**Gender Studies**

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You can imagine for a moment that gender is like a game of pass the parcel. A mystery package has been wrapped with many layers—by your parents, community, school, the media, advertising, the government—and is passed around over the course of your life. Each time the music stops you might take another layer off the wrapping to discover the prize inside.

The wrappings all look similar: if you identify as a woman, they might be pages from magazines such as *Vogue*, stills from movies such as *Legally Blonde*, or pages taken from *Wuthering Heights*. If you’re a man, they are spreads from *The New York Post*, *Men’s Health, Sports Illustrated, Woodworker’s Weekly*, and the latest Robert Ludlum novel. While you’re passing the parcel, Patriarchal Society—always playing with painful distractions to make you look the other way—keeps adding new layers. And because you’ve been taught to experience a kind of ersatz pleasure when handling a familiar package, providing a sense of where you fit in this circle, you’re not worried that you never get to see what’s inside. You’re kept too busy playing a role. You fit into this social sphere that keeps passing you this parcel, at ever greater speeds. You look (enough) like the images on the paper (although never quite enough). More to the point, you *believe* you *want* to look like them. Why unwrap the recognisable for a dangerous mystery inside?

For men in Western societies, this game is so diversionary we die from it. In many countries, suicide is the biggest killer of men under the age of 45, and three quarters of all deaths by suicide in the UK are male (ONS). Men have higher cancer mortality rates in all forms of cancer that affect both men and women, often due to men’s under-utilization of healthcare services. In terms of those taking their own lives, a major cause is that the male wrappings are dominated by stories where men are overwhelmingly reliant on one other person—often a non-male partner; conventionally a “wife”—for all of their emotional support; when that relationship breaks down, men in their midlife have no other safety net. The stories in the wrapping educate men on the socially constructed narrative we call masculinity: in this context, that it is “masculine” not to ask for help or develop emotional bonds with other men. Men’s attempts to live up to what the UK charity The Samaritans call a “gold standard” of male experience, which “prizes power, control and invincibility” (Samaritans) is a major factor in why men fail to learn how to process emotions, refuse to get a cancer screening, and, critically for this chapter, consume certain kinds of foods (such as meat) and eschew others (such as “effeminate” or vegan foods).

Women’s wrappings similarly educate and train women in the socially constructed narrative we call femininity. For women, in many cultures, this training includes the practice of submissive roles in relationships with men, the wearing of certain kinds of clothing and face paints, and, as with men, to consume certain kinds of foods and eschew others. The social, economic, health, and safety consequences for women are deleterious, evidenced in too many ways to capture here but including: gender pay gaps, domestic abuse, sexual violence and rape, forced marriage, genital mutilation, and lack of access to political and economic leadership. These are lives lived on alert to both the micro and macro aggressions and micro and macro inequalities (Sue) that structure the unjust and unequal ways in which those identifying and living as men and women experience life differently.

For the majority of our modern history in Western countries, there have been only two recognized parcels which you could legally handle. This limitation has changed to a certain degree, incorporating parcels that begin to offer alternative narratives to the cis-gendered binary of masculine/feminine. However, it is often difficult to handle these packages, and when seen in public domains, their handlers are often treated with fear, discrimination and violence. The package most of us are handed at birth—and earlier—remains wrapped in dominant gender stories. The securing of identities and privileges that these gender stories shore up are threatened by other non-binary scripts. These gender stories are also implicated in how we explore ethical animal rights orientations at the heart of vegan praxis; and so, this chapter sets out to understand the different psychological and practical categories through which masculine, feminine and non-binary identities are constructed in relation to vegan practices, particularly around food, and especially those food products derived from the exploitation of animals. For an in-depth exploration of queer theory and veganism, see Quinn (Ch. 24), and for a deeper unpacking of the role played by the film and television in these constructions see Stewart and Cole (Ch. 29), for media see Estok (Ch. 30), for advertising see Trauth (Ch. 31) and for social media see Aguilera-Carnerero (Ch. 32).

