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DEAR VN DPG MEMBERS:

I want to sincerely apologize for the significant delay in this issue of the VN DPG Newsletter. Academy staff works diligently to adhere to the procedural newsletter review timeline of no more than two weeks. While we occasionally find additional time is needed for other Academy staff internal review due to specialty areas or content expertise, we rarely see review delays that exceed a month in total time. In this instance, we are very sorry for the significant delays that occurred which ultimately pushed back the newsletter publication by three months. Additionally, thank you for covering the topic of diversity, inclusion, and bias in the winter edition and we commend your courage to share and discuss difficult topics. We fully support all members to continue advancing equity through sharing your experiences and suggestions so that we can all do and be better.

Moving forward, we are taking steps to ensure this type of delay from the review process does not happen again. We are focusing on changing how we communicate the need for additional review, which additional staff team member(s) will be included in the review process, as well as a revised date for this review to reach VN DPG members. I want to sincerely thank you the VN DPG leaders for bringing these concerns to my attention. This feedback is essential to how we continue to build a collaborative relationship with members and DPG leaders.

Sincerely,

Diane M. Enos, MPH, RDN, FAND  |  Chief Learning Officer
ACADEMY OF NUTRITION AND DIETETICS

VN DPG MISSION: To empower members to be the leading authority on evidence-based vegetarian nutrition for food and nutrition professionals, health practitioners and the public.
HELLO FELLOW VN MEMBERS,

I hope that 2021 has been kind to you so far. Last year we witnessed a lot. We were paralyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic and polarized by the racial tension.

Looking back, it may be hard to believe, but there were some positive things that happened amongst all the grief and angst. RDs got approved for telehealth! We hope that this service is here to stay beyond the pandemic. We witnessed a long overdue spotlight on racial discrimination, systemic racism, and implicit bias. The lack of diversity and inequities in our own profession got acknowledged which opened up a possibility for several initiatives and interventions to bring about meaningful action.

FNCE® 2020 was different as well. We were not able to have our Board meeting or our member reception in person. Instead, we had a great virtual meeting with a live cooking demo. Our Board has been actively creating new handouts, offering several webinars, updating our website, and focusing on diversity and sustainability. We have submitted a spotlight session for FNCE® this year; fingers crossed that it will be accepted!

Our team has been working hard on the collaboration with Dietitians in Integrative and Functional Medicine (DIFM) DPG and International Affiliate of the Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics (IAAAND) for our first virtual Joint Symposium. We hope to continue the conversation on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Our speakers will speak on the intersection between sustainable foods, diversity, inclusion, and equity.

I am really proud and excited about this newsletter issue. The editorial team has done a phenomenal job in creating this one-of-a-kind keepsake issue that addresses racism and cultural bias on so many levels. It was a tough decision to discuss the bias and discrimination permeating within the plant-based movement. We have focused not only on external biases but also covert racism and bias within our own profession and practice group. Some of the articles may be hard for you to read. But the articles are written with great care, research, and lived experience and my hope is they can learn from the past to create a more equitable and inclusive future. I hope you keep an open mind when you read this issue. As always, please feel free to reach out to us, and let’s keep the dialogue going.

Take care and stay safe!

Parul Kharod, MS, RDN, LDN
chair@vndpg.org
FROM THE GUEST EDITOR:

BY SAHRA PAK, MS, RD, CPT

**WELCOME** to the winter 2021 VN DPG newsletter! Thank you very much for your patience as we were working through some challenges receiving final approval from the Academy on few of the sections within the newsletter.

Last year was an extremely eye-opening, challenging, and interesting year to say the least. In the midst of it all, I am grateful that I had work, opportunities, and access to health-promoting food, housing, and social connections. My heart goes out to those who are experiencing significant hardship during this time of instability and unpredictability.

In this edition of the newsletter, we are highlighting and confronting disparities, inequities, and racism within our food and nutrition and dietetics arena. We have heard from many members and non-VN DPG dietitians about the need to critically examine our privilege, bias, and racism. We hope to use this moment in history to take a stand and to make a difference for those that have been marginalized and pushed aside for so long.

This process of self-reflection, both on an individual and organizational level where we work toward recognizing our conscious and unconscious biases and being open to change can be extremely challenging. It can push us beyond our individual and collective comfort zones but most of all — it’s messy. What inspires one may offend another. What goes too far for some, may not be far enough for others. The ‘mess,’ in my humble opinion, is necessary and is a part of the process that we simply cannot avoid. A meme that was circulating for a while on social media in 2020, I believe, captures the essence of the messiness involved in the process of bringing about meaningful, and often uncomfortable, change. The takeaway was that no matter how people of color protested — peacefully or with anger and force, it was inappropriate and just not “right” regardless of how innocuous some of the messaging may have been. How we come to an awareness of our shortcomings, history, and the corrective actions we choose to take are not going to be ‘perfect’ and perhaps may even be unacceptable to some. However, I believe that it’s essential for all of us to speak up, share our fears, vulnerabilities, beliefs, and thoughts so that we can realize change on an individual level and as a profession to be of utmost service to our clients, patients, community, and society as a whole.

In this issue, we define and examine what privilege is to us VN dietitians; what appropriation vs appreciation looks like when sharing foods from other cultures; how to support diversity and inclusion in our profession; and resources to expand our awareness and knowledge of being anti-racist and how to take action to realize a more inclusive profession and community. The theme of this season and articles shared in this edition are not intended for members to feel shameful or discouraged, but rather, as an invitation for us to find opportunities in the midst of significant challenges and to be part of the solution. It is our vision that the articles in this issue will encourage us to not only understand and acknowledge the communities that have been, and still are, experiencing oppression and marginalization, but to honor and acknowledge their place in the history of vegetarianism and to be mindful of that full context when we offer nutrition support.

Despite the challenging subject matter, I hope you will find this edition of the newsletter insightful, vital, and useful to propel you to find common ground with others and the environment around us. Thank you to all of the article authors who generously spent their time, shared their knowledge and experience, as well as the continued support and contribution made by our hard working and committed columnists. Please feel free to reach out to me and my co-editor, Debbie Murphy if you have any feedback or comments.

We are VN RDs. We want all beings to be healthy and happy. Let’s use that passion and commitment to create positive changes that will cause a ripple effect of true and equitable health across the world.

In health and solidarity,

Sahra Pak, MS, RD, CPT, DipACLM
PRINCIPLES OF AHIMSA
Ahimsa is most often translated as non-violence; however, it literally means “absence of injury.” The concept is said to have originated in the Vedas, the most ancient Hindu scriptures, written more than 5000 years ago in early Sanskrit language and containing hymns, philosophy, and guidance for life.

There are four Vedas, and in one of the Vedas resides the Yoga Sutra. The Yoga Sutra is a collection of 196 Sanskrit sutras (aphorisms or “threads” as translated in Sanskrit) on the theory and practice of yoga. These sutras offer guidelines for living a meaningful and purposeful life. As you may have already guessed by now, yoga is not just an exercise class! The true meaning of Yoga is the union of body, mind, soul, and spirit. The Yoga Sutras contain a set of observances and practices on how we should treat others if we want to attain liberation. There are Eight Limbs of Yoga (eight sets of rules).

Ahimsa is part of the first of the eight limbs known as Yama. The principle of Yama is to correct behavior toward others. Thus the concept of Ahimsa or non-injury to others comes from this philosophy. Yama practices are geared towards cleansing our minds, bodies, and spirits to allow the existence of more conscious, liberated lives. Ahimsa is also a foundational principle of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism (1).

The basic tenet of “non-harming” means “abstinence from ill will toward all living beings in every way and at all times.” Literally translated, Ahimsa means to be without harm; to be utterly harmless, not only to one’s self and others but to all living beings. But its implications are far wider; it is more than not committing acts of violence or an attitude — it is a whole way of life. The concept of Ahimsa extends to all living beings, and also includes the protection of the environment and natural habitats. Thus harming any animal for the sole purpose of human consumption is completely against the basic tenet of Ahimsa. This principle of non-injury towards all living beings has been the foundation of vegetarianism (2).

As we can see, the concept of plant-based eating has been around for thousands of years. Humans have been vegetarians since well before recorded history. Most anthropologists agree that early humans would have eaten a predominantly plant-based diet (3). There are very old and traditional roots of veganism/vegetarianism from indigenous communities such as those in Africa, Asia, and Aztec/Mexico (4, 5).

