discussed the confidentiality of anything shared within the focus group and I explained to my participants my procedure for storing and later disposing of the audio recordings and transcripts (see below). Finally, we had some more refreshments while we waited for everyone to arrive and settle in, one-by-one and made small talk about upcoming events in the local community. Both the setting, as indicated above, and this "downtime" while we waited for everyone to filter in, read through/sign the forms and eat provided a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere right from the outset - just as Morgan and Krueger (1997) suggested it would. I feel very strongly that this encouraged the outpouring of candid participation later.

The focus group was recorded on a professional USB microphone, attached to my laptop, which had the lid closed and sat on a table between the couch and circle of chairs in which the participants sat. I took some very minor notes on a clipboard, which also had my questions - although by the end of the focus group, I would put the pen and clipboard down between questions, wanting to give my full physical (body language, eye contact) attention to each speaker. The recording of the focus group was duplicated into three copies, one of which remained on the laptop, with the other two were stored safely on two external storage USB flash

memory sticks. Over the course of the following week, I transcribed the audio recordings into a text document, which was likewise duplicated and copied to the thumb drives. I retained one paper copy of the transcript, stored with the informed consent forms at my residence. For security reasons, I have not made any digital or physical copies of a pseudonym key; it is nevertheless simple for me to remember which participant is which because of the process I used to choose the names. All of these data will be stored until after my thesis defense and then deleted and, in the case of physical data, shredded.

Participants were compensated for their participation with \$20 gift certificates for Rise Above restaurant and bakery. In later weeks, I found out that a few of the participants had used the certificates to enjoy a meal together and, while eating, further discussed the research topics and their positive experiences of participating in the research. To me, this was proof that the research project had achieved some of the goals of feminist research methodologies. The fact that my participants were discussing the research outside of the context of the focus group and without the researcher (myself) even present meant that the goal of de-centering the researcher and thus de-centering “authority” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2007, 168) was achieved - to the degree that this is possible.

Findings and Analysis

My research findings were surprising, to say the least. I had anticipated that vegetarian men would have shared experiences of being subjected to gender policing and that, because of their inability to fit into the models presented by dominant society they would understand gender differently than others. I did not, however, anticipate being so lucky to have a group that had thought about manhood - the process by which they were socialized as men - and masculinity - their everyday sense of themselves as men - so carefully prior to attending the focus group. Much of their prior thinking about men and masculinity was a result of trying to unpack their experiences of exclusion or not fitting into the dominant masculine ideal and is examined below. In addition, almost all of the participants came from a social justice community that was steeped in critical feminist thought (due to the particular activists and activist groups that organized around issues related to women and LGBTQQIA people) and, while not all of them agreed with poststructural understandings of gender as a performative practice, they nevertheless understood that gender was (at least in part) socially-constructed and that masculinity - rather than a monolithic, concrete or “natural” state of being, was a fluid and changing landscape of multiple and varied identities that both men and women participated in and (re)constructed in their daily interactions. When we broached questions about mainstream or hegemonic constructions of what it means to “be a man”, they worked together to construct a working definition of their ideas about dominant (or hegemonic) masculinity that closely coincided with those offered by early “sex role” theorists as well as contemporary Men’s Studies authors. However, they were quick to point out that they felt this was just one possible way of “being a man” - one which, as this report points out, they never quite felt was attainable, nor even - in their cases - desirable. The

fact that my participants vocalized these views about what might be termed “hegemonic” masculinity right at the onset showed that they had clearly given the research project and the questions that we sought to answer together some serious thought before showing up. This may be due to the fact that I had discussed the project with some of the participants prior to the focus group, but also because (as my data demonstrates) the experience of growing up “different” forced them to confront many of these questions in their own lives. This forethought was crucial both to helping the discussion move organically and to adequately answering the questions that this project was designed around.

I began the focus group by asking each of my participants to describe their own experiences of becoming vegetarian, focusing on: “how long ago it was, ... what your motivations were, your influences - particular people that influenced you, things that maybe challenged you or surprised you and whether there were some positive or negative outcomes - which could be health related or anything else” (Researcher, Interview, 0:00). This question was designed to hopefully lead us into discussions of the participant’s own trajectories or the “career paths” of vegetarianism according to McDonald’s (2000) model for understanding the process of becoming vegetarian.

According to McDonald’s model, the learning process for becoming vegetarian involves backgrounds and experiences (“who I was”), a catalytic experience (some major event sparks a realization of the cruelty inherent in meat consumption) and finally repression and/or becoming vegetarian (Hirschler 2011, 157). I left this first question open-ended, so that the participants could contribute whatever they felt comfortable sharing and I used their responses to determine which of my other questions I would ask, in what order, and how best to synthesize their shared

experiences. Their responses to this question were fairly personal and tended toward short anecdotes. I did not sketch out their experiences according to McDonald's model, but made note of each person's catalytic moments, as they bore striking similarities. I also noticed that most of the participants did, at first, "repress" their catalytic moments, opting to downplay or otherwise put off becoming vegetarian until later. I explored these similarities in more depth later in the focus group and have elaborated on both points further below in a section titled "Relationships with Women". Posing the question of how the participants came to vegetarianism proved a fruitful tool for allowing the participants to open up to the other members of the focus group and orient the discussion around the issues and concerns that mattered most to them.

It was obvious, from analyzing their responses, that they were able to take the focus group as an opportunity to discuss the things that they noticed or that bothered them or that they found most interesting about the relationship between meat eating and masculinity. I made notes regarding what each person said, especially where it related to other questions that I had not yet asked, so that I would return to them later in the focus group. The participants seemed to value this form of active listening and, in turn, were more comfortable - both with me and with each other - and therefore more willing to share further.

Thematic Trends

A number of thematic trends became obvious both at the onset and throughout the participants' responses to questions during the focus group. For instance, almost all of the participants claimed that they had been excluded from dominant male peer groups and regarded themselves as "nerds" or "losers" prior to becoming vegetarian, they said had been disrespected because of their dietary choices, especially by male co-workers, colleagues and family members,

and they admitted that they had always had an easier time relating to women, beginning with their mother and/or sisters, female friends and/or romantic partners; and felt as though they had arrived at the decision to become vegetarian not through emotions or feelings but through logic and/or reason. This chapter examines these and other themes using direct block quotes from the focus group participants, and puts them in context with the relevant literature. While I have attempted to break these themes up into concrete, discrete groupings, it should be noted that many of the participants' responses spoke to more than just one theme. As a result, some of the sections that follow are broken up into smaller subsections, some themes are addressed more than once and some quotes are repeated or revisited in different sections. All of this is then synthesized concisely in the discussion and conclusions.

Analyzing the collected data from the focus group was challenging. Focus groups involve bringing several people together into close quarters to discuss complex and multifaceted problems or questions. A focus group is basically a large conversation and, as such, is almost by necessity as disorganized and scattered as conversations tend to be. In addition, while the participants all seemed to agree about their own personal decision to refrain from eating animals, their reasons for doing so, the extent to which they practiced their boycott and the ways in which they felt this intersected with their being masculine all varied considerably. In order to capture the experiences that my participants felt were most pertinent to their own struggles of being both vegetarian and men, I kept my questions open-ended and tried not to interrupt or guide the discussions too much. As a result, the data that I ended up with covered a wide variety of topics from family and holidays to the differences between vegetarianism and veganism and even the tendency for patriarchy and hierarchal power structures to be asserted within social justice and

animal rights communities. Parsing through this data required that I constantly referred back to the research questions to ensure that the quotes that I chose to reproduce in this report moved us closer to answering them. In the tradition of feminist research methodologies and the focus on privileging the participants' voices, I also had to be careful that my research accurately represented the focus group participants' own thoughts, feelings and experiences. Striking a balance between the two - ensuring that the questions I was most interested in answering were attended to while also paying attention to the topics that the focus group participants most wanted to discuss - was no easy task. The categories of responses, which roughly make up the following subheadings, were drafted several times over the course of multiple playbacks of the focus group recording. I made notes during the focus group of possible themes that emerged from our discussion, and, on the first playback (and transcription) attempted to slot my participants' responses into one or more of these categorical themes, creating new themes where necessary. It became clear, however, that certain topics were not useful in answering the research questions and others would need to be divided up into smaller, more discrete categories. However necessary, it was difficult to exclude any of the focus group data - even those that did not answer the research questions - as every statement, discussion and argument massaged my curiosity and beckoned me to investigate further.

A final note on the block quotes from the focus group: wherever possible, quotes are preserved in their original form; however, because participants would sometimes lead into their responses with unnecessary anecdotes or disclaimers, ellipses are sometimes used to truncate the recorded data. Regarding notations: short pauses are indicated with commas, sentence breaks or deviations in a train of thought with hyphens or dashes, and longer pauses are indicated in

parentheses. As should be evident, transcript notations were not meticulously systematized according to a pre-defined set of guidelines such as the Jefferson Notation System or other discrete approaches to Conversation Analysis. Instead of these narrow approaches, I have transcribed the data using a broad transcription technique that focuses more on the content of what was communicated during the focus group, rather than how it was said. While I recognize the value of these systematic approaches for studies of more stigmatizing issues (for example, studies of race, sexual violence, etcetera) and especially in other disciplines (psychology), I do not think that such an approach is necessary - nor even especially useful in this case. Instead, I exercised caution to transcribe the focus group keeping the mood and atmosphere of the audio recording (and my memories of the focus group itself) readily-apparent.