While I have been alive to these other parcels in social circulation, my personal experience has been of unconscious and conscious identification with the parcel wrapped in the narrative of “cis-gendered manhood.” My wrapping is also printed on white, thickly rich and European paper. I am conscious enough to recognize the advantages this wrapping has given me, yet my worldview remains directed by forty-five years of this narrative. It has rarely felt as if the prize inside was worth the heavy burden requiring constant carrying effort. As Kimmel argued in his seminal work on the construction of manhood, the parcel is not always safe to handle and offers only a “perilous masculinity” which, as Ruby and Heine note, “is tenuous and fragile. That is, in most cultures, manhood is earned through social displays, competition and aggression, and is socially, rather than biologically determined” (450). As Vandello et al have shown, manhood is a precarious state, easily lost and requiring constant validation. One of the key ways in which this constant validation is practiced is through the food we eat; and the broader exploitation of animals as nonhuman beings for those foodstuffs and the other products we gain benefit from, in reinforcing the stories of ourselves as gendered and speciated beings.

There is no way I can discuss with authority the experience of what it has been to identify, consciously or unconsciously, acceptingly or coerced, as a biologically sexed woman, with femininity as an identity, or as a person of color, a non-binary, gay, lesbian, queer or trans person; although, being raised for the majority of my early life in an all-female household has given me less “masculine” ideals to live up to, and more “feminine” modes of life as instruction (Lockwood *The Pig in Thin Air*). The outcome, at least for this chapter, is that while I learn from and engage with ecofeminist critical practices that underpin robust vegan scholarship, I do not write here comfortably on the experiences of feminine or feminized gender roles – nor on hypermasculine experiences. Yet a focus on masculinities is timely, with the need for more men to “do” critical gender work within vegan studies. As Wright told me in personal communication: “Until straight, white men decide that they are willing to stand up to other straight, white men … and call them out for their racism, sexism, speciesism, and homophobia, then this is where we are, and this is why most men aren’t vegan. I can talk all day about veganism, but who cares? I’m just a woman.”

If that is the case, we need to ask—all of us, “men” and “women,” but especially “straight, white men”—who exactly does the construction of gender identities serve? If binary gender norms are a deranged and dangerous package of limiting experiences and beliefs, what price are we paying to play this game? And who suffers most from the imposition of these insane, controlling practices?

**Gender and Vegan Studies under Capitalism**

Vegan studies as a practice has been engaged with issues of gender from its inception. Among others, ecofeminists such as Carol J. Adams, Josephine Donovan, and Greta Gaard whose animal-focused scholarship and research preconfigured the vegan studies field to follow, explored and revealed how gender norms are used as organizing differences in violent hierarchical relationships within patriarchal societies, often by positioning women and animals together as subordinate to men. As Yilmaz puts it, “meat has historically figured and continues to do so in interrelated oppressive structures, practices and meanings” (23) inscribed in society, particularly in reference to gendered identities. Laura Wright’s foundational work for the field *The Vegan Studies Project* (2015) has the subtitle “food, animals, and gender in the age of terror” and grew out of what was originally called “the vegan body project.” Wright’s conception of vegan studies puts forth “that an ecofeminist approach to veganism allows for what . . . is the most inclusive politics with regards to that position, and such theoretical grounding provides a scaffolding onto which I can build my concept of vegan studies” (18). This concept gives “specific attention to the construction and depiction of the U.S. [sic] vegan body—both male and female—as a contested site” (19) in texts of popular culture. The ecofeminist approach, which early on identified “rhetorical linkages [working] to establish the psychological justification of actual—not rhetorical—oppressions” (17) such as the identification of women as “pieces of meat” or colonized people as “brutes,” has laid much of the groundwork for vegan studies practitioners in understanding how “the mythology of meat and the ways that a meat-based diet not only is cruel to animals but constitutes sexist and racist ideology” (19).