AHIMSA AND CULTURAL APPROPRIATION
Oxford Dictionaries, which only put the phrase into its official lexicon in 2017, defines cultural appropriation as “the unacknowledged or inappropriate adoption of the customs, practices, ideas, etc. of one people or society by members of another and typically more dominant people or society (6).”

Simply put, it is when someone adopts something from a culture that is not his or her own – a hairstyle, a piece of clothing, a manner of speaking, food, cuisine, and activities or traditions. When cultural elements are copied from a minority culture by members of a dominant culture, these elements are used outside of their original cultural context — at times even against the expressly stated wishes of members of the originating culture.

This goes against the basic principle of Ahimsa. Ahimsa refers to doing no harm through thought, words, or action. Often, the action in itself may not be harmful per se, but the thought, or more importantly, the lack of thought behind that action is what is harmful.

Cultural elements that may have deep meaning to the original culture may be reduced to “exotic” fashion or toys by those from the dominant culture. For example, when you drink a “Golden Milk latte”, do you think about the fact that turmeric (pronounced TER-MER-IC, not TOOMERIC) has been used in India and other ancient cultures for its medicinal purposes for thousands of years? I just explained the deeper meaning behind yoga earlier. When someone creates classes for Beer Yoga, Wine Yoga, and Goat Yoga, it demeans and dishonors the very principles of Yoga and Ahimsa! Whether it is a Native American headdress for a Halloween costume or celebrities sporting a “bindi” (dot on the forehead), or sports mascots, these callous actions do cause harm to the people of those cultures.

I cannot tell you the number of times people have told
me that “they LOVE curry!” just because I am of Indian origin because they feel they can connect with me by assuming that I too, love, or eat curry. Did you know that there is no single dish called “curry” in Indian cuisine? Curry was a word invented by the British when they ruled India. Indian spice merchants are said to have invented the well-known curry powder for British colonial personnel returning to Britain.

I am sure each ethnic minority has a similar story to tell. Cherry-picking cultural elements without engaging with their cultures, whether that is with food, dance moves, print designs, or headwear, is called misappropriation. This type of action is covert racism where you adopt a particular element from a culture but look down upon that minority group as being inferior.

The rapper Nicki Minaj, in an interview with The New York Times, said “Come on, you can’t want the good without the bad. If you want to enjoy our culture and our lifestyle, bond with us, have fun with us, twerk with us, rap with us, then you should also want to know what affects us, what is bothering us, what we feel is unfair to us (7).”

In these times where there has been a long overdue spotlight on diversity and inclusion, it behooves us to also acknowledge that there has been widespread bias and racism by means of misguided cultural appropriation.

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION & VEGANISM
The article, “Dear white vegans, stop appropriating food” written by Anya Zoledziowski (8) sheds light on an overlooked aspect of veganism where white vegan influencers have appropriated traditional foods. Although a large percentage of the population in India, Brazil, Jamaica, and other Asian countries follow a vegan and/or a vegetarian diet, the vegan movement in the United States and other western countries is largely run by white people. The majority of authors, bloggers, and celebrities who are vegan are white. This has created a false sense of elitism and a myth that being vegan is expensive or “white.” Vegan diets do not have to have avocado toast and chia seed pudding. There are a plethora of dishes in cuisines from Asia, Africa, South America and the Middle East that just happen to be vegan, but were never marketed as such.

It is often overlooked that the foods promoted by white vegans originated in communities of color where these items have been consumed for hundreds or thousands of years before they were “discovered” and rebranded as “superfoods” or meat alternatives. This lack of acknowledgement, understanding, and respect towards foods strips them of their identities.

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION & RACISM
The Washington Post article by Ruth Tam titled, “How it feels when white people shame your culture’s food - then make it trendy,” articulates what every child of ethnic parents has experienced growing up in the United States (9).

Kids beg their parents to give them something as plain and “white” as the all-American peanut butter and jelly sandwich for school lunch because they do not want their white peers to shame them when they bring something homemade that may be unfamiliar and different. These same foods that have been belittled over the years have become part of the menu that’s sought after as the latest “hot” or trendy cuisine to try.

It’s ironic and disappointing that some people have such strong views against immigrants and ethnic minorities but have no qualms about eating and appropriating the foods of the very culture(s) that they depreciate and dismiss.

CULTURAL COMPETENCY FOR RDS
What can we do as a profession? Why is cultural competency important? As part of the healthcare team,
where our first tenet is to “do no harm” - how can we incorporate the philosophy of ahimsa into our profession?

Americans are more racially and ethnically diverse than in the past, and according to a 2016 study by Pew Research, the U.S. is projected to become even more diverse in the coming decades (10).

- By 2055, the U.S. will not have a single racial or ethnic majority.
- Asians are projected to become the largest immigrant group, surpassing Hispanics.
- Millennials (born after 1980) are the most racially diverse generation in American history: 43% of Millennial adults are non-white, the highest share of any generation.
- There will be significant changes in gender roles, income tiers, family make-up, and religious affiliations.

This means that as RDs we need to be prepared to counsel patients who come from any of these diverse groups. Cultural competence includes understanding the importance of language, thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of ethnic, racial, religious, or social groups. Cultural sensitivity is being aware that cultural differences and similarities between people exist, without assigning them a value – positive or negative, better or worse, right or wrong.

According to the Commission of Dietetic Registration, about 81% of dietitians are white (11). When a nutrition plan doesn’t take into account language, customs, or food preferences, it is not going to be successful. Trying to have a standard one-size-fits-all portion plate is not the answer.

We need to be mindful of:

- Norms, values, views, and practical aspects of daily life
- Family relationships and their significance
- Health beliefs and practices
- Food habits – cooking styles, staple foods, religious practices (fasting or forbidden foods), special occasions
- Cultural attitudes about health care professionals and when to consult them
- Physical, physiological, and psychological differences among ethnic and racial group

Let us hope that everyone takes this opportunity to become cognizant of the biases and behaviors, and we inch closer toward practicing Ahimsa in our personal and professional lives.

References:


Other reading recommendations:

- The History of Veganism Around the World
- Food & Nutrition Conference Expo 2019 Session: Global Appreciation or Cultural Appropriation?*

*Special offer for VN members: This FNCE panel is complimentary for VN DPG members. Please view this session if you have not already done so while the offer lasts)

- No, Starbucks’ Chai Tea Latte is not real chai.
- The Cultural Appropriation of Turmeric
- The Vegan Race Wars: How the Mainstream Ignores Vegans of Color
- The Cultural Appropriation of My Lunch: What I hear when you tell me my food is “strong smelling”
- When Chefs Become Famous Cooking Other Cultures’ Food

Parul Kharod is currently serving as the Chair for the Vegetarian Nutrition DPG. She has served in various other roles within VN DPG, including State Coordinator Program & Speaker’s Bureau Chair, Nominating Committee Chair, Diversity Liaison, and the State Coordinator for North Carolina. She works as a Clinical Dietitian with Outpatient Nutrition Services at WakeMed Hospital, where she counsels adults and children for a variety of issues such as diabetes, heart disease, kidney stones, GI issues, food allergies and intolerances, and celiac disease.
Stay Heart-Smart* with New Research on Walnuts

If walnuts had to pick a favorite month, it might be February. February is American Heart Month, a celebration of one of walnuts’ best features – supporting heart health.

Walnuts have long been recognized as a heart-healthy,* plant-based food, and new research suggests even more reasons to recommend this versatile nut:

- A study published in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology (2020) looked at regular consumption of foods rich in marine or plant-based omega-3s, such as fatty fish or walnuts, and risk of death among individuals who have suffered a heart attack.


- A long-term study published in Nutrition, Metabolism & Cardiovascular Diseases (2020) investigated the beneficial link between cardiovascular risk factors and people who consumed walnuts versus those who did not.