Relationships with Men

Throughout the focus group, the participants were asked to discuss and share the ways in which their becoming vegetarian influenced their relationships with other men. These questions were designed around Connell's (2005) notion of the gendered power relations exercised between multiple, competing masculinities and Kimmel's (1994) notion of the "homosocial community" of manhood. In both cases, I was hoping to elucidate the participants' perspectives on how their becoming vegetarian shifted the dynamics of power relations between themselves and other men - both within their own homosocial communities and in the broader community of manhood (fathers, male authority figures, male coworkers, etcetera). Some of the participants took this to mean their fathers or other family members, others took this to mean *non-vegetarian* peers or peer groups and still others talked about their *vegetarian* male peers. The variety of these discussions led to rich, layered data about vegetarian men's relationships with other men,

which, according to many Men's Studies authors (Kimmel 1995; 2011; Connell 2000; 2005) is a key component of how men understand themselves and evaluate their own masculine performances.

Fathers

Three of the participants, Charlie, Michael and Tim, were, to varying degrees, estranged from their fathers and one, Geoff, had his father pass away when he was in his late teens. These absences seemed to impact the participants in multiple and varied ways, but the one consistent theme linking them seemed to be the way in which it freed them up from their father's influence and made them more likely to act independently - up to and including becoming vegetarian. While, on first glance, this may seem to allude to an underlying truth about the psychoanalytical "crisis" model of masculinity triumphed by Freud and some psychologists, an alternative explanation is offered below.

Geoff talked about how he had a "romanticized admiration" for his father because he was not yet old enough, when his father passed away, to challenge him on his "inconsistencies and intellectual immaturities" - especially relating to animals. He stated that his father had an:

... enormous compassion for animals ... but he was a meat-eater and ... I could intuitively tell as I was growing up that there was something inconsistent about that but he held a very paternalistic relationship over me and he said 'well, when you get older, we'll talk about it' ... when he did pass away it made it a lot easier to transition into vegetarianism because - that was one thing that I was really afraid of - 'well what would my dad think?' - because I hold him in such high regard. But his absence in my life, because of his death, made it much easier, actually to become independent, to become my own person, including vegetarianism which I don't know if he would have approved of it, or not, frankly (Geoff, Interview, 1:30:59).

I clarified with Geoff that he had been worried that his becoming vegetarian would have - without actually saying anything - pointed out his father's inconsistencies, and he agreed that this is what he meant. It is likely that Geoff was fearful (and perhaps felt a certain empathy) that

his becoming vegetarian would reveal a conflict of different masculine performances in his father; who would then be forced to reconcile two opposing ideas about himself as a man. One of the examples Geoff gave of his father's "enormous compassion" was that he would take Geoff fishing, but - in secret - cut the barbs off the fishing lures so that the fish could not be hooked on the line. Geoff's father, therefore, embodied one type of masculinity that necessitated that he took his son fishing - perhaps as a rite of passage, or as a method for male bonding - while at the same time embodying another type of masculinity that necessitated that he act compassionately toward the fish, who he did not want to harm in the process. Geoff feared that by becoming vegetarian while his father was still alive, he would have forced his father to have to reconcile these two conflicting masculinities and, in the process, admit or own up to his compassion - a feminine and thus subordinated masculine performance. I will return to this alternative analysis in the conclusion of this section, incorporating the other participant's responses as well.

Tim changed the direction of the discussion when he told the group that his parents had been physically and emotionally abusive during his youth and that he felt very strongly that he ought to be apart from them both - a feeling that led him to leave home when he was just 14. He said that becoming vegetarian and orienting himself around animal rights theories gave him a justification to become even more estranged and to even "hate" his father, especially.

I could forgive everything that he'd done to the family and personal stuff but then to be, like, murdering animals? It was just unforgivable and actually, when my mom went vegetarian I like forgave. You know - and I think a lot of people do - but I had a shitty childhood and when my mom went vegetarian it was like - I could actually appreciate her and, like, forgive everything - which, with my father, he continued to eat meat and just, like, it was a very clear - like I hate you for that and, like, I don't know. If people - if they know what they're doing, they should hate it. If he was hitting a cat or dog on the street you should hate him for that (Tim, Interview, 1:29:20).

Charlie had a similar experience with his own father, whom he also claimed was abusive. He shared with the group:

I have this weird relationship with my dad. He's not even my biological father but he's been around my whole life so - he's my dad. I can never quite pinpoint ... why I just generally don't really care if I see him very often or whatever. [But] I think back to these moments in my childhood and we had this dog who was my best friend ... and one day ... I saw [my father] take a butter knife, just because the dog was barking, hold it by the blade and just, as hard as he could, hit him right in the back and the sound that he had made when he got hit - you know, that yelping sound - haunted me for years and I remember being like: "innocent animal? You're a piece of shit" like that's how easy it was. So my dad's opinion about what I do has never really mattered ... I've kind of written off any moral things that he would want to pass onto me I could care less about that (Charlie, Interview, 1:33:43).

Michael's estrangement with his father was less severe, but likewise strained. He told the group that his father was emotionally abusive and that his parents divorced when he was in his teens, which he felt was for the best. He said that his father used to try to control his behaviour and that he now resists that control by maintaining an emotional and physical distance between them (Michael, Interview, 1:35:49). When asked about how his father reacted to his becoming vegetarian, Michael was vague but said that, for the most part, it was just another aspect of how different they are (Interview, 1:40:40).

In all four cases, the participants seemed to indicate that their relationships with their fathers (or lack thereof) made them more likely to consider and later become vegetarian. I believe that this speaks to the way in which men perceive themselves as being evaluated and measured by other men and/or groups of men. In a sense, the father/son relationship constitutes a primary "homosocial community" (Kimmel 1994) for young men. With their fathers absent, these participants were not burdened with the pressure to conform to their fathers' ideas about how masculinity ought to be performed. They did not feel anxious or stressed about adequately performing hegemonic masculinity or about being "unintelligible" according to the discourses (or regimes of intelligibility) that govern masculinity (Butler 1990). They did not feel that they

were being measured against or compared to their fathers' performance of masculinity and this made it easier for them to assert their own, alternative performance - one which included compassion for animals and plant-based diets. Richard's experience with his father and his reflections on their relationship offers a good explanation of exactly this point.

My dad, because he's a very masculine guy - he likes to work on motorcycles, he likes to work on cars - you know, he likes to talk about "manly things" and so - and me being the oldest child in my family, in some ways I was always - I don't want to say disappointing because that sounds like my dad doesn't love me but (laughter) - in some ways I do think he probably wished that I was more manly. When I was in grade school he really tried to get me into hockey and I sort of got into it and I dug it a bit but I definitely - like, there was pressure from him that I had to be "a guy," to you know - to bond with him - and when I went vegan - that was just, again, it was just another way that I was different from him and different from what he thought a man should be (Richard, Interview, 6:41).

In all cases, becoming vegetarian strained the father/son relationship, although this was mitigated by the estrangement of many of the participants' fathers and the fact that all of the participants were already performing non-hegemonic forms of masculinity prior to becoming vegetarian. Father/son relationships, therefore, did not seem to be fundamentally altered because of the transition to vegetarianism but, in many cases, were already strained beforehand. Although, for some, the negative experiences with their fathers were few, the participants nevertheless made a point of demonstrating how - even if they had already been performing an alternative form of masculinity than their fathers before - the transition to vegetarianism further complicated their relationships. This data directly challenges Merriman's (2010) conclusions regarding men's transitions to vegetarianism - namely, that men do not encounter disapproval from family members upon becoming vegetarian. Instead, some of the participants of this focus group were indeed challenged and rebuked by their fathers for becoming vegetarian. Or, in the case of Geoff, at least, the anticipation or fear of rebuke persuaded him to avoid becoming vegetarian (against his own desires) until after his father had passed.

It is at least possible that some of my participants construct and perform this alternative masculinity oppositionally; to achieve distance and assert themselves as different from their fathers - many of whom were either not present or else abusive and/or violent during their youth. The inherent violence of eating meat is not always immediately apparent due to the industries' efforts to divorce meat - as a product - from the violence is necessitated by its purchase - a process which Adams (1994) argues renders the animal an "absent referent". Nevertheless, eating meat remains a pervasive form of necessitating and perpetrating violence - a fact that is, on rare occasion, celebrated by hegemonic masculinity (pig roasts, hunting, fishing, etcetera). Certainly, becoming vegetarian is one way to drastically reduce the amount of violence that one participates in, which may be a consideration for boys and men who are looking for ways to differentiate their masculine performance from that of their fathers.

The similarities between the participants' fathers seem to allude to another possibility as well. That the fathers of more than half of the participants were abusive and still more felt that their fathers were at least somewhat disappointed in their masculine performances speaks to a deeper problem on the part of the fathers. It would appear to me that the fathers have internalized the popular discourse of a "crisis" in masculinity and have chosen to resist or push back against the perceived threat by trying to raise boys who they believed would reclaim a retrograde, traditional masculinity that they may feel has been robbed from themselves. Their sons, on the other hand, have embraced the shifting dynamics of gender relations - at the very least, symbolically, through their repudiation of the most "male" of all foods: meat. While I do not think I have enough data to make a conclusion, it is at least possible that some of the abuse that my participants experienced was a result of their fathers own inability to reconcile the shifting

patterns of gender performativity. They may have experienced an internal, individual “crisis” in their own understandings of masculinity as a result of their sons’ transitions. What is clear to me, however, is that my participants’ sense of themselves as men has hardly been harmed by their estrangement from their fathers. Quite to the contrary of the psychoanalytic “crisis” model, my participants seemed to be more comfortable with themselves (and safer, in some cases) precisely because of the distance between themselves and their fathers’ - to say nothing of their emotional proximity to their mothers (examined below).