Ecofeminism, and especially the work of Adams, is covered in more depth elsewhere in this handbook. But ideas put forward by Adams and others first identified, as Cohoon succinctly summarizes, how the “violence inflicted upon women and animals is tacitly interpreted as something that is part of their nature” (526). Such validation of violence against animals and women is inherent in social constructions of both animality and femininity. That people whose identities are constructed as animal or female are open to violence from those wrapped up as masculine or “Human” (the epitome of “human” speciation being the white, Western, straight, Christian man) gives vegan studies a mandate to explore constructions of vegan bodies in relation to the construction of gender. It is, perhaps, also why a specifically “vegan ecofeminism” (Yilmaz) rejects, in the main, a rights-based approach to liberation for both women and animals. The reductive (male) individualism within rights-based theories and policies obstructs our ability to think ourselves in relation with others, and other animals. As Wright puts it, a “vegan studies approach is theoretical, but it engages in a lived politics of listening care, emotion, and the empathetic imagination” (*Through a Vegan Studies* viii). A vegan ecofeminism has, in that sense, evolved from the “ethics of care” tradition that is itself a fundamental thread unpicking the traumatic exploitation of women and animals in our societies.

And these societies are generally capitalist. The study of veganism and gender together is also often, and perhaps best, situated within the critique of the capitalist systems of production. These systems of production render those outside the “Human” as consumable products, as for example ‘pieces of meat’ or “chattel/cattle.” As Corey Wrenn argues:

in a capitalist system, power is concentrated through the exploitation of vulnerable groups, and this vulnerability is exemplified in ‘meat’. Meat in this context refers not only to the butchered flesh of nonhuman animals but also the fragmented flesh of human women. … Power rests on the consumption of feminized bodies, human and nonhuman alike. (201)

For Wrenn, the process of feminizing human and nonhuman bodies is a process without which capitalism could not function. Society “is structured to disadvantage and hurt women and other animals in the process of extracting value and privilege from them. Females are made into ‘meat’ […] and the making and selling of ‘meat’ is a primary function of capitalism” (202). Indeed, and unsurprisingly, “foodstuff” is the commodity on which most money is spent, globally, by individual consumers (World Bank).

And as pattrice jones argues, we have always experienced life under a “gendered capitalist system” by which she means a binary gendered system, one that leaves no room for nonbinary, “queer or intersex animal bodies” (97) whether human or nonhuman animal. The binary gender parcels are primary products of capitalist systems, which create difference allowing for wildly different treatments of groups. This creation of difference is perhaps equally invidious in human and animal relations. Erika Cudworth has outlined in great detail how nonhuman animals are gendered in the agricultural system, and the majority of protein consumed, for example, is feminized protein in the form of eggs, dairy, and “meat” from the exhausted bodies of female reproductive cows and chickens.

The institution of human dominance itself is gendered as well. As Wrenn continues:

In Western Culture, masculinity is a performance of domination, while femininity is a performance of subordination … Femininity is defined by its powerlessness in relationship to masculinity, which in turn is defined by its domination of the feminine. The entire capitalist system in this sense is a patriarchal one, as nonhuman animals, women, and exploited workers are all feminized through subordination. (202)

The practice of a vegan studies scholarship cannot, for it to be a thorough vegan critique, avoid asking questions about how the gendering of bodies shapes the vegan or non-vegan body, and how gendered bodies are in turn shaped by capitalist forms of meaning and production. This is the case for the development of masculinity through industrialization. As Kimmel argues, the 19th century saw the emergence of a distinct form of modern masculinity, which, as Garlick suggests, is “embodied in an ideal of the ‘Self-Made Man’ [and] intimately connected to the competitive market relations of the emerging capitalist economy” (235). Kimmel’s argument, and one that critical Marxist vegan feminists such as Wrenn would agree with, is that these constructions of masculinity remain dominant today. As Connell makes evident “the world in which neoliberalism rules is still a gendered world, and neoliberalism has an implicit gender politics. The ‘individual’ of neoliberal theory has the attributes and interests of a male entrepreneur” (51). For Garlick, “masculine subjects are the main bearers of the neoliberal ideology of competition, and this means that men, in particular, tend to have an investment in the maintenance of current social and economic relations, insofar as they bolster or secure masculine identities” (235).