*Supportive but not conclusive research shows that eating 1.5 ounces of walnuts per day, as part of a low saturated fat and low cholesterol diet and not resulting in increased caloric intake, may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease. (FDA) One ounce of walnuts offers 18g of total fat, 2.5g of monounsaturated fat, 13g of polyunsaturated fat including 2.5g of alpha-linolenic acid – the plant-based omega-3.
UNDERSTANDING PRIVILEGE IN THE VEGETARIAN AND PLANT-BASED DIET MOVEMENT

BY VIKRAM KALEKA & KATE G. BURT, PHD, RDN

A note from the Editor:
In recent months, a tremendous amount of attention, focus, and determination has been spent to rectify the discriminatory and biased view and perception of race and culture in our country. VN DPG leadership has been committed to bringing light to the issue of unconscious and implicit bias that perpetuates an incomplete and at times inaccurate history of the plant-based movement. The genesis of the objective of this article was to “call-in” those within the plant-based movement, particularly those in the dietetics profession to be aware of the issue of omission or inaccurate attribution of the history and origin of the plant-based movement.

This article may be difficult for some of you to read. We are “calling in” our own VN members, past and current leaders within VN DPG, and the Academy to have a conversation about race, equity, diversity, and inclusion in an open and mindful way so that we can take action towards changing the system from within. We have to start the conversation somewhere and somehow. Our hope is that even if you find yourself feeling uncomfortable or even upset after reading this article that you will stay open-minded as you learn more about the experiences of those that have been systematically ignored, erased, and deprioritized through centuries of implicit and explicit bias from both within the plant-based movement, U.S. and the world. Thank you for taking the time to read this vital and critical piece and we welcome your comments and suggestions.

Introduction
The plant-based movement has gained tremendous traction in recent years as a pro animal-rights, healthy, and environmentally conscious alternative to traditional diets (1). In a recent survey, about 41% of American consumers reported increased consumption of protein from plant sources, and more than four in ten consumers assume that a “plant-based” product is healthier than its alternative, even when presented with identical nutrition fact labels (2). Plant-based diets have also been touted to reduce many disease-related risk factors (3). Despite its potential, the current plant-based trend in the United States is problematic because it relies on assumptions enmeshed in white privilege and subtle racism. Privilege refers to the unearned social power held by a dominant group; it is usually invisible to those who have it (4). In this context, privilege refers to the normativity of Whiteness and the luxury of ignoring unequal racialized power dynamics that underlie plant-based advocacy. For dietetic practitioners to cultivate cultural humility, they must not only build awareness of other cultures (which includes recognizing the roots and history of plant-based diets), but also of political, economic, and social realities that impact persons in other cultures and marginalized groups (5). This article aims to elucidate how the historical and current discourse around the neo-plant-based movement steeped in Western-prejudice views and beliefs inadvertently bolsters privilege and deepens structural inequities.

Hidden history: The Whitewashed Past of the Plant-Based Movement
Peer-reviewed and practice publications, including those serving food and nutrition professionals, view plant-based diets through a White normative lens, ignoring the myriad cultures rooted in plant-based eating, rather than celebrating them. For example, a recent Food and Nutrition Magazine article falsely claims that the first known group to practice vegetarianism for philosophical reasons was the Pythagoreans, and then goes on to name several white actors (with the exception of the Indian emperor Ashoka and Japanese emperor Tenmu), and identifies them as central figures in the spread of the plant-based movement around the world (6). This example illustrates the subtle whitewashing that occurs, despite historical records indicating non-White cultures’ appreciation for and adherence to plant-based diets for hundreds of years prior to White cultural records (7,8). Vegetarianism as a philosophy can be found in the ancient Indian epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, with numerous references pertaining to the abstention of meat for the purposes of higher spiritual attainment. Scholars have dated these texts between the 3rd and 7th centuries BCE, indicating that they could predate Pythagoras by several centuries (7). A contemporary of Pythagoras, Gautama Buddha, forbade all killing and animal sacrifice and prohibited all trade involving carcasses (8). Later adherents have interpreted his philosophies to be explicitly vegetarian (9). Another account, also detailing the history of plant-based movements, gives a cursory nod to Buddhism and the Hindu traditions, but details an otherwise white-centric history of vegetarianism (10). Included is a list of prominent vegetarians, Pythagoras chief among them, and all of them white with the exception of Mahatma Gandhi. In mentioning Mahatma Gandhi’s vegetarianism after this exposition, the author quite bizarrely implies Gandhi’s non-violent philosophy owes its roots to white philosophers such as Pythagoras, the purported “father of ethical vegetarianism.” Gandhi’s philosophy of ahimsa, variously translated from Sanskrit as non-injury or non-killing, in fact, stems from the Vedas, the ancient Hindu canon whose oldest text...
has been dated around 1500-1200 BCE (11).

Reading these articles at face value, one might think that we have mostly White figures to thank for the spread and popularity of vegetarianism, and so too for its "newly discovered" health benefits. Both articles give but a cursory mention of non-white cultures' historical vegetarianism, inadvertently focusing on Whiteness in supposedly unbiased historical accounts. In essence, authors are privileging the White history of plant-based diets, which ignores and subjugates the history of non-White cultures who have celebrated these dietary patterns for centuries. It maintains a normativity of Whiteness; that is, it makes the White history the primary or sole history (12).

In truth, the history of white-vegetarianism is steeped in racist ideology. John Harvey Kellogg, is credited in both of the aforementioned articles, is well known for promoting and popularizing the plant-based movement in the United States. However, beneath the inclusive veneer of the plant-based movement lies a dark and sordid past, evidenced by Kellogg's fervent puritanical beliefs regarding sex and his championing of eugenics (13). Kellogg first rose to prominence as the director of Battle Creek Sanitarium, a world-renowned health resort based in Michigan. The resort was founded on the principles of Seventh-day Adventism, of which Kellogg was a huge proponent.

Their advocacy for plant-based diets stemmed not only from potential health benefits but from the view that meat consumption was eroding the moral fiber of America. To him, consumption of animal flesh fueled the hapless meat-eaters' hedonistic impulses, and gave way to deplorable sexual vices (14). In addition to developing a plant-based curriculum to be taught to the aspiring dietitians at Battle Creek, Kellogg asserted that these deleterious habits should be bred out of the populace, in order to promote racial purity for the good of public health. For Kellogg, these supposedly harmful immoralities were inextricably tied to people who were poor, uneducated, or of a racial/ethnic minority. Unsurprisingly, he was also a vocal advocate for racial segregation and eugenic legislation, later becoming a founding member of the Race Betterment Foundation (15). Clearly, the "founding" and propagation of the plant-based movement in the United States was, in truth, an unapologetic promotion of Whiteness.

Privilege in Plant-Based Discourse

The legacy of Kellogg's early American vegetarianism was underpinned by and explicitly tied to racist ideology and that White privilege is still evident in today's vegetarian and plant-based movement(s) in new and myriad forms, including the promotion of farmers' markets and community gardens, appropriating cultural norms to promote plant-based eating, and in focusing on animal rights over human rights. Advocacy for farmers' markets and community gardens in low-income neighborhoods of color are often white-led and dominated, but promote themselves as inclusive (16). The subtext is that everyone should want these spaces, and privilege allows farmers' markets and community gardens advocates to assume this view is universal and accessible. In essence, farmers' markets and community gardens create more access to whole plant foods and everyone would or should want to engage in these spaces.

In creating these markets and gardens, White people often gentrify community spaces in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, which further displaces and marginalizes Black, Indigenous, or other people of color (BIPOC) (17).

The promotion of a plant-based...
ideology to those who lack the means to engage in it, presents another marker of White privilege. According to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (The Academy), several conditions need to be met for a healthful plant-based diet. These include access to a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, incorporation of legumes and grains, vitamin B12 supplementation, and exposure to sunlight to obtain sufficient vitamin D (3). Although the intention of The Academy may be to prevent and reverse chronic diseases that may affect the BIPOC community at a disproportionate rate, underlying these recommendations is the unfounded assumption that they are universally feasible. In reality, the ability of individuals to follow a plant-based diet relies on access, financial resources, and geographical location - resources that are taken for granted by the privileged. BIPOC communities often lack the means to purchase high quality produce, let alone incur additional expense via supplementation, and may live in areas where such resources are scarce (17). In analyzing the misguided presumption that anyone can follow such a diet, and the contrived moralization that they should, the blinders of privilege are made visible. It is White privilege that allows the proponents of neo-plant-based movements in the West to promote this ideology without recognizing the very real barriers encountered by the less privileged. This is ‘racism without racists’, where individuals and institutions of the dominant (White) group perpetuate racialized power structures but do not necessarily do so directly or even consciously (19). In this example, it is evident that nutrition recommendations behind the plant-based movement, that does not accompany policy, systems, and environmental change, unwittingly raise a balustrade supporting the structures that systemically disenfranchise BIPOC communities.