Vegetarian men embody an alternative masculine performance that, like other masculinities, is defined in relation (and possibly in opposition) to the hegemonic ideal. Whether vegetarianism is the most pronounced attribute of this alternative performance remains to be seen, however, it is clear that this feature of the performance directly impacted the participants’ relationships with their fathers. Similarly, alternative performances of masculinity impacted on the reactions from non-vegetarian male friends or peer groups, specifically those to which the participants belonged prior to becoming vegetarian.

Non-Vegetarian Male Friends

My participants’ relationships with non-vegetarian friends were also somewhat strained by their transition to vegetarianism, although, for the most part, this did not seem to cause my participants much distress or concern. It is at least possible that this might well have been a gendered reaction - a masculine stoicism put on for the benefit of the other participants in the homosocial community of the focus group. However, it is just as likely that my participants’ inclusion in a social justice community that mostly embraces vegetarianism (a point to which this paper will return) may well have made their strained peer relationships easier to cope with.

In either case, the fact remains that peer relationships were at least somewhat affected by my participants' vegetarianism - specifically during their transition to vegetarianism. For example,

Richard told us:

I did have some friends who were meat-eaters that were the kind of friends who would pick up on any difference in a person and kind of tease at it playfully - not in a way that was especially aggressive or made me feel ostracized or anything like that so I think I lucked out insofar as my friends go - I guess, they were the sort of friends who liked to joke about everything and it was just one more thing and it wasn't too big of a deal (Interview, 6:41)

For many of the participants, this feeling of being "different" was intrinsically related to their alternative performances of masculinity. Because their performance already did not conform to the hegemonic ideal, the notion of transitioning toward vegetarianism was indeed just "one more thing" that was not especially "masculine" about them. Richard continued:

I don't think I ever was considered as much masculine as a lot of other males ... so it wasn't a huge gap for me to have one more aspect of my personality that wasn't hyper-masculine (Interview, 6:41)

Charlie, likewise, felt that although his friends made jokes or picked on him because of his vegetarianism, that it was not especially damaging to his relationships with them. He said that "some of [his] friends were really supportive ... it was just one sort of thing that got joked about" (Interview, 13:54). Tim, too, echoed this point: "my friends joked about everything - it wasn't particularly harsh, like I didn't get bullying from people I didn't know because I was vegetarian" (Interview, 18:26). But later, in the same response, he said that his:

... friends tried to belittle it - and I saw that with other vegetarians, too - where they would say I was just doing it for a girl. They held on for that for like six months to a year just constantly saying I was doing it for this girl who was vegetarian and that was awful - it was really belittling. And other people would say it was good for my health and it was just a phase, that I was cheating on it, whatever (Tim, Interview, 18:26).

Michael, who, of all the participants, had most recently stopped eating meat said: "It just kind of weeds out which people are worth associating with, worth being friends with" (Interview, 32:10). For him, the joking and teasing was more immediately impactful. Instead of ignoring or

tolerating the teasing and joking, Michael seemed to indicate that he had to make hard decisions about who he would continue to associate with following his transition to vegetarianism. His tone throughout his response (as well as the relative brevity of his response, compared with his responses throughout the rest of the focus group) seemed to indicate a certain pain or regret about this “weeding out”. Interestingly, however, it was Michael who made this decision to reject his former friends, rather than them rejecting him and his newfound ethics and lifestyle choices. His newfound beliefs, it would seem, quickly became an uncompromisable position for him, as the literature seems to indicate is so often the case (Macdonald 2000, Hirschler 2011).

Following a similar pattern to the participants’ father/son relationships, examined above, most of the participants emphasized again that their friends were already accustomed to their alternative performances of masculinity (and performances of difference, more generally), prior to their becoming vegetarian. To their friends - especially close friends - their vegetarianism did not mark them as “unintelligible” (Butler 1990), as they were already used to the participants subverting these gendered discourses. It is possible that their existing performance of masculinity, prior to becoming vegetarian was already “subordinated” to the hegemonic ideal; their becoming vegetarian may have further feminized them as compassionate, empathetic men (which may have led to the friendly ribbings they received from friends), but the addition of this trait did not seriously compromise or alter their position within the existing gender configuration. They did not move from a hegemonic or complicit masculinity to a subordinated masculinity; rather, they were likely already there, most likely along with their friends. As an illustrative counterpoint, Michael’s “weeding out” speaks to his friends’ willingness (or lack thereof) to alter their own perceptions about meat eating and - in the sense that they are so

intimately connected - masculine gender regimes. Whether the dominant, masculine hegemony accepts compassionate masculinities or not, Michael demands that his friends (at least) subsume vegetarianism within their frames of intelligible gender practice. The friends who are unwilling to do so - who toe the line on regimes of intelligibility - are not “worth associating with”. To be sure, the other participants likely went through the same process of “weeding out” those who were unwilling to respect their new gendered realities, but because many of the participants had been vegetarian for a long period of time and this was likely not as obviously impactful as it was for Michael.

It would appear - from the data collected on fathers and on peer groups - that the dominant gender theories promulgated by psychology and sociobiology - permeate and structure relationships of men. Because my participants already challenged hegemonic masculinity - precisely by failing to perform or purposefully performing an alternative - the experience of becoming vegetarian indeed represented simply yet another performative practice that defined them as not-masculine and different, more generally. In a sense, vegetarian men demonstrate and understand, through their own experiences, that gender identities are fluid and always-changing. Their transition to vegetarianism represents just one aspect of a gender performance that is constantly negotiated, managed and (re)produced. The familiarity of this territory meant that vegetarian men were well-equipped to handle the consequences of this change; even when the gender policing came from acquaintances, more distant family members and strangers.

Other Non-Vegetarian Men

The participants had a variety of negative experiences with male acquaintances, co-workers, extended family members and strangers in response to their becoming or being

vegetarian. The wide range of these interactions demonstrates the hegemonic status of both animal-based diets and notions of gender binaries. The gendered nature of these interactions also speaks to mainstream assumptions about the relationship of masculinity and meat consumption.

Geoff, the first participant to respond to a question about his relationships with other men, shared with the group that a personal trainer at a local gym refused to work with him (after his third session) because he was vegetarian; he argued that Geoff “needed” to eat meat in order to build muscle mass. Geoff went on to say that:

... all of the males that I encountered [at the gym] were very adversative to vegetarianism ... and they justified it by saying “well you can’t really build protein ... you can’t get bulky and big” ... what if I don’t want to be bulky and big? And of course, you’re working under the false premise that you can’t get protein from soy, beans, nuts. So, there was a lot of pushback from that because I think the link in their heads was so strong between physical muscle mass and physical masculinity and a big body and meat eating (Interview, 41:07).

Because men’s bodies are policed by regimes of intelligibility - which dictate that they ought to be “big and bulky” - and because the false assumption that this can only be achieved through the consumption of animal flesh is so taken for granted, the men at the gym (and men in general) have to either acknowledge the social constructedness of discourses of masculinity and/or meat eating, or simply render the individual (in this case, Geoff) who is challenging them “unintelligible”. Put another way, Geoff’s “vegetarian masculinity” was placed within the arena of gendered power relations, and came out the other side as a subordinated masculinity within the context of the gym. The men at the gym saw Geoff as misled or plainly incorrect in terms of both his dietary choices and ideas about how men ought to look. Their inferences on his body and health conflicts with the previous conclusion made by Merriman (2010) that, for men, vegetarianism is seen as a “healthful demonstration of self-control”. The difference here probably stems from the group that the participants are interacting with - in Merriman’s study,

participants were interacting mostly their families and close friends, in this example, participants were interacting with acquaintances at the gym.

Tim's performance of a masculinity that includes vegetarianism was likewise understood as unintelligible according to his grandfather. Tim told us that, while he was in the room and within earshot his:

Grandfather asked my grandmother, whispered very loudly ... "so Tim's vegetarian" and then he was like "so he's homosexual?" ... in a ... serious way. Like I knew that he thought that was a bad thing. But ... like, it was a matter of fact ... "he didn't eat meat, he was gay" - or, I was gay (Interview, 18:26).

Here, the rigidity of gendered regimes of intelligibility - and Tim's grandfather's inability to deconstruct them - forces him to map his grandson's being vegetarian (understood simply as being "feminine") directly onto his sexuality. To use the simple categories of Adams (1994), because Tim's grandfather could no longer understand him as belonging to category "A" (straight, meat-eating, masculine, etc.) he must, therefore, belong to a different category - "Not A" (gay, vegetarian, feminine). In Connell's model, Tim's repudiation of meat placed him in a subordinated position, relative to his grandfather's conception of a meat-eating, heterosexual hegemonic masculinity. Along with meat, then, he repudiated his compulsory heterosexuality and was therefore effeminate and "gay".

Nate received a lot of the same dualistic categorizations from his colleagues, saying:

I get a lot of ridicule from other people who are in the same profession as I am and doing ... events, doing charity events, I work with a lot of [people] that are complete meat-heads and they will make fun of me for being vegan and I've been called gay, I've been made fun of on Twitter from different [people] in the area ... (Interview, 9:40)

However, Nate's response to this "gay baiting" (Kimmel and Mahler 2003) has been to act defensively in an attempt to turn the tables and instead bait his aggressors.

