

FROM THE INSTRUCTOR

Hermon Minda made her animated video-essay, "Is Veganism White?," for a WR152 course in the spring 2019 semester. "Is Veganism White?" is the digital remediation of Hermon's research paper, "Lack of Representation in Vegan Media and its Effect on the Obesity Rates of People of Color." The paper may be read in conjunction with the video-essay; Hermon provides the link with her video and encourages viewers to read it.

At three minutes and 45 seconds, Hermon's video-essay would be an ideal pedagogical tool to teach a variety of skills. For starters, students might consider genre questions. How does Hermon "translate" the traditional academic research paper and its attendant genres into digital form? What is gained, and what is lost, with each genre? The difference in titles alone is striking. For instance, Hermon's argument about the relationship between the perceived whiteness of veganism and obesity rates--a key claim in the paper--does not figure prominently in the video. Instructors might also zero in on Hermon's diction and tone in the voice-over and in the abstract. How do the conventions and affordances of each genre differ, and why?

Questions of genre can lead into questions of audience (or vice-versa). Hermon's initiating question about veganism is, basically, a question about audience and access. Hermon's choice of the animated video format is deliberate: she wanted to reach the same publics that she describes seeking out when she decided to become vegan. For this reason, the project also dovetails nicely with Hub focus on media and digital literacy. Finally, Hermon's argument that media organizations, non-profits like PETA, and "influencers" constitute the meaning of veganism as a kind of political philosophy rooted in a "colorblind" universalism (on the analogy of slaves with animals, ironically) is especially persuasive in this digital form, because she slows down, and talks through each of her points with care.

Scott Challener

WR 152: Writing, Research, & Inquiry with Digital/Multimedia Expression

FROM THE WRITER

This paper addresses the lack of representation within the vegan community and its resulting effect on obesity rates in the African American and Hispanic communities. Because these racial minorities are the two groups most affected by this issue, it is important to urge food revolutionist entities such as PETA to address this lack of representation. In this essay, I explore the cause of the negative perception of veganism within ethnic minorities and attempt to demonstrate how this perception may be linked to obesity rates within these communities.

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HERMON MINDA

IS VEGANISM WHITE?

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT:

Hi, I'm Hermon and I've been vegan for more than four years now. When I first made the switch, I relied on the Internet to find all things vegan. If you don't know, a vegan diet entails avoiding all animal products such as meat, fish, poultry, eggs, dairy, dairy products, and in most cases, honey. Although I'm lucky to have so many resources at hand, I began to realize that most of the vegan-related content I was seeing was super white. As a black girl, it was disheartening to see this lack of diversity in this community that I was a part of. It begs the question: is veganism white?

The vegan diet has been trending for the past few years. The Food Revolution Network reported that there has been a 600% increase in the number of people who identify as vegans in the US within the past three years. Because the community is growing exponentially, social media has been flooded by vegan content from brands, influencers, and nonprofits. Sadly, the majority of the content is made by and for a white, privileged, middle to upper class demographic. These pages promote white actors, chefs and influencers while maintaining a colorblind approach when discussing veganism. By colorblind, I mean that these pages believe that their audience is equally capable of maintaining a vegan lifestyle and have equal access to the places they need to do so. These pages avoid discussing difficult topics such as how living in a food desert can impact your nutritional choices. This is a topic that concerns people of color, especially those of African American descent. This is especially unfortunate because African Americans are one of the top two demographics that are impacted by obesity. In fact, four in five African American women are overweight or obese.

How is this linked with the lack of representation in vegan media? Well, there are studies that show that a vegan diet, which usually consists of low amino acid intake, causes a gene which opposes weight gain and obesity to be released. Considering the extremely high cost of health care in the US, veganism is an appealing alternative cure or preventative measure against obesity. Because social media has branded veganism as white, people of color have difficulty perceiving the diet as one they can adopt themselves. These pages should talk about how fast food chains directly target African American and Hispanic communities when expanding their franchise, or how minority and lower income populations have less access to physical activity facilities and resources. If they addressed these issues and talked about you can get around these obstacles to maintain a vegan lifestyle, it would create a more inclusive space for people of all backgrounds to enjoy the benefits of the diet.

I wanted to talk about this because a lot of vegan pages seem to accuse non-vegans of selfishness and lack of compassion. I saw this picture when doing research, and I think this pretty much summarizes what I've been talking about. [Pictured on screen: a small pig looking up at the camera with text reading "Veganism is not about how easy or hard it is for you. It's about every animal's right not to be used as a slave." – Randy Sandberg]

Instead of blaming people without regard for the unique challenges they face, these pages should promote more vegans of color. In fact, I'll link a couple videos by these amazing creators in the description below.

No, veganism is not white, even though the Instagram algorithm makes it seem like it is. If you're a vegan of color yourself, try to create as much content as possible to help with diversifying the "Vegan Explore" page. But only when organizations like PETA take responsibility for how their content is perceived by a diverse audience will the issue of whiteness in vegan media be solved.

Thanks for watching this video, and comment below any vegans of color you think people should know. Bye!

WORKS CITED

0:43 <https://foodrevolution.org/blog/vegan...>
1:40 <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databri...>
1:48 <https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/br...>
1:57 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mehy.2014.0...>
2:24 <https://www.asu.edu/courses/css335/wh...>
2:31 <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwr...>
2:55 <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/ef/78/...>

VEGANS OF COLOR

Toni Michelle: <https://youtu.be/NmUJNHOnf8c>
Herbivore beauty: https://youtu.be/fM-_c1V8jHo
Hailey Gamba: <https://youtu.be/jf8Oat0rf8A>
Danger remmy: <https://youtu.be/LTnkqLtfT8I>
Sweet potato soul: <https://youtu.be/35sFxoUvIMM>
Armani jack: https://youtu.be/J_4De6lqyHQ
Black vegan tube: <https://youtu.be/sCorKISfak>
Rachaelxss: <https://youtu.be/98q5xBSgWkc>
Vegan sistah: <https://youtu.be/GD6W9iKatS8>