There have also been instances in which white actors in the plant-based movement have appropriated non-white cultures to benefit monetarily, without suffering any of the disadvantages that BIPOC face. The plant-based movement is propelled by advertising that assumes a White audience, but also exploits non-White culture. One example of this is Thug Kitchen, a popular vegan recipe site and blog that went on to publish several successful cookbooks. The site prompted much controversy when it was revealed that the people behind the blog were an upper class white couple from California (20). What raised hackles was the fact that the blog utilized aggressive racialized language and African American Vernacular English in its recipes and self-promotion (21). Far from benign marketing, some scholars have referred to this taking advantage of online anonymity in order to claim a Black identity for the purpose of self gain as “digital blackface” (22). The couple’s use of aggressive and “colorful” language, such as their liberal use of the word “thug”, paints a picture of the Black community that portrays them as violent, poorly educated, and uncouth. Further, the very word “thug” invokes negative, threatening black stereotypes and in this way legitimizes them. Some critics have gone so far as to say that the term “thug” is in fact a coded, politically correct version of the n-word (22). White privilege again rears its head here in the ability of claiming this promotion of themselves and vegan food in general as for everyone, while ignoring the stigmatizing connotations of their language and marketing. Reacting to the criticism six years after the controversy, the founders of the site changed their name to “Bad Manners” and promised to reevaluate their branding and the content of their cookbooks in 2020 (23).

Similarly, a clear parallel exists between eschewing human rights in favor of animal rights in plant-based advocacy, without awareness of the harmful implications for BIPOC communities. Research indicates that for vegetarians in the West, animal rights is a primary motivator for adopting the diet (1). Animal welfare organizations couch their plant-based advocacy in the language of promotion of “cruelty free” and “ethical” products and practices (24). A critical examination reveals these recommendations to be hypocritical as such products rely on an agricultural food system that is sustained by the unethical exploitation of food system workers, who are overwhelmingly non-white (25). Government assistance to farm workers is overwhelmingly skewed towards white farmers, and agribusiness subsidies structurally disempower communities of color through these communities’ lack of access to land and wealth. The true beneficiaries of such subsidies are large corporations who are then enabled to continue paying low wages to, and withhold benefits from, their majority BIPOC workforce (25). In reality, food system workers domestically and abroad are often BIPOC who receive low wages, are subject to harsh working conditions,

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and are exploited frequently and in numerous ways (26). BIPOC plant-based advocates have highlighted the importance of focusing on human labor as well as animal welfare yet that narrative hasn’t been adopted by white-dominant organizations (17). In this example, it is evident that plant-forward animal-rights advocacy blithely forsakes the human animal, and thus contributes to the marginalization of BIPOC communities through a lens of privilege.

A Culturally Humble Way Forward for Plant-Based Diets and Vegetarianism

The lack of awareness and cultural sensitivity surrounding the plant-based movement has both directly and indirectly contributed to the impoverishment, marginalization, and stigmatization of communities of color. To foster cultural humility, dietetics practitioners, particularly those who are White, have to be aware not only of implicit biases and assumptions but also of the implications of dietary recommendations. It is necessary to be aware of the paradoxical and harmful underpinnings of the Western plant-based movement, which uses one form of oppression to combat another. Vegetarianism, veganism, or plant-based diets have documented benefits for health, the environment, and the welfare of other living beings, but it is of paramount importance that RDNs continue to deepen cultural humility in order to approach vegetarianism from an informed perspective, one that critically examines the current Western plant-based movement. The current lens of white privilege must be abandoned and disguised exclusion made visible if the vegetarian or plant-based movement is to become truly inclusive, sustainable, and achievable for all.

References


Kate G. Burt, PhD, RDN is an assistant professor and undergraduate program director of the Dietetics, Foods, and Nutrition Program at Lehman College, City University of New York. Her research broadly aims to reduce inequities in dietetics and food systems and within this scope, she focuses on unveiling systemic racial bias in the profession and in dietary recommendations.
“WHERE DID YOU PARK YOUR CAR?”
Those were the very first words spoken to me by the Caucasian dietitian who interviewed me for my first job attempt in the field of dietetics in Texas.

“What is a metabolic balance diet?”, emphatically stated by my predecessor, an RD from India whom I had replaced in a nutrition research unit.

“How did you get your job? Where did you go to school?”, repeatedly asked by multiple Caucasian RDs at my first attendance at a National Institute of Health (NIH) Annual General Clinical Research Centers (GCRC) Conference.

“Wow, I really didn’t believe you could do it!”, exclaimed a Caucasian doctor when I received approval for a proposal that I had written to establish a Body Composition Lab at my workplace.

Scrutiny never rests for those of us who are blessed to be born African American. In the field of dietetics, it strengthened me to become more resilient.

Results from the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR) 2017 survey of RD/RDN demographics indicate that only 2.6% (2,450) of the 93,320 dietitians in the US are Black or African American (1). Many more are needed. African Americans have the highest rates of obesity (39.8%) (2) and hypertension (54%) (3), as well as colorectal cancer incidence (49.2%) and mortality (20.5%) (4).

Type 2 diabetes is also more prevalent amongst African Americans (11.7%) compared with Caucasians (7.5%) (5). Finally, rates of COVID-19 cases are 2.6 times higher in African Americans and they are 4.7 times more likely to be hospitalized than Caucasians (5). While there are many factors such as genetics and physical activity, diet plays a significant role in the manifestation and prevention of all these diseases. There is abundant information online, in healthcare clinics, evidence-based and peer-reviewed studies, and in the media regarding the importance and efficacy of consuming a more plant-based diet rich in whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, and seeds.

Barriers existing in the African American community include access to community grocery stores and safe environments conducive to routine physical activity. However, another important piece of the puzzle is access to African American RD/RDNs who can relate culturally and help to navigate the dietary changes necessary to improve health. Role models are needed to help translate knowledge into practice within the African American community whether it’s in a grocery store, church, or community center.

The root of most of the disparity in the diversity of RD/RDNs is as simple as ABC: ambition, beliefs, and competition. These ABCs are Eurocentric and Western thinking and these ideas promote a control mentality. African Americans and people of the African diaspora have been looked upon as inferior since the time of European colonization and slavery. These negative beliefs and attitudes have infiltrated into the hearts and minds of Asians, East Indians, Hispanic Latinos, and “believe it or not” Africans. The reality is that every human bleeds red, pees yellow, and poops brown. Due to social injustice and constant negative media portrayal, African Americans have continued to be suppressed by limited access to quality education, economic advancement, and therefore adequate and equitable healthcare.

Many of those that have been able to escape the cycle of poverty and achieve economic gain do not remain in their communities as role models, investing and building up hope (6). This allows crime to dominate, values to diminish, disunity among African Americans to increase, despair to prevail and health to decline (7, 8).

Ironically, more African Americans are transitioning to a plant-based diet lifestyle than any other ethnic group. The 2015 Vegetarian Resource Group Poll of Americans found that 8% of African Americans consume a 100% plant-based diet compared with 3.4% for the total population (9). This trend is a result of African Americans taking health matters into their own hands due to a lack of true concern by the “system.” As this trend unfolds, many are discovering that the traditional diet of their African ancestors was majority plant-based. In fact, ancient African cultures in Ethiopia, Egypt, Nigeria, and South Africa were adhering to a mostly plant-based diet long before the concept ever reached Europe. Fresh fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, and seeds were common. Cereal grains were staples and included African red rice, fonio, teff,
sorghum, millet, and barley depending on the region. These grains were also fermented which provided both fiber and probiotic substrate for the gut microbiota that has contributed to the lower existence of colon cancer in African countries. In more rural regions of Africa, these practices still exist. Over the centuries through migration, food exchange and adaptation of western culture, these nutrient-dense whole grain sources were replaced by refined processed foods in African American culture.

Other communities like those in Okinawa, Japan, as well as religious groups in China, India, and Israel preceded the European “invention” of a vegan diet for health. Even Native Americans had healthy plant-based cuisine which they shared with European settlers and helped them survive here in the Americas. That means people of color were on to plant-based diets long before Europeans. But skin color should never define people. It is the character and unique gifts bestowed on each individual and society that should be recognized and respected. Everyone has an opportunity to thrive if we collectively value one another. It is the diversity of colors on a plate that truly matters. There are unique plant-based foods on every continent to support this type of eating pattern and lifestyle. We should allow the RDNs of these nations to share their cuisine through presentations at our nutrition conferences and workshops.