My rebuttal is: “your clientele is a bunch of middle-aged, fat men and my clientele is a bunch of beautiful women - a bunch of beautiful guys” and like - really? you’re trying to call me gay and you’re trying to emasculate me but I’m pretty sure that [my business] would be the place you’d want to hang out as a macho asshole (Nate, Interview, 9:40)

In doing so, Nate attempts to force his colleagues to reevaluate their views of him as an individual while maintaining their collective ideas about performances of hegemonic masculinity. He is not so much interested in deconstructing these gender regimes, as he is in subsuming vegetarianism into the hegemonic masculine ideal. For Nate, vegetarian masculinity is “marginalized” - to use Connell’s (2005) classifications. Like marginalized Black masculinities (which Connell uses as an example), vegetarianism is grounds for alienation and ostracism for all but a privileged few - a group which Nate attempts to expand to include himself. This is actually a fairly common tactic within the North American animal rights movement, where vegan athletes such as Mac Danzig, Robert Cheeke and Brendan Brazier are presented (somewhat curiously) as exemplars of how men can be both vegetarian and yet still perform hegemonic masculinity.

This effort to seek inclusion within the framework of hegemonic masculinity - while an understandable coping strategy for particular men - is a poor tactic for animal rights organizers, in general. While this may increase the visibility and cultural authority of vegetarian voices over the short-term, it nevertheless fails to adequately challenge the antagonistic and hierarchical nature of the taken-for-granted configuration of gendered practices over the long-term. By focusing on achieving recognition from the homosocial community of hegemonic masculinity for a few, exceptional vegetarians, some animal rights organizers (including women) limit the extent to which they are able to appeal to feminist women and other marginalized groups and, ultimately, undermine efforts to achieve emancipation for animals.

Vegetarian Men

For most of my participants, the transition to vegetarianism and loss of friends seemed to be mitigated by the fact that there is a fairly large community of vegetarians and vegans in St. Catharines. While they may have lost some old friends by becoming vegetarian, they also came into a community where they could count on making new ones.

Asked if they were comfortable self-identifying as vegetarian or vegan, Michael, being the newest, had this to say:

I'm vegan and I'm proud about it. I think it's really cool that the community here is so diverse and so open and so large that there's a vegan restaurant, there are vegan options ... there's a group that I've been a part of a few months now - a local activist group ... there's a lot of really cool people (Michael, Interview, 1:46:20).

Charlie, having been vegetarian for a lot longer, was not fortunate enough to have this community available right away. This kept him from identifying as a vegan, opting instead to occupy the middle ground as a vegetarian:

I had only known one other vegetarian when I went vegetarian and it was the one who had influenced me to learn about it and I remember having this attitude toward veganism like if I was talking to someone and they were like "well do you eat eggs or milk" I was like "oh yeah!" Like I was still on their side a little. It was weird ... as I got more involved politically I met more vegetarians and vegans ... there was this support network - like, going to a vegan potluck once a month ... or just going to vegan potlucks at people's houses and stuff and Food Not Bombs kind of helped me learn how to cook so once I had the skills and the tools to maintain a vegan lifestyle and like friends and fellow activists who could provide that support it was just - there really was no more excuses for not being vegan (Charlie, Interview, 1:51:43)

Richard echoed Michael and Charlie's feelings about there being a sizable supportive community of vegetarians and vegans, and talked about how this made him feel included and like he was "less of a weirdo":

I feel like definitely now it's easier to talk about [veganism] because ... there's a bigger community and it increases awareness with people who aren't in the community and it makes you seem like less of a weirdo, I guess, that there's actually a larger group of people so it's kind of reassuring and provides like back-up and it makes it easier to be proud, in a way (Richard, Interview, 1:53:51)

Beyond this, Richard and the other participants felt like they had an easier time getting along with men in the vegetarian/vegan community, that it was easier to relax and be themselves around vegetarians. Answering a different question, later in the focus group, Richard offered this:

Your original question was about whether it's easier to be friends with males in a community that includes vegetarian males and I definitely feel that it is in a certain way because I feel like before, when I didn't identify as a typical masculine male, I was always second guessing whether I would be able to relate to another male and, if so, on what grounds and I generally found it easier because I didn't second-guess myself in that way when I was relating to females and I think - I don't know if it has to do specifically with vegetarianism or veganism or whether it has to do with being a part of the social justice community in general - but I feel like I can at least have the opportunity to connect with males that are challenging the ideas of what it means to be a masculine male and then I don't have to worry about - like, I still remember once when my partner pointed out to me that I talked completely different to one of my friends who is not in a social justice community and is more of a masculine male and more of a - she noticed that my voice was different on the phone and I didn't even notice it myself but I think it's because I was trying to act like more of a masculine person, in order to connect with them better (Richard, Interview, 2:05:07).

Here, while not adopting the language of poststructural feminism, Richard admits that he does, in fact, perform masculinity and that this performance is especially hegemonic around non-vegetarian men. On the other hand, he says he feels more comfortable around vegetarian men because he does not feel the pressure to conform to the gender regimes of hegemonic masculinity. His relationships, therefore, with vegetarian men are much more natural and relaxed - he is able to connect with them better, while also feeling as though his performance is less exaggerated. This example very clearly exposes the constructedness of homosocial male relationships, which are organized around the performance and evaluation of masculinity.

“Masculine” Activities

An interesting discussion around masculine gender practice emerged as both Nate and Tim regretted that the vegetarian men that they knew were not interested in traditionally

“masculine” activities (with the exception of tabletop board games) such as sports and “pub nights”:

There haven’t been a lot of guys around the vegetarian scene, where I was coming from ... there were less road hockey games and less playing basketball and less playing sports and going out at 2AM to a bar or - less “guy” stuff that are typically “masculine” activities . Thank God for board games, I guess - but I still don’t feel like I have those activities. There’s not like the “norm” activities which sometimes is good but sometimes it’s like - shit (Tim, Interview, 2:06:56).

Nate pointed out that this lack of “masculine” activities might just be specific to the St. Catharines community. He talked about visiting another community in Greensboro, North Carolina where vegetarians:

... had nights of when they would do things. Like every Tuesday and Thursday was a sports night - they’d go to the local university and play like soccer or frisbee or something to be active and then like there’d be a few people who would stick around to run the bleachers or do something and like stay fit and be healthy ... people had that sort of networked out that they constantly had things that they were doing and even if it wasn’t that and it was a board game night or something that’s like that but it’s something that’s stimulating that you’re doing with a group of people (Nate, Interview, 2:08:47).

Although Nate’s description of these activities did not seem to be especially gendered, the type of activities he described, as well as the fact that he brought it up in response to Tim’s lament indicates that, in his mind, they likely are. As Tim pointed out, some of the participants do in fact play board games together and with other men from time to time, but the feeling was that this was not enough, that there were not enough homosocial male activities to satisfy the participants. Again, although none of these activities are expressly enjoyed *only* by men, the fact that the participants brought this up during a focus group about (vegetarian) masculinity indicates that, at least to them, these activities do have a particularly gendered aspect to them. It is interesting to note, as well, that the activities mentioned are almost exclusively *competitive* sports or games.

In general, however, the participants communicated that men in vegetarian communities do not have the same homosocial pressures to perform hegemonic masculinity. Instead, they felt

that they had a wider range of possible gender expressions available to them or, as Tim explains, could forge their own ideas about what it means to “be a man”.

I kind of think it's easier to be a man in this scene than outside because like I wasn't emasculated before going vegetarian but I was one of the only guys in my group of friends who was vegetarian and then all the vegetarians I knew were generally female and then it's like - you're effectively, I don't know - cutting out the competition ... if you're one of the only guys in the room then it's easier for you to define what it is to be a guy (Tim, Interview, 54:30).

In this example, Tim shows how homosocial relationships between men structure and “define” masculinity. This process of social construction happens relationally, between men (and women) and is co-constitutive. In communities where the fluidity of gendered performances is better understood, there is a recognition that this process of social construction can be consciously tailored by individuals and groups of individuals in such a way that the definitions and the boundaries of these definitions are less restrictive. It might be said that vegetarian men - and all men - are negotiating not just masculinity, but femininity, too. While the ideal goal might be to work towards eliminating these boundaries altogether, the participants' efforts to undermine the rigidity of gendered practice is a step in the right direction.

The participants were careful to point out, however, that vegetarian or vegan communities are not without their own gendered power relations and hierarchies - a point to which this paper will return.

Relationships with Women

Every participant seemed to feel that they had a stronger affinity for women; they had an easier time relating to and making friends with women and felt as though they had been predominately raised by their mother - whether their fathers were estranged or not. Women played key roles as motivators and as supporters during men's transition to vegetarianism. Many

of the participants made statements that seemed to indicate that they felt women had an innate or biologically-determined ability to feel empathy for animals that somehow rubbed off on them. This section addresses these aspects of vegetarian men's relationships with women, which all of the participants felt were important or vital to their transition.

Women as Motivators

With the exception of Tim, whose friends had joked and teased that he had become vegetarian to attract a woman (although he asserted that he had not) most of the participants said that, in one way or another, they had indeed been motivated or influenced by women to become vegetarian.

For many (Charlie, Geoff and Michael), their female partners were already vegetarian or were becoming vegetarian during their relationships and they therefore learned about vegetarianism through them. For Charlie, as well as others, the "catalyst" to his vegetarian "career path" (McDonald 2001) was these relationships with women, however, like the others, Charlie initially "repressed" (McDonald 2001) this. He said:

It was motivated by - I dated a vegetarian - who, eats meat now, ironically. And I didn't want to go vegetarian at all while we were together. It was the weirdest thing - just like "nope - forget that" but because of like just hanging with her all the time the information like I couldn't not - I couldn't "unknow" certain things and like I want to say about a year after we broke up I was reading about it a lot more and I decided to stop eating meat (Charlie, Interview, 13:45).

