

# Oral Sadism and the Vegetarian Personality

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A review of the clinical literature on vegetarianism to date reveals that little attention has been given to the psychodynamic mechanisms which govern the behavior of those individuals who choose to restrict their diet to foods other than dead animals. While it had been Fruitlooper's (1895) case study of Julia V., a 39-year-old pregnant hysteric unable to refrain from regurgitating Wienerschnitzels, which had first thrown light upon the meatless phenomenon, Fruitlooper's contemporaries rejected his psychosexual interpretation of Wienerschnitzels and interest in his discovery soon waned. It was not until the advent of von Krankmann, one of Fruitlooper's more brilliant students, a tireless theoretician and jogger and, later, founder of the "neo-Fruitloopian school" of psychoanalysis, that interest in vegetarianism was renewed.

The connection between vegetarianism and sadism was first highlighted in von Krankmann's (1939) seminal paper, "A treatise on the psychodynamics of the meatless choice." Von Krankmann theorized that the sole consumption of vegetables, to the exclusion of sin-

every flesh, represented a "fixation" at an "oral-sadistic stage" of development.<sup>1</sup>

The fixation is by the rigid cathexis of energy to but one category of objects represented.<sup>2</sup> While the vegetarian not so very often to other equally erogeneous zones these organic substances placed observed have been, so can we say that the use of these vegetables truly, no, almost exclusively, to the oral zone placed are! Also, have we a sadistic impulse with the vegetarian character. The man who kills animals for meat gives the pursued animal a chance to escape. How more and more sadistically cruel is the non-meat eating man. The keen theoretician must himself this question deeply ask—What is the likelihood that the tranquil carrot from its vicious predator successfully outrun can?

During his American lecture series, delivered at the New School For Social Research in the Fall of 1941, von Krankmann (1942) introduced a refinement and expansion of his work, outlining the process by which the vegetarian defends himself against conscious awareness of sadistic impulses.

The orally fixated vegetarian deals with his early prototypic loss of the love object through compensatory defense mechanisms which serve to conceal from himself, significant others, and his Saturday night dates, his deep-seated feelings of anger, hostility, hatred, rage, and, to some extent, dislike for his fellow man. Nor is his like for women too keen. Since the vegetarian character identifies man with animals (and

<sup>1</sup>I would like to thank Mr. Angelo Agratini, A.A., adjunct assistant instructor of European languages, Hempstead Community College, for his translation of this passage from von Krankmann's original text.

<sup>2</sup>*Translator's Note:* I kind of had some trouble translating a pretty short sentence that came after this one so I just left it out.

rightfully so), he utilizes the defense mechanisms of reaction formation, denial, and sublimation in order to portray a facade whereby he is perceived as loving man, the animal, and hence animals, while displacing his true oral-sadistic impulses onto the non-man non-animal—vegetables. Thus it is that the orally-sadistic vegetarian character comes to take delight in aggressively consuming vegetables while zealously and defensively maintaining his *dis-taste* for animals.

While von Krankmann was making progressive inroads in exploring the psychodynamics of the vegetarian character, it was not until his now famous 1947 Invited Psychoanalysts Address before the faculty and candidates of the prestigious Advanced Institute for Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy that his thinking crystallized with the conceptualization of "the Vegetarian Personality." Von Krankmann's long and arduous theorizing was finally complete.

The Vegetarian Personality is characterized by ruthless acts of an oral-sadistic nature directed against vegetables. Through a series of complex and difficult (even for the analyst) to understand processes, a tripartition of the ego develops. This splitting of the ego leads to the gradual emergence of three compartmentalized senses of reality—"the good-food," "the bad-food," and "the not-food." Vegetables are perceived as "the good-food" because engaging in the consummatory act does not threaten to unleash the underlying currents of anxiety. Animals are perceived as "the bad-food" because even the thought of devouring them is threatening enough to arouse the vegetarian's fear of dealing with his repressed oral-aggressive and oral-sadistic urges toward his fellow man. And lastly, there is the primitive taboo against phylogenetic self-destruction of the species, so that man himself becomes "the not-food" and the impulse toward cannibalism is successfully defended against.

VON KRANKMANN'S tragic and untimely death from ingestion of poisonous mushrooms deprived the psychoanalytic community of a great mind. His pioneering work in the area of oral sadism and the Vegetarian Personality, nonetheless, had an enormous impact upon the field of psychoanalysis and prompted, if not a great deal of research, or any, for that matter, at least a great deal of heated debate among psychoanalysts.