How can the VN DPG help? Establish avenues for more African Americans desiring to excel in plant-based nutrition and dietetics professions. Provide training workshops on plant-based nutrition education for African American RD/RDNs who need to be educated. Provide research opportunities and mentors for African American dietetic interns to explore plant-based nutrition on a basic and clinical level. They will then go into their communities and share their knowledge. They will become African American nutrition scientists. Remember knowledge is not owned by any particular race or ethnicity. It was never meant to be dominated or used as a means of suppression. It is built upon the successes and failures of past generations to be shared with future populations that make up the family we call “the human race.”

Civil Rights leader, Coretta Scott King embraced veganism as a “logical extension of Dr. Martin Luther King’s philosophy of nonviolence and justice.” Let us as VN DPG RDNs pledge to continue to fight for health equity through enabling African American dietitians to become leaders within their communities. We should not compete for control. All we need to do is share and collaborate. This sharing means an exchange both ways. There are existing resources created by African Americans which you can use in your practice. The African American Vegan Starter Guide and Lifestyle Interventions for Optimal Health. Getting Started: Whole Foods Plant-Based Recipes and Meal Plans (11) are tools developed by practicing African American plant-based health professionals including RDs to assist African Americans in adopting a plant-based lifestyle. We could include this and other evidence-based resources developed by African Americans in our VN DPG resource list. How would you increase reach and equity in the African American RD community? Share your ideas with the VN DPG!

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References

Kayellen Edmonds Umeakunne is a Plant-Based Registered Dietitian Nutritionist in Atlanta, GA. She currently directs the Bionutrition Core in the Clinical Research Center at Morehouse School of Medicine and lectures for the Optimal Health and Wellness Program - Plant Based Nutrition Class Series.
CULTURAL COMPETENCE & HUMILITY
IN DIETETICS

DIVERSITY IS OUR ADVANTAGE

Culture is a set of behaviors of groups that create patterns carried forward through generations. Cultural competence refers to our ability to function effectively to provide guidance within the cultural parameters. Cultural humility is one construct for understanding and developing a process-oriented approach to competency.

CULTURAL HUMILITY REQUIRES LIFELONG COMMITMENT TO SELF-EVALUATION AND SELF-CRITIQUE, FIX POWER IMBALANCES, DEVELOP PARTNERSHIPS WITH PEOPLE AND GROUPS WHO ADVOCATE FOR OTHERS.

DIVERSITY AMONG US IS LIKE A LARGE “PARTY” AND INCLUSION IS BEING INVITED TO “DANCE” AT THE PARTY. INVITE EVERYONE TO DANCE AND HELP CREATE A SENSE OF BELONGING.

Dignity + Respect = Inclusion

LISTEN, LEARN AND AMPLIFY. CULTURAL HUMILITY IS OUR ABILITY TO MAINTAIN AN INTERPERSONAL STANCE THAT IS OTHER-ORIENTED IN RELATION TO ASPECTS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY THAT ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO THE PERSON.

ACCEPT AND RESPECT DIFFERENCES CONTINUE SELF-AWARENESS LEARN THE DYNAMICS AND UNIQUENESS OF CULTURES ACCESS MULTIPLE RESOURCES SHARE AND EDUCATE OTHERS

DISPARITY VS INEQUITY: do you know the difference? I thought I did. Or rather, I found myself muttering, “I should know this already,” as I completed assigned reading and homework on the topics of health disparity, health equity, and food justice. While health disparity simply refers to health differences between groups (1), health inequity describes the unfair and avoidable health differences resulting from systemic oppression of non-dominant groups (2). The first term suggests to me an indifferent attitude of inescapability regarding such differences, especially when these definitions appear in a context to educate health care providers. In contrast, the second term emphasizes our opportunity and responsibility as health care providers to challenge the origins of these differences and reject their inevitability (2).

It may look like a simple terminology swap: after all, these terms are routinely interchanged as I observe how health disparity often dominates nutrition textbooks and resources with little, if any, discussion of health inequity altogether. However, for me, this review of terms has been an enormous learning. Now I can’t unsee it, and now I can’t sidestep my role in improving patient care by dismantling systemic oppression and promoting policies that influence everyone’s health.

I learned this and much more in a new live course entitled Culture, Equity, Diversity, and Race in Dietetics (CEDAR). My powerful experience in this course inspired me to share what I learned with you all. I was grateful to find a resource that helps me learn about myself and advances the cause of cultural humility and anti-racism specifically in nutrition and dietetics. “Dietitians are uniquely positioned to play an important role within both the food and health care systems. I am committed to providing an action-oriented course where students are provided with real solutions, that they can apply to their professional and personal lives, to truly embody and accept and respect differences,” says Rosie Mensah, MPH, RD, the Toronto, Canada-based Registered Dietitian behind the brand “The Rosie Nutritionist” and the creator and instructor of this course.

I often thought about this dietetic practice group during the course as vegetarianism sits at the intersection of so many isms and injustices. Many nutrition resources show a preference for specific foodways associated with whiteness while ignoring or disparaging other foodways developed by
people of color. Vegetarian and vegan nutrition resources fall prey to this pattern, and I have learned a lot from Dr. A. Breeze Harper’s activism and writing on this issue (3). As champions of vegetarian nutrition, we must consider the many structures and policies that influence individual food access, including systemic racism. If our concern for non-human animal welfare drives any aspect of our passion for vegetarian nutrition, then we must extend our concern to the injustices experienced by all beings.

I left each session of the course with practical strategies for culturally relevant nutrition care and examples of the power of language. The more I opt to say “racism-related health inequities” instead of “race-related health disparities,” the more I advocate for treating racism as a public health issue. I do this as a clinician, a preceptor, a colleague, and a member of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. I do this to demonstrate the biases in our own field (all fields have them), then show another path we can take as health care providers.

My experience in this course was so valuable to my professional development and growth. I used to think that food justice work and policy advocacy were only for me if my job title mentioned public health, community, or policy advocacy. Even when I was previously working as a community dietitian, frequently collaborating with public health dietitians and community outreach teams, I still thought that when I was there. Now after this course, I better understand that my privilege and responsibility as a dietitian require me to continuously educate myself on all of the connections between food and health.

WHAT IS NEXT FOR ME?
Sharing my experience in venues like this feels like an important next step where I can acknowledge systemic racism and use my platform as a dietitian and health care provider. I have committed to participating in anti-racism education on a monthly basis, similar to the commitments that many of us make to stay up with the latest nutrition research and respond to nutrition policy action and advocacy alerts. This includes reading current events and critical race theory writing, then discussing with colleagues from my CEDAR cohort, and attending social justice workshops and sharing my takeaways with colleagues. This commitment has led me to valuable opportunities to explore my interests like a recent workshop on the intersections of yoga as industry and practice, racism, and social justice. As a white person, I am learning that I have the responsibility to educate myself and engage with others, mostly other white folks, regarding my white privilege and ways I can promote antiracist structures and policies. I look within the organizations where I work and volunteer to contribute to more inclusive practices: most recently, this has meant a revision of an award application form and rubric to remove as much bias as possible from the selection process. I also continue to seek out volunteer opportunities with local and regional initiatives that advocate for food justice and antiracist systems in my community.

WHAT IS NEXT FOR YOU?
I invite you to join me in lifelong learning and action in anti-racism. Pick a resource or next step from this article, from elsewhere in this newsletter, or from Vegetarian Nutrition’s resource list: https://www.vndpg.org/vn/diversity/anti-racism-work. Set a goal for yourself to continue on this journey and share your experience with as many people as you can.

Visit Rosie’s CEDAR course here to preview the curriculum and read about the years of experience that moved Rosie to develop this course. Or connect with Rosie to learn more about the course here.

“Explore and bookmark the Racial Equity Tools Glossary available at https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary. Learn definitions and explore terminology that you do not understand. Look at health data and become aware of the health inequities that exist. Do the research. Finally, recognize that ‘not being racist’ is not enough.”

–Rosie Mensah, MPH, R.D.

Let’s stand and move in solidarity.