Geoff was likewise motivated by a female partner, and, like Charlie, initially argued or debated with her about his meat-eating. Like Charlie, he had to discover his own reasons for becoming vegetarian - a point which he was very conscious of and articulated well:

It was inspired by a girlfriend that I had at the time - she was vegetarian and she was a very good debater and whenever she called my premises about meat-eating into question, I really couldn't defend them intellectually and that really didn't sit well with me - the fact that there really is no good argument that I could think of for being an omnivore so I sort of pushed it aside and I didn't want to be vegetarian because - it would be something she approved of -

because I knew that that sort of external motivation isn't really long-term lasting like the second that you break up with that person or the second you find differing motivation, you change your behaviour again so I really wanted to do it for the right reasons - for my own personal reasons - and she provided me with the literature to do so and I realized at that point - fully reading into it - that there really is no solid intellectual argument against vegetarianism or veganism (Geoff, Interview, 3:06).

Finally, although Richard was not intimate with either of them, he had:

... two female friends ... who were vegans and basically talked to me about why they were vegan and I'm the kind of person who will listen to any reasonable argument and I thought the arguments were reasonable - at least enough to motivate my own research into it - and that research led to me to just decide that it was the appropriate thing to do for myself (Richard, Interview, 6:41)

All three of these participants make a point of explaining that they had to do their own research or otherwise challenge themselves to get to the point where they took seriously the arguments of their female friends or partners. McDonald (2000), refers to this process as “repressing” their catalyst moment. While it is tempting to simply view this as a good use of critical thinking skills, this phenomena speaks to a valuing of gendered knowledges or ways of knowing that prefigures rationality, intellectual argumentation and scientific positivism (all read as “masculine” types of knowledge) above intuition, empathy and intersubjectivity (read as “feminine” ways of knowing). The willingness to “repress” this information also speaks to a devaluing of women’s ability to make rational arguments, since, as we can see in Richard’s example above, even when women are conveying informational using these methods, it is initially challenged or refuted. The distinction, roughly categorized as being between rationality on the one hand and empathy on the other is explored in more detail below.

Besides acting as motivators, women supported men through their transition to vegetarianism. Geoff pondered to himself:

Maybe we have the cause and effect here turned around, because most of my friends, even to this day, are female and the few males that I surround myself with are very like-minded individuals ... So maybe it's that ... we're less masculine men ... and thus we don't face the same issues that a more masculine male would when they, when he converts to vegetarianism or

veganism and that exposure to women who are more frequently vegetarian or vegan probably helps us along, makes the choice easier (Geoff, Interview, 53:49).

Michael seemed to agree with this statement, adding: “most of my life I grew up with women around me so I just maybe have a different mindset, a different view of things” (Interview, 56:15). Finally, Richard attempted to tie these ideas together:

Another thought that came to my mind - when Michael mentioned having strong female role models, I think - and it sort of ties into what Geoff was saying about having the cause and effect backwards - and I think that the fact that we didn't care about how masculine we were and maybe we weren't maybe part of these masculine groupthink-type situations as much may have contributed to us being more open to alternative ideas but I also think having strong female role models or spending time with girls more than guys can perhaps better develop our sense of empathy which can then also lead to thinking differently about vegetarianism. I think someone that grew up - say their father was the primary person in their life growing up and then they surrounded themselves with males their whole life they might not be as - their empathy might not be as well developed and they might be more like the person who, when I talk to them and I say “blah blah blah this is what happens in factory farming, and blah blah blah” and they're the type of person who would say “yeah? I don't really care though - I don't really care about animals”, like, I've heard that response - like “I don't care if animals experience pain and suffering” and to me that shows a lack of empathy being well-developed (Richard, Interview, 1:01:27).

The participants - particularly Richard - again drew a connection between women and empathy. They all seemed to agree that their relationships with women - which were better and more meaningful than their relationships with men prior to becoming vegetarian - influenced, motivated or helped them through their transition to vegetarianism. It is true that women far outnumber men in terms of their likelihood to be vegetarianism and to be active within the animal rights movement (Gaarder 2011) so it is not too surprising that the participants pinpoint their relationships with women as being a precursor to becoming vegetarian. What was surprising, however, was the rationale that the participants provided for this phenomenon, examined below.

Empathy versus Rationality

A gendered binary between masculine rationality on the one hand and feminine empathy on the other emerged several times during the focus group discussions and was reproduced by

the majority of the focus group participants. As indicated above, this was principally manifested through the way in which the participants came to vegetarianism, based on their own “rational” investigations. Richard, Geoff, Charlie and Michael all indicated that they had been initially motivated by women to consider vegetarianism, but refused to take it seriously until after they had investigated the “intellectual arguments” (Geoff, Interview, 3:06) for themselves. In some cases, as with Richard, even when women helped to illuminate the issue with rational arguments, they were initially challenged or resisted.

Echoing sex role theories, some of the participants (Richard and Geoff) seemed to indicate that they felt women had an innate or biologically-determined empathy for animals, although it is more likely that the regimes of intelligibility (Butler 1990) that dictate how women ought to perform femininity are more tolerant or allowing for women who wish to explore compassionate attitudes toward animals. This attitude seemed to be a common thread for the participants, who recounted stories of women’s empathy or “sentimentality”. They seemed to be divided on whether their difficulty with being able to properly empathize with animals was a positive or negative characteristic.

Tim was the first to share one of these stories as evidence of how “nice” he thought most vegetarians were:

My last long-term relationship, she stopped in the middle of the road to pick up a bag of food - like a ziplock bag that someone had dropped - because a crow kept flying into traffic to try to get it. She picked it up and put it on the side of the road, and opened the bag for him - or her (Interview, 18:26)

This seemed to trigger a memory that Nate shared with us which he felt exemplified how “screwed up, emotionally” he was.

I remember riding bicycles ... and a bird got hit by a car and my friend threw her bike down, ran and grabbed the bird and called the humane society and just couldn't stop crying and I wasn't phased by it at all. Like, I felt uncomfortable for not reacting (Interview, 1:04:53).

Charlie had a similar experience, recalling:

Same thing happened to me. I watched a squirrel get hit and I was with that girl at the time and she just had to sit down and like - it was dead - and she was just bawling and I just remember feeling like it was terrible that the squirrel got hit but it was kind of like "when are we going to get up and keep walking?" (Interview, 1:06:04)

The commonality of these experiences was not lost on the participants, who immediately got to work explaining and justifying their lack of empathy, socially constructing an answer to the hanging questions surrounding the similarity of the three stories, which the other participants seemed to identify with, even if they did not share their own examples. Nate began the discussion by drawing a parallel with the loss of human life:

Maybe I'm just not a sensitive person in that sense, because there were times when I was in high school that people would die and I just wouldn't care ... people die all the time in more horrific ways but I'm not feeling empathy for them because they're not a part of my life so why should I feel empathy for the jock football player who went into the canal? (Interview, 1:07:25)

Interestingly, Nate draws a caricature of hegemonic masculinity in the "jock football player" whose life he says he does not care about. This perhaps serves two purposes: to demonstrate the distance between himself and a particular performance of hegemonic masculinity and to justify his lack of empathy for the person performing it.

Richard then draws a distinction between the male participants and the women in their stories in terms of their reactions to the animal deaths:

I think also there's an important distinction between empathy and sentimentalism. I mean I don't think necessarily bawling for an hour over an animal that's already dead doesn't accomplish anything, I mean maybe that's a little bit cold to phrase it in that particular way. But I think for me when I was considering the animal rights issues and considering going vegan I wouldn't say it wasn't about my empathy but I wasn't sentimental about it. I wasn't thinking "my heart goes out to these animals" I was more thinking that my sense of empathy contributed to my sense of fairness and to me it became an issue of fair and unfair which doesn't have to be emotional, it can be entirely logical and rational and if something seems unfair to me then I don't want to participate in it - not because it makes me cry but just because it goes against my

sense of fairness. So I think that you can still be empathetic without being emotional - in a way - without being sentimental about the loss of animal life (Interview, 1:10:03).

Despite the terms that Richard uses, the distinction being made here seems to be between empathy versus rationality, where femininity is associated with the former and masculinity with the latter. This coincides with Birke's (1986) nature-culture dichotomy, explored by both Fiddes (1991) and Adams (1994). Richard differentiates these two ways of knowing from one another and sets up a hierarchy between them, with rationality and logic valued more highly than empathy or "sentimentality". With the exception of Tim, the other participants seemed to agree with this categorization and ranking. Indeed, although Geoff was able to point out that this discussion was "swinging back into masculinity now" (Interview, 1:10:49), he nevertheless lent his silent approval to Richard's argument. This is a perfect example of one of the main advantages of focus group methods: the participants were actively (re)producing the social construction of knowledge and gendered power dynamics (albeit in an unexpected manner) through a relational dialogue.

Donovan and Adams (eds.) explore the privileging of rationality and empiricism over empathy and subjectivity within animal rights debates in their 1996 volume "*Beyond Animal Rights: A Feminist Caring Ethic for the Treatment of Animals*". The collection of essays that comprise the volume are written by a variety of authors, many of whom argue that feminist ethic-of-care theories can and ought to be extended to issues of animal well-being. These ethic-of-care theories begin from the position that human animals are capable of experiencing both empathy and intersubjectivity with other animals and that this alone ought to serve as a basis for extending compassion and care to other animals. These traits - compassion, empathy, subjectivity and nurturing - are commonly associated with femininity and Donovan (1996), in

particular, argues that the focus on rights-based theories distracts and devalues the importance of these approaches to thinking about and acting on behalf of animals. Leading animal rights theorists Tom Regan (2004) and Gary Francione (2008) have responded to these criticism in their own ways. In a short section of the preface of the second edition of "*The Case for Animal Rights*", Regan (2004 xli-xliii) points out that empathy and compassion have always been motivating factors for him, personally, and argues that his positions have simply been misrepresented by ecofeminist writers. Francione (2008), on the other hand, devotes an entire chapter of his "*Animals As Persons: Essays on the Abolition of Animal Exploitation*" to sidestepping much of the ecofeminist criticism. Although he does make some valid points about some of the actual adherents to feminist care approaches and their defense of meat consumption and captivity, for the most part, he returns to his own theoretical rumination (personhood, property status, welfare/abolitionism) to disprove the tangibility of the ethic-of-care, without ever addressing the base concern - namely, the devaluing of empathy and subjectivity within rights discourses.