There is an explicit point here for a vegan feminist context and analysis. By expanding vegan critiques to incorporate the study of gender at every step, we see more easily that “Capitalism runs on females … Women’s devalued status in the capitalist system is also functionally important in regard to the role they play in consumption” (209).

**Gender and Veganism: Food Practices as Constant Validation**

Take a closer look at that wrapping around the “man” parcel and you’ll see a lot of pictures of typically processed animal products such as burgers, bacon, sausages, and steak. You’ll read stories of men in practices where the exploitation of animals is normal and rife. Staying with “meat” foods for now: foods are inscribed, perhaps like no other objects we have in human social life, with meanings “representing ethnicity, nationality, region, class, age, sexuality, culture, and (perhaps most importantly) gender” (Sobal 136). Numerous works (e.g. Adams 1990; Beardsworth and Keil 1992; Bentley 1998; Bourdieu 1984; Fiddes 1991; Greenebaum and Dexter 2017; Roe and Buser 2016; Roe and Hurley 2018; Nilsen 1995) have identified the ways in which foods are gendered as either masculine or feminine. One of the most referenced works on this is Jeffery Sobal’s 2005 article “Men, Meat and Marriage: Models of Masculinity,” in which he surveys the literature, exploring how foods are gendered differently across cultures. As Sobal notes:

Animal flesh is a consummate male food, and a man eating meat is an exemplar of maleness. Men sometimes fetishize meat, claiming that a meal is not a ‘real’ meal without meat. Men often hypermasculinize meat in male rituals. For example, men dominate meat cooking competitions, such as barbecue contests, and are the main contestants engaging in eating competitions, which often focus on meats. (138)

Plenty of men engage in the direct animal-exploitative behaviors they believe confer masculine identities upon them, and the benefits and status such behaviors bring: angling, hunting, betting on animal sports. But the vast majority of the abuse of animals comes through our food systems. There are almost no women working on the kill floors of slaughterhouses worldwide (Pachirat). Of course, the majority of the exploitation takes place where men, pleasurably wrapped up in images of what it means to be a man, continue to dominate the bodies of other animals through the heavy consumption of “meat” products. Globally men eat around 57 percent more meat than women (US Department of Health). Most vegans are women—in the UK, about two-thirds of vegans identify as women, and the in US it’s more like four to one. Veganuary, the campaign to get people to choose vegan in January, attracts around 82-88 percent women every year, and only 10-15 percent men. For Luke the reason for this disparity is that those who identify as men continue to benefit from institutions of animal exploitations in ways that women do not. Those “ways” are wrapped up in what men see as the benefits of “meat” consumption in providing a social identity which is, using Joy’s formation, Normal, Natural, and Necessary. And as Piazza et al have added: Nice.

For women, the wrappings of femininity are loaded with pictures of salad, yoghurts, fruit, chocolate and “white” “meats” such as chicken or fish, as well as contextualized by time and place; for example, Chaiken and Pliner’s findings of single women choosing not to eat “steak” or other “red meats” on a date. Much of this socialization is done when we are children, specifically through our relations to animals (Cole and Stewart). As Sobal summarises, “Western men are socialized into adopting beliefs and behaviours about masculinity by the active and passive efforts of other men and women, with fathers acting as examples of meat-eating men and mothers reinforcing those gendered values” (138).

Anat Pick divides meat eaters into three categories, with an explicit gendered expression. The categories are “the ‘defaulters’, who take what is and what ought to be as one and the same; the ‘new moralists’ … who portray the consumption of animal flesh as an enlightened and conscientious choice, sensitive to both the lives of animals and to the higher value of human culinary discernment; and ‘bravado eaters’ who insist on meat eating as an expression of manly superiority.” Sobal’s work had already illustrated how masculine dominance shaped food practices within marriage, drawing on a considerable literature in psychology, sociology, and anthropology that provided evidence for how “men’s food preferences dominate family food choices” (142) and provide a “patriarchal dividend” (Connell 25) that “both reflect and reproduce wider patterns of male dominance and female subordination (Sobal 142). There is no way, therefore, to explore the vegan or veganized body in these contexts without also exploring the shaping roles that gender plays in such relationships, and how gendered foods matter for building embodied identifications. As Sobel writes, “men and women ‘do gender’ by consuming gender appropriate foods. Meat, especially red meat, is an archetypical masculine food. Men often emphasize meat, and women often minimize meat, in displaying gender as individuals” (142).