References:

Lora Silver, MS, RD, CDN is a Registered Dietitian newly based in New Haven, Connecticut. Lora holds a master’s degree in integrative nutrition from Bastyr University and completed her clinical training at Cleveland Clinic. Lora has been an enthusiastic member of the VN DPG since 2015. She also serves on the Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Committee of Dietitians in Integrative & Functional Medicine (DIFM).
FIRST OF ALL, as Diversity Liaison, I want to extend my sincere thanks to our newsletter editors Sahra Pak and Deborah Murphy and our entire VN leadership team for putting together this edition of the newsletter. As you all know, the topic of Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity has been a hot topic of conversation after the death of George Floyd. Why is Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity important in our profession? The answer is very simple – so we can provide the best food and nutrition services and advice to a diverse American population while understanding the culture, ethnicity, and traditions broadly represented in our society. In February of 2019, the Academy defined diversity as “striving to recognize, respect, and include differences in ability, age, creed, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, size, and socioeconomic characteristics in the nutrition and dietetics profession” (3). Judith C. Rodriguez, PhD, RDN, LDN, FADA, FAND, Academy’s 2010-2011 President says “It is important to know the difference between diversity and inclusion, and ideally to value and actively practice both, while diversity is about a variety or range of groups, inclusion is about being and feeling, a part of something. A group may have many different persons, but not all, or any, may feel as though they are included” (3).

The Academy developed a 5-year Diversity Strategic Plan in 2015 to integrate strategies to create a more diverse and inclusive membership as well as increase our member’s cultural understanding under our first African American Academy president Dr. Evelyn Crayton. According to the Academy 2019 survey (6), the current statistics of our profession are:

- **Gender:** Female- 95%, Male-4%
- **Heritage/Race:** White (Non-Hispanic)-84%, Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Origin-5%, Asians-5%, Black or African American-3%, Some other race-2%

As you can see, our profession which has the majority of White (Non-Hispanic) RDNs and NDTRs, lacks diversity. Therefore, it becomes very important that we continue to learn and educate ourselves about diversity, inclusion, and equity in order to render unbiased nutrition services to our country’s population which is highly diverse. The Academy has addressed this in its strategic plan: “Increase the diversity and cultural competence of the workforce to reflect the communities they serve.” Please see here to review the key updates and messages from the Academy on the Diversity and Inclusion Committee.

What can YOU do?
There are some effective and meaningful strategies that you can employ. See below some great examples from the article by Shamera Robinson, “Doubling Down on Diversity: The Journey to a More Diverse Field”:

- **Recognize.** Some level of bias is nearly always present and it is important to recognize how that may impact decision-making. “We all have formed an opinion about someone based on their looks, language, culture, et cetera,” says Joseph Quinlan, MSH, RD, CNSC, LD/N, chair of the Academy’s Diversity Committee. “It’s going to happen and, as professionals, we must realize we are judging people not on fact but on bias and opinion. We preach evidence-based nutrition — sometimes we need to form evidence-based impressions.”

- **Learn.** After recognizing personal biases, place yourself in a position to grow. Attend training on cultural competence, review inclusion resources and tools, and be intentional about encouraging diverse spaces both personally and professionally. Joining a member interest group with a focus on another culture could be beneficial.

- **Connect.** Mentorship is an effective strategy to recruit and retain students and professionals from underrepresented groups. If you do not have the capacity to serve as a mentor, connect interested students with
helpful resources or colleagues.

• **Share.** If you create or implement an effective approach to the problem, share the solution with other nutrition professionals. Working together to address lack of diversity is more resourceful than attempting to tackle the issue alone.

• **Ask.** If an organization does not offer a statement on how diversity is handled, then inquire. As a student, find out how your education program helps students of diverse backgrounds overcome barriers and how you can get involved. Health care practitioners can ask similar questions in the workplace to spark conversation about cross-cultural competence, diversity and inclusion.

References:

Sheetal Parikh is a dietitian from India and has been vegetarian all her life. She believes that “you are what you eat”. She currently is an author for plant-based nutrition and advocates vegetarian nutrition in her practice and counseling. She loves to create new recipes and cook healthy and yummy plant based meals for her colleagues, friends and family.

Shine a Light on Heart Health with a Handful of Walnuts

American Heart Month puts a spotlight on cardiovascular health. Food and nutrition professionals have the opportunity to shine the light on heart-healthy, plant-based foods, and this is where walnuts take the stage.

Decades of scientific research have linked walnut consumption to various factors related to heart health such as cholesterol, blood pressure, inflammation and blood vessel function. Plus, walnuts are the only nut with an excellent source of plant-based omega-3 ALA, providing 2.5 grams per one ounce.

View Plant-Forward Recipes
THIS YEAR we are happy to announce Katie Ellison as the recipient of the Cyndi Reeser Outstanding State Coordinator award. Katie is the state coordinator for Alabama and is earning her PhD in Nutrition Science at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. She is currently conducting an obesity study investigating the independent contributions of intervention components and their ability to produce weight loss. She is developing vegetarian meal plans based on the USDA’s Healthy Vegetarian Diet pattern and comparing its effectiveness in producing weight loss to the USDA’s Healthy US and Healthy Mediterranean diet patterns. Congratulations and thank you for being an active state coordinator, Katie!!

Sheetal Parikh had the first virtual meeting with a group of dietetic students at Kaiser University in Florida. This is her experience in her words:

‘No one can deny what an unprecedented time we all are experiencing and likely are never going to forget. Practicing social distancing has become the routine lifestyle for everyone and slowly but surely we are getting used to this ‘new normal.’ In light of this present situation, as a Florida State Coordinator for VN DPG, I was scratching my head trying to come up with ideas to spread the word about VN DPG since all the state face-to-face events are canceled. I decided to reach out to nutrition and dietetics college students since most of them are studying virtually at this time. I contacted the director of the Bachelors and the Master’s program at Keiser University and voila - my wish was granted! I was permitted to present to their students who are ready to graduate and share about the VN DPG as a Professional Involvement and Leadership Opportunity.

Students took this presentation very well and I had many overwhelming responses about how thankful they were to know about all of the VN DPG information and the opportunities to get involved. The most highlighted part of this presentation was that students were very happy to know that they didn’t have to be vegan and/or vegetarian to join our VN DPG group. A few verbalized that this was one of the things that were holding them back from joining VN DPG, but now they will go ahead and become part of our VN DPG community. All the professors were also very glad for this presentation and asked me to present this information to every batch of students going forward. I will end by saying that “where there is a will, there is a way.” Let’s all share with each other the different avenues to showcase our passion and our love for plant-based foods!’

Sheetal Parikh, MS, RDN, LDN is an NCM Author, the VN Diversity Liaison, the VN Florida State Coordinator, and VN Advocacy and Public Policy committee member.

Thank you, Sheetal for being a great state coordinator and active VN DPG member!

If you are interested in volunteering in your state, please don’t hesitate to contact your state coordinator. If your state doesn’t have a state coordinator, I invite you to consider becoming the state coordinator. Please visit the state coordinator to find out or contact me at kgalbis@yahoo.com with any questions.
HOUSE OF DELEGATES (HOD) UPDATE

BY LINDA ARPINO, RDN, CDN, FAND

HELLO FELLOW VN MEMBERS:
I hope all of you are doing well during this pandemic. The House of Delegates (HOD) fall meeting was held virtually on October 15-16, 2020 followed by a January POD and February meeting. Unlike previous program years, when the HOD focused on nutrition and health equity, The HOD leadership team charged the delegates to think about how the Academy and its members accelerate nutrition and health equity.

The House of Delegates is continued to discuss the Critical Issue: A Systems Approach to Accelerating Nutrition and Health Equity. The HOD dialogue is currently focusing on Black, Latinx, and Native American communities as these are the groups most affected by COVID-19.

THE HOUSE OF DELEGATES VALUES YOUR INPUT ON THE FUTURE OF MEMBER INTEREST GROUPS WITHIN THE HOD.
Please read the HOD Member Interest Group (MIGs) Task Force Report and review the options for MIG representation in the House of the Delegates.

Please select your preferred option for MIG representation in the House of Delegates via this survey link. The options are not presented in any particular order and are not prioritized or rated in any way. The input will be shared with your delegate(s), as well as the MIGs you indicate.