Like Francione (2008), however, I worry that in attempting to undermine the privileging of one way of knowing (rationality and rights theories), ecofeminist writers like Donovan are simply privileging another (empathy and ethic-of-care). The point, I think, should be to destabilize this dualism altogether. Each way of knowing seems to have its own strengths and may appeal to different audiences in divergent ways. In the case of this study, rights theories seemed to resonate more strongly with most of my participants; even if they were initially influenced by women's empathy. For my participants, empathy - their initial resistance to it, and

the eventual embrace of it - as well as recognizing the subjectivity of animal others seemed to be an important precursor to their becoming vegetarian.

On Hierarchy, Patriarchy and Hegemonic Masculinity

In the weeks leading up to the focus group, some major changes had occurred within the social justice and animal rights communities in St. Catharines. Participants felt that this infighting had resulted from shifting power dynamics and abuses of power. The participants agreed that this was typical of patriarchal power structures and felt that the resultant fallout - both interpersonal and organizational/political - was a “natural” consequence of performances of hegemonic masculinity.

When I first asked the participants to discuss how they related to other vegetarian men, Nate, who had been most recently affected by the changes jumped ahead to answer my follow-up question. He said that these changes were a recent development, but that such power dynamics were inevitable:

Six months ago, I would have said “Yes... I can get along with males more in the vegan community” but I feel like recently it’s turned into ... another form of hierarchy and like - it’s just like every community is going to have a hierarchy and there’s always going to be people on top and there’s macho assholes no matter where you are and it’s not going to change ... there’s power dynamics in every social group - there’s power dynamics no matter where you are - whether it’s work, whether it’s social groups, whatever. But like, there’s no difference between the hockey jocks and us - you know what I mean - there’s going to be the nice, sensitive people in that group, there’s also going to be the people who have been put into a position of power and then that changes them mentally and they turn into something that they’re not ... Like, people will feel like they’re in a situation of power and then they’ll use it. It’s just a repetitive cycle (Nate, Interview, 2:03:26).

Nate hypothesized that vegetarian and vegan men had been bullied in high school or before (perhaps for not performing hegemonic masculinity) and were thus on the receiving end of a hierarchal power structure. Now, however, within vegetarian communities, they had an opportunity to wield power. He said: “for your entire life you had no power and now you all of a

sudden do. That dynamic is going to fuck with you, no matter who you are” (Nate, Interview, 2:22:54).

Geoff and Richard seemed to agree that hierarchy and power structures were “natural” or inevitable but offered more evolutionary and biological determinist arguments to support this.

Geoff, for instance, argued that:

the people that are running the show in the vegan community, most often men, do so because they were the people running the show in the previous communities they were part of. It’s just their personality. ... You have shy submissive people that concede responsibility and authority to the more assertive, aggressive people or natural leaders, or people that are naturally aggressive and so they sort of take up in this hierarchy that you mention just sort of automatically happens. And that’s why there is such a push for non-hierarchical structure [within the vegetarian community] and you need to act differently to do it because the opposite is what is natural (Interview, 2:25:06)

Richard agreed: “I think that there is legitimate evolutionary reasons for why that happens” (Interview, 2:27:17), after all: “that is exactly what happens in the primate world” (2:33:03). In doing so, Richard demonstrates a speciesist oversimplification underpinning this determinist line of thinking - namely, that just one “primate world” exists, and that the behaviour of primates (ourselves included) is entirely explained by evolutionary responses. His statement exemplifies the erasure of animal subjectivity that is threaded throughout evolutionary/biological explanations of animal (and human) behaviour.

Earlier in the focus group, the participants had worked together to provide a definition for manhood or masculinity. Their collaborative definition of “masculinity” - based on the examples provided by the dominant culture - included dynamics like “power, both physical and social” (Richard, Interview, 25:36), “aggressiveness” (Charlie, Interview, 25:45), “dominance” (Michael, Interview, 25:47), “control” (Geoff, Interview, 25:54), “not showing emotions” (Charlie, Interview, 26:07) and “displays of status” (Richard, Interview, 26:32). These

same defining characteristics emerged as the participants discussed how or why hierarchal power structures emerged and what sort of qualities were put on display by the (usually male) leaders of these communities.

That this overlap exists is hardly surprising. Most North American, White, able-bodied boys and men (even vegetarian ones) are consistently provided models for masculinity that are structured around the performance of these traits (and the repudiation of their discursive opposites). Many North American, White, able-bodied girls and women, likewise, are taught to be passive, subordinate, laissez-faire, emotional and shy. That these hegemonic ideas about what it means to be a man or woman follow people into vegetarian social communities should be expected. In “Gender Divisions in Labour, Leadership, and Legitimacy”, a chapter of her 2011 book, Gaarder (2011) explores these and other patriarchal structures endemic to animal rights communities and advocacy organizations. She writes:

Many women felt that men were favoured as leaders and spokespersons in the movement, and that the day-to-day actions performed by women activists were devalued next to the heroic ideal of radical actions often undertaken by men. The kind of work and image considered more valuable in the movement was a gender issue (Gaarder 2011, 88).

Similarly, the hierarchy of leadership and legitimacy structures gender divisions between men who perform hegemonic masculinity within the animal rights movement and vegetarian communities and men who do not (or who perform an alternative masculinity). Indeed, during an activist conference where I presented some of my preliminary findings for this very project, I was told by a radical liberationist and activist leader that the bravado and physical feats of strength required to liberate animals from confinement carried with them a distinctly macho quality - an assumption that led him to the conclusion that these activities (which are highly

valued and celebrated by the animal rights movement) ought to only be carried out by men and “masculine” women.

Based on my own experience, even in St. Catharines, where many social justice and animal rights activists pride themselves on being intersectional and informing their activism with the lessons of poststructural feminist theory, the (radical) work of men (particularly straight, white men) is held up and valued more highly than any other. The privileging of men and “masculine” forms of activism presents a clear problem for animal rights activists; however, to the extent that this problem can be challenged or overcome, activists need only open themselves up to the possibility of exploring and discussing avenues for change. The biggest obstacle in this light appears to be pride - another notoriously “masculine” trait. However, all activists are, nevertheless, people and, as Nate reminds us:

no matter who you are ... you're not impervious to fucking up. Not everyone is a complete super hero about everything they do and everyone makes mistakes. The fact of the matter is that you need to be able to accept that and let other people get over it - and that is the biggest problem I see in most social justice movements, whether its people I know in Portland, New York, here, its like - fuck, let someone grow as a person, instead of just [ostracizing] them (Interview, 2:22:54).

Although the work will be difficult, activists (particularly men) must challenge each other and themselves to question and disrupt the dominance of men and “masculine” forms of activism within both vegetarian communities and the animal rights movement.

Discussion

This project adequately answered the research questions that I set out to investigate, detailed above. The data that were collected paint a vivid portrait of certain vegetarian men's understandings of gender practice, masculinity, patriarchy, power relations, and their own place within homosocial male communities. In addition, this project also provided a wealth of data on

vegetarian men's lived realities and demonstrated, on an empirical level, the ubiquitousness of the relationship between meat consumption and hegemonic masculine performances. Finally, it successfully illustrated the consequences of questioning, challenging and/or transgressing the boundaries of the meat/masculinity relationship and, in doing so, added to a growing body of empirical explorations of this topic.

The project itself, as an exploration of how vegetarian men understand themselves and their communities may well fall within what Connell (2000) calls the "ethnographic moment" in masculinity research. She explains, providing evidence of a great many studies completed around the time that her book was published, that masculinity research has explored, in great detail, the lived realities and everyday existences of different groups of men. Although she advocates for a move beyond this type of research, to broader, more intersectional and generalizable studies, the fact remains that this particular research locale (vegetarian men) has hitherto been mostly overlooked and seldom examined in this manner: with special attention paid to how the two identities - masculine and vegetarian - intersect. This project begins to illuminate this unique subculture within the framework of gender studies and, employing feminist methodologies, privileges vegetarian men's voices - as opposed to privileging omnivorous men's opinions or popular views about vegetarians (e.g. Ruby 2011, Potts and Perry 2010, Stibbe 2004).

As a method for concluding this project, it is useful, I think, to revisit the guiding research questions in a structured manner - to demonstrate the ways in which the focus group explored and illuminated the social phenomenon of vegetarian masculinity and ensure that my research goals were achieved. While there is likely to be some overlap between these discussions

and the analysis above, I will also use this as an opportunity to propose what the sociological significance of these findings may be and what implications they hold for both studies in gender performances, generally and those of men specifically.