Accomplishing a gendered masculine identity through food involves acts demonstrating and celebrating autonomy in the face of other demands, with men eating what they want, not what they should. This leads to Wright’s finding in *The Vegan Studies Project* that “Hegan” men feel a need to pass through the “masculine ritual” of cardiovascular disease and poor health to attain the right to adopt healthier plant-based diets. So much of the “power, control and invincibility” (Samaritans) that men practice in the constant validation process of maintaining their masculinity comes at the expense of those who are most easily controlled and overpowered: animals. According to Sobal, “to eat in a masculine way is to eat meat, accomplishing maleness by the relict behavior of eating animals that were (or at least could be) hunted” (138).

And yet as Wright established, veganism is, for men in general, “depicted as impossible to maintain” (*The Vegan Studies Project* 108). There was a moment, specifically in American culture, pre-9/11, where a discursive space “opened for the negotiation of new, nonnormative masculinities that challenge our traditional understandings of what it means to be manly” (108). But Wright’s analysis of media and popular culture texts of the two decades either side of the 9/11 attacks convincingly depicts a backlash against vegetarianism and veganism as threats to established forms of masculinity, that the ‘War on Terror’ successfully defended in its mission to reinstate patriarchal white male privilege as the dominant global operating system. Quoting numerous sources, Wright articulates how challenges to these entrenched “eating identities” (Parkinson, Twine, and Griffin) as formative of the larger gendering of identities, in their positions as either shoring up or challenging patriarchal structures, manifested as “a profound denunciation of vegetarian and vegan diets as indicators of weakness, ethnicity, and femininity, all of which have been constructed as threats to a traditional ‘American’ way of life” (Wright, *The Vegan Studies Project* 114). As such, the fifteen years or so following 9/11 were, for Wright, characterized by situating male veganism “within a space that exists by its virtue of its increasingly misogynist overdetermination of its difference from a veganism practiced by women” (155).

This is how veganism (and before it, vegetarianism) have constantly been viewed. “People attend to others’ diets as a means of understanding them” (Ruby and Heine 445), and so when people are following vegan diets or lifestyles, understanding is inferred from these practices and, most comprehensively, understood through a gendered lens. Women have been found to be much more accepting than men of vegetarians; vegetarian men have also been regularly perceived as “less masculine than omnivorous men, underscoring the link between men, meat and masculinity” (Ruby and Heine 450). Omnivores also tend to rate vegetarians as good, but weak people (MacInnis and Hodson), suggesting already that omnivores would expect most vegetarians to be stereotypically women (where “weakness” is a hegemonically colored trait of femininity).

Such stereotypes, acceptances and refusals also filter sexual relationships. As Potts and Parry have analyzed, the threat of a vegan sexuality, where (mainly) vegan women expressed a desire not to have sex or relationships with non-vegan men, was felt most vehemently by heterosexual meat-eating men. Write Potts and Parry of those responding to their research findings, “meat and meat-eaters were assumed to forever prove a temptation to veg\*n women. … The language of abstinence was invoked to describe a vegan or vegetarian’s decision to avoid animal flesh, echoing news coverage’s portrayal of vegansexual women as ‘abstaining’ from sex with men who eat meat” (38). They concluded: “The particularly brutal remarks directed at women ‘vegansexuals’ may also be understood as an effect of masculinist meat-eating culture’s relationship to certain forms of male violence perpetrated against both nonhuman animals … and other humans” (42).

As noted above, this constant revalidation belies a fragility in the construction of gendered identities that vegan scholars and practitioners can attend to. As Adams told me in 2019, “I keep hearing the call for men to ‘renew the man card.’ Well I’ve had my library card for 30 years, why is the ‘man card’ so fragile it needs to be renewed every time they eat?”