The survey should take approximately five minutes of your time and should be completed by Tuesday, April 6.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU! CALL TO ACTION FOR ACADEMY MEMBERS:
• Thank you to those who took the survey this winter and the results will help the HOD task force to develop tools and resources to support member efforts to accelerate nutrition and health equity. The successes and challenges of these efforts can help us learn from one another.
• Several of our board members attended our February meeting to discuss the topic of VUCA. It stands for Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous. The VN DPG board members will further address this topic on April 22 @ 6pm on how it applies to our DPG and future practice.
• Stay informed about the Academy’s many projects and funds allocation by reading the recently released 2020 Annual Report: annual-report-2020.pdf (eatrightpro.org)
• Lastly, VN DPG is seeking all members to respond to Legislative Action Alerts to assure our services are addressed.

I am always available and like to hear from you on any concerns you think should be addressed at HOD.

LEARN MORE ABOUT NUTRITION AND HEALTH EQUITY AND USE THESE RESOURCES
• Combatting Unconscious Bias and Preventing Microaggressions: A Professional Duty (webinar)
• Definition of Terms (webpage)
• Diversity and Inclusion (webpage)
• Equity vs. Equality (video)
• Practicing Cultural Competence and Cultural Humility in the Care of Diverse Patients (article)
• Project Implicit, Implicit Association Test
• Understanding and Promoting Nutrition and Health Equity (webpage)

Thank you,
Linda Arpino, VN DPG Delegate
Email: linda.arpino@gmail.com

POLICY AND ADVOCACY LEADER (PAL) UPDATE

BY CATHERINE CONWAY, MS, RDN, CDN, CDCES

HAVE YOU SEEN our new Advocacy page on the VN DPG website? Please check it out. We hope you will find it helpful and full of all the information you need to help you voice your ideas and concerns to your legislators. Last year, VN formed a Policy and Advocacy Committee. We have been hard at work in the background all year on ongoing and new issues as they arise. If you are interested in advocacy or want to learn more about it, please consider joining this committee and contact me. We are always looking for new members.

I am proud to introduce one of the members of this committee, Justine Meyer. She has been very active in following legislation among other things. The following article was written by her. I hope this will help you understand the importance of actively participating in public policy.
WHY PUBLIC POLICY & ADVOCACY MATTERS
BY JUSTINE MEYER, RDN, CSG
PUBLIC POLICY AND ADVOCACY COMMITTEE MEMBER

AS A MEMBER of the Vegetarian Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group (VN DPG), you may wonder at times why we advocate for the public policies presented here. While a particular policy may not directly relate to vegetarian nutrition on the surface, there are many ways in which public policies impact us as registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs) and nutrition and dietetics technicians, registered (NDTRs), as well as shape the health of our clients, families and communities.

A public policy may help to create or extend funding which affects job availability for our members. These positions can mean a seat at the table in clinical, community, and research settings where VN DPG members help advocate for the needs of people who follow vegetarian and vegan diets. As public interest grows in plant-based and environmental sustainability-focused eating habits, RDNs and NDTRs with knowledge in vegetarian nutrition will help inform programs and projects that address these topics. VN DPG members can also serve at their workplace to promote equity in healthcare and nutrition services by speaking to the different ethnic and cultural dietary habits that connect with vegetarian nutrition.

Public policies may also influence the health of clients we serve in addressing the accessibility of nutrition services. Many in the public considering or already practicing vegetarian/vegan diets can benefit from Medical Nutrition Therapy (MNT). Counseling and education provided during MNT from a RDN is an important intervention to not only address nutrition-related medical issues, but also help ensure that those practicing vegetarian/vegan diets are properly educated on how to meet their nutrition needs. Without access to MNT, people may be discouraged from adopting a vegetarian or vegan diet recommended by their doctor to help treat a medical issue due to the challenges of making these dietary changes on their own. MNT may also help those already following a vegetarian/vegan diet who would without guidance from a RDN struggle to avoid nutrient deficiencies or have trouble following these diets along with the dietary restrictions necessary for a medical condition such as chronic kidney disease, diabetes or cardiovascular disease.

The funding and regulation of public health programs are vital to combating food insecurity and malnutrition. Public policies may influence the reach of these programs to provide vegetarian/vegan options for home-delivered and congregate meals for older adults, or the Free and Reduced Price School Meals program for children. Funding policies for programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC) can also mean access to adequate food for low-income families and individuals following vegetarian or vegan diets, ensuring nutrient deficiencies are avoided and health equity is promoted.

We can as nutrition professionals and the public help inspire positive change to improve the nutrition and health of our communities through supporting public policy. If there are other ways public policy influences work you do as a VN DPG member or as a person following a vegetarian/vegan diet, we would love to hear about it (insert link to VN DPG Contact Us page)

Justine can be reached at justineviolet@gmail.com
If you are interested in joining the Public Policy and Advocacy Committee please contact catherineconway@msn.com. We are always looking for new members.
1. JEANIE, HOW DID YOU BECOME INTERESTED IN PLANT-BASED NUTRITION?
I always practiced plant-based nutrition to some extent, but after a former student, who was a patient of Dr. Esselstyn, introduced me to his plant-based, no-added oil program, it piqued my interest once again.

I was skeptical about the restrictions of the program, but marveled at the success that the student and her partner achieved by adhering to the program. She invited me to join her at the Cleveland Clinic for a “reunion” of former patients who were successfully following the Esselstyn protocol. I was amazed at the enthusiasm of the group and the lifestyle changes they were able to maintain. Dr. Esseltyn presented, complete with a suitcase of food as props to enhance his lecture, and his love of cooking inspired me.

I jumped on board and followed the program for 11 months, until it was time to lead my first student trip – a culinary immersion experience designed to explore the foodways of Italy. I was NOT going to miss out on the true cultural experience of the food, so I put my plant-based, no-added oil diet on hold for 10 days. I thoroughly enjoyed my trip, and was able to resume my plant-based eating upon my return with ease.

My first trip abroad turned into annual trips with my students, and it became increasingly challenging to continue to follow the Esselstyn program 100% upon return. I teach principles of food selection and preparation, and every time I would teach egg nutrition I would ask myself why I omit them from my diet, as I recognize their nutritional benefits and enjoy eating them. I made the decision to transition to an ovo-vegetarian diet to enjoy the benefits of egg nutrition.

In 2018, my husband was diagnosed with prostate cancer, and we decided to adopt a 100% plant-based diet. We were successful in maintaining a 100% plant-based household for about a year, but then opted for a more flexible pattern and added eggs back into our diet. We are flexible in our eating when we travel, but follow a predominately whole-food, plant-based diet when at home.

2. PLEASE TELL US ABOUT YOUR TRAINING BACKGROUND, AND THE NUTRITION-RELATED JOBS THAT YOU’VE HELD INCLUDING YOUR CURRENT JOB(S).
My career started in school lunch and university dining, followed by jobs in wellness, private practice, supermarket, and sports nutrition. I was the sports RD for the Philadelphia Flyers for 8 years, the Philadelphia Eagles for 14 years, and just recently retired from the Philadelphia 76ers after a 3-year tenure. I started teaching in higher education in 1999, and am still actively teaching at West Chester University of Pennsylvania (WCU).

3. CAN YOU BRIEFLY DESCRIBE ANY PROGRAMS OR INITIATIVES YOU ARE CURRENTLY INVOLVED WITH?
I work with the Men and Women’s Swimming and Diving teams at WCU to promote sports nutrition and plant-based eating. We hold nutrition seminars and plant-based tailgates which are wildly successful. I also lead plant-based nutrition cooking seminars in the foods lab at the university to educate the community on the benefits of plant-based nutrition.

My most recent endeavor is my work with a group of young adults with developmental disabilities in a program called “Ram Chefs”. The program combines whole food, plant-based nutrition education with culinary instruction, while also providing a social network for the chefs and nutrition students. It employs the active engagement framework with a goal of increasing the chefs’ self-determination and ability to independently prepare food.

4. DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR RDNS LOOKING TO PURSUE A CAREER IN SPORTS NUTRITION?
Build strong counseling and communication skills. Develop relationships with fellow healthcare professionals to educate them on the unique skill-set of the RDN, they will act as a referral base in the future. Use the SOP/SOPP for Registered Dietitians in Sports Nutrition and Dietetics Sports RDN as a guide for professional development, and honor our Code of Ethics for Nutrition and Dietetic Professionals.