Research Answers

1. What kinds of challenges and/or types of gender policing do young men experience when becoming vegetarian?

This question has already been explored in some detail in the preceding analysis, especially in terms of my participant's relationships with their fathers and with other non-vegetarian men. In many ways, my participants' responses confirmed my own hypotheses, formed by the relevant literature and my own experiences of being a vegetarian man. Many of my participants were ridiculed and "gay baited" by their male peers, co-workers and strangers for becoming vegetarian. Many of the participants felt that their performance of masculinity was disappointing to their fathers or caused a strain in this relationship. Existing empirical studies of the process of becoming vegetarian as well as the inferences we can draw from social constructionist and poststructural gender theory demonstrate that vegetarianism is subordinated to the dominant masculine hegemony. There are many ways to approach this conclusion, some of which this paper has already alluded to. Meat is a powerful symbol for both the male domination of nature, on the one hand, and the virile, muscular "real" food of the male sex, on the other (Fiddes 1991; Adams 2004). Eschewing meat, therefore, connotes that vegetarian masculinity is effeminate - it embraces feminine traits such as compassion, peace and nonviolence and is therefore treated as an opposition to masculinity within the dominant framework of gender dualism (Fiddes 1991). Vegetarian masculinity, therefore, is subordinate to

hegemonic masculinity and subject to the same taunting, ridicule, verbal assault and other forms of gender policing common to hegemonic masculinity's treatment of women and other subordinated masculinities - including, but not limited to gay masculinities (Connell 2005; Kimmel 1994).

The other way of viewing this, however, is that vegetarianism threatens the legitimacy of an already tenuously-positioned hegemonic masculinity; it is a threat that compounds on the supposed "crisis" in masculinity. Changes in the economic and political realities of men - created, in large part by the liberation movements of women and other equity-seeking groups - have undermined hegemonic masculinity's legitimacy to a point where many men feel that their masculinity is in crisis. Vegetarianism emerges as one potential site of contestation, a locus for the backlash of hegemonic masculinity and those complicit in its maintenance. According to the masculine discourses analyzed by Rogers (2008) and Buerkle (2009), vegetarianism is closely aligned with the environmental movement - another "feminizing" influence seeking to limit men's conquest and domination of nature and, as a result, like other threats to the legitimacy of hegemonic masculinity, must be resisted. Vegetarian men stand on the front lines of this gender conflict; they are the embodiment of a palpable threat and they must therefore be subordinated with every tool of gender policing available.

2. How do young vegetarian men understand themselves as men or as masculine - both within their peer groups and individually?

Almost all of the participants which I recruited for this research project saw their vegetarianism as just one aspect of a holistic alternative masculine gender performance, motivated by their shared commitment to social justice activism. Their vegetarianism, therefore,

was not the defining characteristic of this performance but merely one additional aspect of their understandings of themselves. That most of this social justice activism took place within a community of activists deeply rooted in anti-oppression and feminist theory meant that their alternative performances of masculinity (and opposition to hegemonic constructions of masculinity) was celebrated and revered by their male allies and friends. Vegetarianism, in this context, rather than being stigmatized as it would be in the popular cultural context, is in fact held up as a virtuous and valuable trait. Within the isolated community of social justice and animal rights activists, vegetarianism is something to be proud of; it is worn as a badge of honour - indeed, sometimes physically, in the form of a T-shirt, patch or tattoo.

Outside of this context, my participants were, in fact, stigmatized as vegetarian men. However, their understandings of gender theory (because of their participation in a feminist-oriented social justice community) helped to steel them against the gender policing of hegemonic masculinity and those complicit in its maintenance. While they infrequently (and surprisedly) found themselves (re)producing hegemonic masculine performances in certain contexts (Richard's phone call with an old friend, Nate's arguments with colleagues), for the most part, they seemed to indicate that their performances of masculinity around friends, family and strangers rendered them either subordinated, marginalized or, in some contexts, complicit. Because vegetarianism is, for the most part, an invisible stigma (except when one is dining or, sometimes, shopping), vegetarian men are often able to "pass" - to appropriate a term from intersex and trans communities - as non-vegetarian men. In the absence of any other visible subordinated traits (class, race, sexuality, etc.), vegetarian men are able to avoid being stigmatized and subordinated and may elect to do so in strategic circumstances (at work, for

instance). Therefore, while vegetarian masculinity is itself subordinated, vegetarian men, as individuals, may elect to remain invisible, to not claim that identity. This privilege is not afforded to most other subordinated groups. By not revealing themselves and challenging the primacy of meat foods and their relationship with hegemonic masculinity, vegetarian men may run the risk of becoming complicit in the oppression of non-hegemonic men, women and others. Indeed, every opportunity to challenge male privilege - even on an issue as seemingly benign as diet - may have resounding consequences.

3. To what extent does the refusal to exploit animals generally (through not hunting, fishing, etc.) or to eat meat, specifically, alter the ways in which young men understand themselves as men or as masculine?

Because all of my participants already understood themselves as men who performed an alternative masculinity and because they possessed (or were at least aware of) feminist and/or social constructionist perspectives on gender, becoming vegetarian did not exemplify a particularly challenging change for my participants. Their understandings of themselves as men were shaped around a comprehension of the fluid, changing, relational structures of gender performances and a recognition that the dualistic sex/gender binary was wholly inadequate for describing the full spectrum of gendered and sexual possibilities. As a result, they were better able to comprehend gender policing for what it was - a method or strategy for hegemonic masculinity to fortify and protect itself from the undermining influence of alternative masculine performances. As a result, the “gay baiting”, insults, ridicule and other forms of verbal assault did not seem to especially affect my participants. They saw this behaviour - perhaps rightly so - as being indicative of an insecurity and ignorance on the part of the assailants.

In addition, my participants' understandings of gender as a performative and fluid process of gender construction made it possible for them to see their transition to vegetarianism as an organic and evolving process of "doing" gender. Rather than being defined (or allowing others to define them) by their vegetarianism, they maintained that their decision to eschew meat was just another aspect of their self-identity (which was not always about masculinity, even). For many of the participants, this understanding of gender practice preceded their transition to vegetarianism and actually facilitated the process.

In conclusion, for the majority of my participants, becoming vegetarian did not significantly alter their understandings of themselves as men. On the contrary, their already-critical perspectives on gender and already-subordinated position in masculine hierarchies made it easier for my participants to consider and eventually transition to vegetarianism.

4. Do young vegetarian men have a better understanding of how gender is constructed and/or performed because of their transition toward vegetarianism?

Drawing on the previous answer and looking back at the data collected, it is clear to me now that the causal inference I made in originally posing this question was perhaps backwards. Rather than my participants' becoming vegetarian leading to a better understanding of the social construction and performance of gender, an already-existing critical perspective on gender configurations (influenced by their inability or unwillingness to perform hegemonic masculinity) made it easier for my participants to become vegetarian and to weather the consequences for doing so. There seemed to be a recognition on the part of my participants that systems of oppression are linked and intertwining, often operating through the same mechanisms to stigmatize, marginalize and exploit certain groups of human and non-human animals. It is,

however, interesting to note that the recognition of speciesism relies upon and therefore necessitates a recognition of sexism, racism, heterosexism and so on, but that recognizing these other matrixes of oppression does not necessitate the recognition of speciesism, per se. A sharp human/animal divide remains pervasive, even in progressive, social justice communities.

Evaluating Explanations

This research project serves as an important and illustrative example of how, in comparison with psychoanalytical and socialization theories, poststructural gender theory best explains gendered practice - particularly in terms of how individuals make conscious and purposeful decisions about their gendered performances. In many ways, vegetarianism or the choice to abstain from eating meat is a transformative gender practice for men. Although becoming vegetarian significantly alters social reality for women, too, the close relationship between meat and masculinity makes this choice especially noteworthy for men. The data collected in this research project serve to elucidate some of the consequences of this decision for men, however, even more interestingly, my thesis demonstrates the fluidity and malleability of masculine gender performances. By choosing to become vegetarian, men are actively negotiating and (re)producing an alternative gender performance that challenges and undermines the hegemonic ideal.

Both socialization theories and psychoanalytic crisis theories fail to adequately explain the fluidity of gender practice revealed by the transition to vegetarianism. Socialization theory, because of its insistent focus on childhood and learned “roles” of gender cannot possibly explain how an adult man, with a socially-learned sense of his “appropriate” gender role (as a meat-eater) could suddenly decide to embark on the transition to vegetarianism - thus compromising

his ability to properly perform his role. Likewise, as vegetarianism transgresses the boundaries of the male sex role, we may well expect that vegetarian men may regard themselves as deviant or otherwise failing at maintaining their gendered identities. None of my participants seemed to indicate that this was the case; however, the people (mainly acquaintances and co-workers) around them - perhaps influenced by the hegemony of sex role theories - did make inferences about their inability to be “real” (heterosexual, muscular, unemotional) men. This demonstrates that although socialization theories enjoy a pervasive cultural authority, they nevertheless have little - if any - influence over the lived realities of men who consciously perform alternative masculinities.

Similarly, psychoanalytic theories of gender discount and devalue the degree to which vegetarian men are able to make personal decisions about their diet and, hence, their gendered realities. Indeed, some psychoanalytic theories may treat the data collected in this project as an indication of a trend amongst vegetarian men, whose affinity for their mothers (and other women) and contrasting estrangement from their fathers could be viewed (narrowly) as a determinant for their decision to become vegetarian. When examined through lens of crisis theory, the decision to become vegetarian (and therefore challenge hegemonic masculinity) is seen as a consequence of a number of social and political factors which impact and alter the fundamental father/son relationship, causing a “crisis” in a masculine identity which includes meat consumption. The deterministic implications of such an explanation for gendered behaviour are alarming. This approach to understanding gendered behaviour leaves out or ignores the influence of personal choices (motivated by empathy, reason or a combination thereof) and the active engagement of individuals in constructing and (re)producing gender.