But femininity is also constantly validated through acts around food practices. For example, women are more able to focus on the sociability involved in providing food for others, whereas men tend to emphasize the necessity of eating particular foods (and especially meat) (DeVault). Researchers found a gendered division between “food work” (considered in terms of masculinity and manhood as economic provision, e.g. “bringing home the bacon”) and “feeding work,” categorized as feminine and centred around household stocking, shopping, preparing and cooking (DeVault). For Sobal, that food remains a “social performance” allows men and women both to decide how to “do marriage” and “do meat” simultaneously, including the “existence of options for hypermasculine cooking and eating … using the plural models of masculinities as justifications for a diversity of forms, types, times, and quantities of meat consumption” (149).

Studying such pinch points in gendered constructions of masculinity and femininity may provide opportunities to advocate ways to improve lived experiences for nonhuman animals, and humans marginalized and outside of the dominant ‘Human’ category. We can look at some of these other ideas, and recent research into the ways in which new identities are forming around the intersection of gender and veganism.

**Plural Masculinities, Vegan Feminisms, and Hybrid Identities**

Sobal contrasts singular masculinity and plural concepts, which has helped shape the field to explore the gendered and contextual understanding of masculinities. For Sobal, “Multiple masculinities (and femininities) are assumed to be developed, learned, considered, selected and enacted as men (and women) engage in the continuous construction of gender in everyday life, including in their food choices” (136). Plural masculinities and femininities are a recognition that there is no “real,” simple binary of gender, and even within dominant discourses they can be practiced in different ways. Recently, for example, whereas we already have ecofeminism, and perhaps plural ecofeminisms (for example, queer ecofeminism (Gaard, “Toward a Queer”) we now have “ecomasculinities” to challenge the idea of a hegemonic and always toxic masculinity. These ecomasculinities to explore and embody have been theorized by Martin Hultman and Paul Pulé. Their proposal is for a third and relationally focused pathway that they call ecological masculinities, which advocate and embody broader, deeper and wider care for the global through to local commons.

This recognition of pluralities is perhaps an example of a new gender script, providing room for multiple forms of gendered identification inside the concept of masculinity or femininity, especially in relation to food practices. For Sobal, “multiple masculine scripts are invoked as sources for particular individuals to draw upon in specific contexts. Thus, masculinities are enacted situationally, such as a man lunching on hamburgers at work with his pals and sharing salad for dinner with his wife” (147). And while “a hegemonic masculine, meat-eating model exists in contemporary Western societies … individual men may choose how they engage with that food script alone and with partners. Men who have access to and experience in using multiple models of masculinity have greater freedom and control in their food choices, and are less tightly bound by singular of hegemonic cultural prescriptions to consume meat” (149).

In the context of vegan studies, a form of engagement in regards to masculinity, Greenebaum and Dexter found that there was no hard line between femininity and masculinity for vegan men: “While hegemonic masculinity is defined in opposition to femininity, the vegans in our study do not reject associations with femininity” (1). Rather, they found vegan men practiced a form of “hybrid masculinity” constructed through three key themes from their worldview:

First, they questioned traditional tenets of hegemonic masculinity, challenging a simplistic binary understanding of masculinity. Second, they claim their attitudes towards masculinity are different from other men, specifically non-vegans. Third, although veganism did not shape their definition of masculinity, it strengthened their identity as “good” men. (5)