5. HOW WERE YOU ABLE TO TAILOR YOUR NUTRITION PRACTICE INTO AREAS THAT YOU ARE MOST PASSIONATE ABOUT?
I’m fortunate that...
many people are naturally drawn towards good food and the concepts of cooking. I use recipes, samples, and culinary instruction to educate on nutrition. The supermarket and kitchen often act as my office; they offer the best visuals for education and clients can shop and cook as they learn.

I love working with kids, athletes, and persons with disabilities. As a mother and now grandmother, I enjoy experimenting with creative ways to offer good nutrition to kids. I hosted a virtual cooking class during quarantine for middle school girls and nutrition was a hot topic during the session. Exercise has always been important to me, and to be able to assist athletes through teaching them cooking skills is very rewarding.

My dissertation was on improving nutrient intake of young adults with developmental disabilities, which transformed from research to a passion.

6. WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO OUTSIDE OF WORK?
I love to run and bike, and play in my kitchen! My grandchildren are a big part of my life and teach me so much!

7. WHAT IS ONE OF YOUR FAVORITE VEGETARIAN/VEGAN MEALS?
My go-to weekday meal is a baked potato with broccoli and beans, but I love any meal that has peppers, onions, and garlic.

8. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO DIETITIANS WHO WOULD LIKE TO WORK IN THE AREA OF VEGETARIAN NUTRITION?
Be flexible with the term “plant-based,” meet people where they are in their eating patterns, be on top of nutrition trends, promote pleasurable eating, know how to cook, and most of all... enjoy food!

HAVE YOU MOVED?

IF YOU HAVE RECENTLY MOVED, changed your email, or had a change of name, please update your membership information with the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics to make sure that you don’t miss a single issue of Vegetarian Nutrition Update. The Academy maintains our member address data so you must notify the Academy directly if your information changes. You can do this by:

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Publish Your Work in the Vegetarian Nutrition Update
Are you interested in writing articles for the newsletter? VN needs authors to provide articles for the upcoming year. If you are interested in writing an article, please contact Deb Murphy, Editor, with your idea at Debbie@dietitiandebbie.com.
BOOK REVIEW

BY TIMAREE HAGENBURGER, MPH, RD, ACSM EP-C


The views expressed here are those of the book reviewer and not those of VN DPG or the Academy.

THIS WELL-ORGANIZED and easily referenced resource is bursting with family- and child-centered guidance and strategies to nurture a positive relationship with food and our bodies that can persist throughout our lives and be passed down to future generations.

Dr. Yami Cazorla-Lancaster, a practicing, board-certified pediatrician, speaker, nationally board-certified health and wellness coach, fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics, PCRM Food For Life instructor, and host of the podcast Veggie Doctor Radio, quickly builds rapport with readers, clearly communicating with honesty and compassion. Her “Five Pillars of Healthy Eating” (Honor Hunger and Satiety, Emphasize Whole Food Plant Foods, Establish a Positive Environment, Be Flexible and Relax and Have Fun), sing the praises of a plant-based whole food eating pattern for every stage in a child's development, while also weaving in the core principles of a HAES (Health At Every Size) approach, describing intuitive eating as a child’s superpower. With childhood obesity rates astronomically high, chronic disease plaguing an ever younger population, and processed and fast food ubiquitous throughout the country and much of the world, this book has a huge audience, well beyond parents, and includes grandparents, childcare providers, teachers, pediatricians, family practice doctors, nurses, medical assistants, WIC nutrition assistants, dietitians and public health nutritionists.

Dr. Yami educates her readers about “what” to feed our kids (Part II: What to Eat), chronic disease prevention, integrating a plant-center eating pattern and addressing nutrients of concern. This book is unique in that she is much more focused on the “how” - setting up an environment for children to feel confident trusting their own intuition and body cues and to let their hunger fuel the decisions about eating and to work together as a family. Part I (How to Eat) encompasses the “why” of healthful eating choices and Dr. Yami’s three main goals when making food choices for herself and her family (and when counseling with her patients and their families): promote health and well being, decrease risk of chronic disease and support longevity, and foster confidence. As a member of the American College of Lifestyle Medicine, Dr. Yami also incorporates sleep, stress and exercise into Part III: Setting The Table for Healthy Eating Habits, along with discussion about feeding styles and creating structure.

The remainder of the book has a chapter dedicated to each phase of the life cycle, from pregnancy through “Tweens and Teens.” Each of these chapters is rich with specific guidance, relevant to that age, phase, and/or developmental stage, regarding “how” to feed, intuitive eating, special considerations, recipes and key points. Dr. Yami also includes guidance for special situations and common concerns, including road trips, navigating relations with other family members, picky eaters, emotional eating, chronic constipation, ADHD, developmental disorders and more. The final chapter is a welcome reminder about the power of patience and persistence. This book recognizes that parenting is often about holding up a mirror to our own childhoods and past mindsets and supports parents on this journey. Dr. Yami’s words not only speak to the reader as a parent but also as a person, who has likely also struggled with food or body-image related challenges. Her writing style is unassuming, empathetic, gentle and even playful, but also straightforward, and the material is well-cited, enabling us to have confidence in the advice she provides. Dr. Yami discusses her own experiences, as well as relevant research studies to support her recommendations, and builds on the work of Ellyn Satter and Elyse Resch in her approach to feeding styles and feeding relationships. Dr. Yami’s passion for empowering parents and kids has motivated her to create additional resources, from plant-based shopping list guides for replacing meat and dairy, all easily accessed and downloaded from her website www.DoctorYami.com


Melissa Halas is the creator of MelissasHealthyLiving.com and SuperKidsNutrition.com, a “mega-site” and abundant source of information, activities and other interactive and engaging resources for kids and family nutrition, and has been a practicing RD and nutrition educator for over 20 years.
This workbook-style approach draws kids in with vibrant colors, fun illustrations and 100+ interactive learning activities that teach kids about whole foods, nutrients, gardening, farmers’ markets, healthy habits, and while developing coloring, drawing, reading, spelling and math skills, all organized around 50 breakfast recipes rich in phytonutrients, (referred to as “fight-o-nutrients”). Each chapter features one of the eight Super Crew characters (multicultural, different ages and interests), their animal friends (from Cinnamon The Dog to Flutter the Butterfly), and highlights their superpowers, which are supported by their favorite foods of a specific color. Adults will find the “Tips for Trying New Foods”, page devoted to answering the question, “What are plant-based foods?” and icons used to identify which recipes are gluten-free, nut-free and peanut-free, along with a separate table of contents for this allergen info. In addition to an abundance of colorful and nutrient-dense plant-based ingredients, the recipes incorporate honey, eggs, dairy products and a limited amount of oil. The wide variety of activities span a large age range, from coloring pages for younger kids to word searches/scrambles, from taste tests to opportunities for older kids to plan menus and set actionable goals to incorporate specific brown, orange and green foods “to feel & live your best”. This very interactive resource would make a great gift for parents, teachers, or health educators looking to engage kids in learning about nutrition in fun and engaging ways, as they connect with the Super Crew characters and discover their own superpowers, fueled by food choices bursting with “fight-o-nutrients!”

BOOK REVIEW

BY REED MANGELS, PHD, RD

The views expressed here are those of the book reviewer and not those of VN DPG or the Academy.


Plant-based pediatrician Reshma Shah and vegan registered dietitian Brenda Davis have written a comprehensive nutrition guide for plant-based families. The authors describe a plant-based diet as a diet that “focuses on maximizing the consumption of whole, plant foods” while minimizing the intake of animal-based foods and heavily processed foods. Their book, Nourish, is aimed at vegetarians, vegans, and those eating varying amounts of animal foods.

The book features a detailed nutrition section which includes lots of summary charts and information for pregnant and lactating women, babies, children, and teens. There are meal plans for different age groups along with practical information on cooking, shopping, and meal planning. There is also a section that explains the benefits of a plant-based diet. Throughout, the book’s tone is positive and upbeat. I especially liked the FAQs and the visual summaries of information. The book includes more than 40 recipes, all of which are vegan.

Reed Mangels, PhD, RDN is a nutrition advisor for the Vegetarian Resource Group. She is a past chair of VN DPG and a co-author of two position papers on vegetarian diets.
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Vegetarian Diets and Pediatric Nutrition
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Vegetarian Diets and Pregnancy

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