Perhaps as a fitting tribute to von Krankmann's greatness as a theoretician, clinician, and taxpayer, members of the American Psychiatric Association, in revising their outdated *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*, spontaneously chose, upon unanimous recommendation of the Task Force on Nomenclature and Statistics, as well as at the adamant urging of the American Psychological Association, to incorporate von Krankmann's work into their newly revised third edition, the *DSM-III*. The influence of von Krankmann's penetrating thinking is clearly evident in the passage from the *DSM-III* reproduced below.

### **301.85 Vegetarian Personality Disorder**

The essential feature is a Personality Disorder in which there is a severe preoccupation with food consumption, schizoid-like inability to empathize with certain living organisms (usually vegetables) within the environment, hypersensitivity to issues revolving about food ingestion, paranoid suspiciousness as to the content of the dinner plate, and impaired social relationships, particularly in restaurant settings, due to rigidity in eating patterns.

**Associated features.** Individuals with this disorder usually are unable to express anger, hostility, or ag-

gressiveness toward others, but fare well in expressing such feelings toward vegetables. Because of the individual's intense preoccupations with food, they commonly have impaired social relationships and oftentimes attempt to band together in social self-help groups, called "food collectives." The rigidity of their eating behavior tends to contribute to their social impairment and individuals with this disorder are frequently known to seek out partners who suffer from the same disorder.

**Impairment.** Eating behavior, by definition, is severely compartmentalized and rigid. Social relationships usually become impaired, as the individual gets into arguments with others over where to dine. While occupational functioning is rarely disturbed, the individual with this disorder usually brings lunch or buys a yogurt to go.

**Complications.** A common complication is Unintentional Substance Use Disorder, with toxicity appearing in the form of "MSG overdose" from eating too frequently in Chinese restaurants.

**Predisposing factors.** Finicky eating patterns in childhood may in some way be associated with the onset of this disorder in later adolescence or early adulthood, although the relationship is not clearly established.

**Prevalence.** This disorder seems to have become fairly common beginning in the late 1960s and continuing into the 1970s, but seems to be tapering off in the 1980's.

**Sex ratio.** This disorder is diagnosed about equally among men and women.

**Differential diagnosis.** In **Paranoid Personality Disorder** there is, by definition, pervasive and systematic mistrust of people, while the **Vegetarian Personality Disorder** involves mistrust specifically related to the content of the dinner plate. In both the **Schizoid Personality Disorder** and **Narcissistic Personality Disorder**, conspicuous absence of any ability to empathize is a primary feature, while the **Vegetarian Personality Disorder** is characterized by an individual who is capable of empathizing, at least on a superficial level, with other people and related animals.

#### **Diagnostic Criteria for Vegetarian Personality Disorder**

- A. Loss of the love object early in life without subsequent resolution of at least five of the following emotions toward the love object:
  - (1) anger
  - (2) hostility
  - (3) rage
  - (4) hatred
  - (5) dislike
- B. Onset of disorder in late adolescence or early adulthood.
- C. Rigidity of eating patterns.
- D. Inability to empathize with certain living organisms within the environment as indicated by:

- (1) an overconcern for the feelings and physical well-being of animals (e.g., verbalizing that it is "animalistic" to eat animals)
  - (2) a conspicuous lack of empathy for the feelings of murdered vegetables (e.g., verbalizing, "But vegetables don't have feelings!")
- E. Paranoid and hypervigilant preoccupation with the oral zone and food consumption, as manifested by at least one of the following:
- (1) hypersensitivity to the issue of food ingestion
  - (2) paranoid suspiciousness about food content:
    - (a) individual thinks that there are pieces of dead animals on his plate
    - (b) in advanced stages of the disorder, individual suspects that there are miniscule animal by-products mixed in with his food
- F. Impairment of social and interpersonal relationships as indicated by at least one of the following:
- (1) decreased socializing at restaurants with friends because of the individual's arguing over where to dine
  - (2) need to join a social self-help group (e.g., a "food collective")
  - (3) exclusive socializing with individuals also diagnosed as suffering from the **Vegetarian Personality Disorder**
- G. "MSG overdose" from too frequently eating in Chinese restaurants.

### References

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- Fruitlooper, Seymour (1895). *A case study of hysterical reactions to Schnitzels, breaded and unbreaded*. Vienna: University of Vienna Press.
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