However, one of the problematic issues of this focus on men, masculinity, and veganism are the ways in which “men legitimize veganism” (Greenebaum and Dexter 8). While compassion for animals and animal rights activism have been traditionally stereotypical feminine traits, they have been easily marginalized in patriarchal cultures. The majority of activists and donors within the animal rights movement are women, yet research continues to shows how men are considered necessary to legitimize the movement (Einwohner 1999; Gaarder 2011; Luke 2007). Such “legitimization” comes at the cost of marginalizing and silencing the women, particularly women leaders, in the movement (Luke 2007; Wrenn 2016). In my research (Lockwood, “How to Turn”) I have found that men were likely to listen to or adopt the practices of other men over those of other women, echoing Greenebaum and Dexter’s findings that, “Non-vegan men are more likely to be encouraged to accept or consider becoming vegan when they see other men demonstrating masculinity within the context of veganism. Whether desired or not, they still benefit from masculine privilege, when men legitimize veganism” (9). So even vegan men, show Greenebaum and Dexter, don’t refute masculinity; they don’t totally unwrap the parcel. And this fact has long been problematic for the animal rights movement. Sadly, most vegan men engage in a hybrid form of masculinity that only modifies masculine associations—eating plant-based burgers, talking of “vegan gains” in the gym—and fall short, like most of us do, of challenging gender inequalities, which are transferred onto the suffering bodies of animals.

**Conclusion**

Not much has changed, then, since Carol Adams wrote in 1990 that “a mythology permeates all classes that meat is a masculine food and meat eating is a male activity” (26). Throughout the 2000s and into the 2010s, those wanting to promote veganism to men went mostly with the grain of masculinity, rather than against it. For example, Johnson found that veganism was predominantly promoted to men through magazines and books such as John Joseph’s *Meat is for Pussies,* for its health benefits, accentuating and supporting the ideas of male domination and sexual conquest, explaining how plant-based diets could support new forms of masculinity without threatening older models (29). Such attitudes have also been seen, for example, in PETA’s sexualized campaigns, which appease men’s fears over the loss of their traditional masculine roles if they choose to adopt vegan life practices. For Thomas this might be a tactically sound decision, after finding that “choosing veganism, not veganism itself, is associated with lower levels of masculinity” (85). Yet Thomas’s argument has held little truck with ecofeminists, who continue to clarify the ways such ongoing exploitative messages reinforce intersectional oppressions against both animals and women. As Gruen and Weil write in their introduction to a special issue of *Hypatia* on “Feminists Encountering Animals,” there is a critical “need to maintain feminist, ethical, and political commitment within animal studies—commitments to reflexivity, responsibility, engagement with the experiences of other animals, and sensitivity to the intersectional contexts in which we encounter them” (493).

What is interesting in recent developments has been shifting beliefs held by social groups about veganism and plant-based diets. For example, in Bryant’s research, he found that omnivores agreed that vegan lifestyles were healthier, more environmentally conscious, and more virtuous. Omnivores also agreed that veganism was socially acceptable. So Wright’s suggestion that “male veganism only seems acceptable if it is not linked to animal welfare” (*The Vegan Studies Project* 129) has perhaps shifted somewhat with the rapid expansion of veganism across both Western and non-Western countries. Not enough to suggest that we have entered a fully open space where “the negotiation of new, nonnormative masculinities that challenge our traditional understandings of what it means to be manly” (108) can be had, but perhaps with renewed hope that this can begin.

If such negotiations do begin, however, they will still need a critical and patient vegan ecofeminist eye on developments. We should not forget Wrenn’s reminder that “gender is difference, and difference is conjured to stimulate market growth” (203-4). We can see this in the way that foods continue to be gendered today, and how this drives marketing to predominantly either masculine- or feminine- identified audiences (Mogelonsky). What we need is to continue to expand our sense of vegan ecofeminist studies and, perhaps, encourage a new vegan ecomasculinist studies, both of which remain focused on critiquing and changing “a speciesist economic system that is not only capitalistic but patriarchal” (Wrenn 207).

One of the rich areas for future vegan studies research that intersects with gender is the construction of the male body and mental health, in relation to the masculine food and food practices men carry out. Some of this work has begun to be done (e.g. Richardson *Redefining*). If we can get men talking, finding emotional support and networks, and if we can help men understand that masculinity is a construction—no more than the wrapping on a parcel, not the gift inside—then we will also help nonhuman animals who men, mostly, in their desperate needs to be masculine, exploit. Living in these times of mass industrialisation and climate change, driven by patriarchal standards of separation and domination, these are critical interventions to make. Perhaps someone will finally unwrap the parcel. Better yet, we will all throw them out the window.

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