In both cases, we might expect that the process of becoming vegetarian would create gender anxieties or a supposed “crisis” in masculinity for vegetarian men - as their changing attitudes toward food, non-human animals and the environment conflict and question the taken-for-granted masculine ideals. Instead, this research project revealed that the “crisis” seemed to be most felt by those in close proximity to the vegetarian participants. Fathers, non-vegetarian male peers, acquaintances, co-workers and colleagues all seemed to be more unnerved than the participants themselves by the transition to vegetarianism. Perhaps unsurprisingly, my participants were well-equipped to deal with the gendered consequences of becoming vegetarian. According to the data collected and examined above, a number of factors influenced their preparedness - community, past familiarity with marginalization/subordination, strong relationships with female family members and friends, whiteness (which runs throughout all of this) - but none more so than their backgrounds in social justice and anti-oppression frameworks, especially feminism and gender theory. This way of understanding gender - as a fluid, changing, relational framework - helped my participants to see their becoming vegetarian as the transgressive form of gendered resistance that it is.

Conclusions

This research project sought to investigate the gendered lives of vegetarian men. It was designed around critical perspectives on both dualistic gender practice and non-human animal exploitation and informed by ecofeminism and poststructural gender theory. My findings were consistent with contemporary research on men and masculinity, especially the multiple masculinities model presented by Connell (2005) and contributed to a growing body of work on the lived experiences of vegetarians and how this intersects with gender.

A number of surprising conclusions can be drawn from this particular group of participants, although, as I elaborate below, a more diverse and perhaps less politically-progressive sample may produce different results. I have already discussed many of the major themes and answered the research questions that I set out to address above. The following paragraphs suggest ways in which this data may illuminate both gender theory - specifically Men's Studies - and animal liberation theory - specifically Critical Animal Studies.

My hope at the outset of this project was that this research could serve as a case study or example of the ways in which gender practices are shaped and negotiated through relations of power. The goal was to utilize vegetarianism or the refusal to eat meat as an example of the ways in which masculinity is discursively constructed around certain ideals or hegemonic codes of practice; to demonstrate the consequences of falling outside these intelligible bounds of dominant ideas about gender and, finally; to examine the extent to which gender is a constantly evolving, performative and relative practice. I am indebted to my intelligent, thoughtful and forthcoming participants for helping me to explore this phenomenon in such detail and for demonstrating - with their illuminative anecdotes, examples and responses - the unique and thought-provoking ways in which masculinity and meat consumption intersect.

While I was able to achieve many of the goals of this project and feel I collected enough data to satisfy my research questions, the most important thing that I learned, as a researcher, was the extent to which reflexivity and intersections of social realities determined my participants' understandings of both themselves and the world around them. It is impossible to simply say that vegetarianism makes men into social advocates and LGBTQQIA allies (as was one of my early assumptions); in fact, these are reflexive processes. For many of my

participants, vegetarianism was just one aspect of an entire shift in consciousness that was occurring while they reoriented themselves around social and environmental justice. Becoming vegetarian did indeed present certain challenges to my participants, especially in terms of how this interacted with being men, but they faced these challenges with an understanding that the dominant, taken-for-granted assumptions about gender mirrored the assumptions about animal agriculture, racism, capitalism and so on. Social consciousness about a particular issue or problem rarely occurs in a vacuum; it is often based on a core, principled belief in equity, justice or fairness. For my participants, their experiences of becoming vegetarian affected their understandings of gender every bit as much as their experiences of becoming a feminist, an atheist, an anarchist, etcetera affected their understandings of animal liberation. To the extent that what David Nibert (2002) calls the “Entanglements of Oppression” are so tightly interwoven, their disassembly requires a holistic and complete unravelling of commonly held assumptions and taken-for-granted attitudes about a variety of social phenomena including, but not limited to both animal liberation and gender performance.

This research contributes to an expanding “ethnographic moment” in Men’s Studies research. It puts poststructural gender theory to the test by examining its usefulness in explaining the gendered practices of vegetarianism. Finally, it examines ongoing disciplinary debates in the field of gender studies, generally, and Men’s Studies, specifically, and attempts to place a particular social phenomenon (vegetarianism) at the centre of them, to demonstrate the relative strengths and weaknesses of each approach. In doing so, this project reaffirms the explanatory power of social constructionist and poststructural models of gender and emphasizes the usefulness of Connell’s theory of multiple masculinities.

In addition to contributing to the field of Men's Studies, this project also contributes (although to a smaller degree) to animal liberation theory and the field of Critical Animal Studies. Throughout this report, I have examined ecofeminist perspectives on dualisms, the capitalist influences in popular discourses of meat and masculinity, the symbolic importance of meat and meat consumption and the concept of the absent referent as it pertains to all of these areas. With meat at the centre point of this entire project, it is necessary to conclude by de-fetishizing it, making present the absent referent.

Meat is, after all, never simply just food. While it is, and has been analyzed here as a symbol, a sign of status and a prop for the performance of masculinity, it is also always the flesh of slaughtered non-human animals. In its current configuration, the industrial meat industry demands the separation of kin, imprisonment, torture, forced impregnation, dismemberment and murder of billions of animals every single year. Even under the supposedly idyllic conditions of "Old McDonald's Farm", the acquisition of meat demands and requires that living, breathing beings be put to death simply to satisfy human desires. Nothing could connote a greater sense of human exceptionalism, supremacy and domination. While eating meat is not simply confined to men, it is men (specifically their connection with the performance of hegemonic masculinity) who are significantly threatened and resistant to the very notion of vegetarianism (as this project has documented) and it is men who celebrate, in grandiose fashion, the act of eating meat - as backyard barbecues and tailgate parties can attest. Meat is not simply a symbol but the very product of oppression, domination and brutal violence.

This project has convinced me that social constructionist and poststructural ideas about gender ought to be taught to children and especially boys from a very young age. Teaching about

gender using the examples of marginal cases (intersex, trans and queer people) may be an effective way to accomplish two necessary tasks: create safe spaces for people who do not fit into sex/gender binaries and eliminate or ameliorate gender anxieties surrounding the proposed “crisis” in masculinity and gender “role strain” - both of which appear to be caused by ideological attachments to rigid, static conceptions of gender. By undermining the legitimacy of hegemonic masculinity, we have an opportunity to steer boys and men away from performing or attempting to perform an idealized masculinity that encourages domination, threatening physicality and violence. In addition, we have an opportunity to teach men that their inability to live up to hegemonic masculinity is commonplace and hopefully mitigate some of the ill effects of gender anxieties - (sexualized) violence chief amongst them.

Further Study

In order to complete this project within with the tight window of time and resources allotted by a master’s thesis, the scope and scale of the research was necessarily narrowed. The data and conclusions offered here are hardly exhaustive of possible examinations of “vegetarian masculinities”. On the contrary, they open a number of various avenues for further research.

One of the approaches that my analysis could have taken up, but which I decided - for the sake of keeping my study narrow and focused on gender - to omit, was the relevance and influence that race, class and ability had upon my participants’ experiences of becoming vegetarian and, therefore, my data. To say that these factors did not impact on my participants’ experiences of becoming vegetarian would be myopic in the extreme. Indeed, because my participants (and myself) are located in the operant, unsignified categories of these dynamics (as White, middle-class, mostly able-bodied men), it is easy to overlook or understate the relevance

of these factors on the data. The decision to become vegetarian is of course based on and facilitated by a set of privileges. Being food secure - not having to rely on food banks or meal programs to meet dietary needs, having sufficient finances, time and other resources to educate oneself about alternatives to meat-eating and having access (both financial and proximal) to proper sources of food are important aspects of this choice. My intention throughout this project was not to ignore (and therefore legitimize) the invisibility of Whiteness, class privilege and ability, however, in not specifically foregrounding these considerations, I have run the risk of doing just that. Further research into vegetarian masculinities should make a stronger effort to foreground these aspects of men's experiences of becoming and remaining vegetarian so that these categories can be made visible.

In addition, my social position (as a White, working-class, able-bodied, straight cisgendered male) and the homogeneity of my sample (who were mostly the same) make the results of this study difficult to generalize. A more diverse sample, or number of samples from around the country, continent or planet might offer this advantage, as well as many others. For instance, I would be very interested to see what sort of variations and differences would have emerged if the focus group contained any non-White, gay-, bisexual-, trans-, queer-, intersexed- or asexual-identified men. As well, I would be interested to see how the data generated by a focus group conducted in a more metropolitan - or, conversely, more rural - setting would have varied. Finally, it would be interesting to see whether some of my research question would have been more applicable to a group of men for whom vegetarianism was their first and/or only foray into progressive politics. This study could easily be replicated by other social scientists with such considerations, to give a fuller, more nuanced picture of vegetarian masculinities.

Finally, further social research into vegetarian masculinities must examine the hierarchical arrangements of masculinities within vegetarian and animal advocacy communities. I was fortunate enough to be conducting my research at an “ethnographic moment” that captured an upheaval within the gendered power structure of the St. Catharines animal rights community. Since completing my work, I have heard several anecdotal stories and read a bevy of movement literature which indicates that such patriarchal power relations - including the jockeying for leadership roles and exclusion of less-hegemonic men (and especially women) is commonplace. This is not to suggest that such structures are unique to the animal rights movement - to the contrary, patriarchal power structures persist within all social and environmental justice movements, despite our best attempts to combat them. However, the animal rights movement has an opportunity, by confronting these issues directly, to exemplify and represent itself as a model of best practices amongst various struggles for emancipation. This project represents a small contribution to a larger conversation about movement goals and the emancipatory vision of the animal rights movement that is and needs to continue to occur - both amongst Critical Animal Studies scholars and grassroots activists. It is my hope, that this conversation continues.

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