

Acknowledgements & Additional Resources

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Latinas who have helped me:

Terry Hope Romero

Cookbook: Viva Vegan!

Yvonne Rivera

Website: www.ricanvegana.com

Morena Escardó

Articles: My Life as a Vegetarian Latina

Websites: www.quericavida.com, <http://perudelights.com>

Spicie Foodie

Website: <http://mexicanmademeatless.com/>

Instagrams to check out:

@vegicano

@foodempowermentproject

@davinadavegan

@crazyurbanvegan

@byanygreens

For scholarly articles, check out my works cited!

No Gracias:

"The Machismo in Our Diets"

Yasmine X. Robles-Vasquez

Dedicated to

A Las Personas y Latinas Como Yo

Para Las Mujeres de mi vida

Ma, Abuelitas, Hermana, y Tías

Las Quiero



What do Tortas and Latinx

have in common?

Like a torta, our identities consist of many layers, of many different aspects that make up who we are as individuals. Our experiences come together, like the layers of a torta, and make up our identities.

Similar to a torta, being Latinx does not look a specific way. We all look different, have different experiences, and have different understandings of what it means to be a Latinx individual.

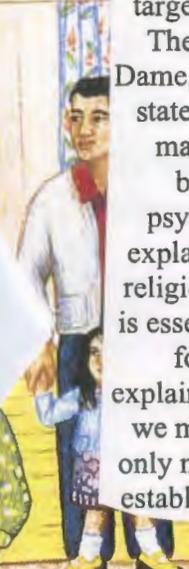
The layers of a torta and Intersectionality:

“Intersectionality ‘as an analytical lens highlights the multiple nature of individual identities and how varying combinations of class, gender, race, sexuality, and citizenship categories differentially position each individual”

-Amanda R. Martinez



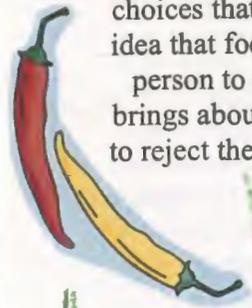
Food in Latinx Culture



The topic of food and how it pertains to a person's identity is a target of scholarly research. Professor Susan D. Blum, Chair of The Department of Anthropology at The University of Notre Dame, answers both of these questions in an effective manner. She states that food is important to study because "[a]ll humans eat, many times a day. Food is involved in our most animal-like, biological needs but also in our most symbolic, personal, psychological, and social (and human) activities. Food can be explained in terms of power, social relations, identity, aesthetics, religion, geography, gender, economics, and more" (Blum). Food is essential to all humans, without it, we cannot survive. However, food means much more than man's survival. Food can be explained in many different ways; in order to understand ourselves, we must understand something about the food we consume. It is only natural that this leads to understanding how food allows us to establish our identity, or how our identity comes alive through the food that we consume.



Food, Language, Traditions, and Family



Professor Blum also answers how food gives us knowledge about an individual/society's identity. She states, "[w]e eat the foods we choose for a variety of reasons, including the accident of where we are born and how foods come to have the social meanings they do within the specific culture we inhabit. Often our identities through food remain after migration, for two or sometimes three generations, and often we our identities as constructed through food are in opposition to other groups' foodways. Always, these choices are meaningful, and they are never obvious or sole set of choices that can be made" (Blum). Professor Blum touches on the idea that food brings about our identity because of how it allows a person to connect with their culture or how their native culture brings about their food choice Even the choice of food allows one to reject the dominant culture, such as the choice of a Latinx to eat enchiladas over hot dogs.



Within the context of Latinx culture, however, food and how it identifies a person comes alive. Through food, we learn about traditions, memories, the history of our ancestors, and even learn how to speak our native language through meal preparations.

Latinx culture in the United States has gone through recent struggles, such as the issue of undocumented immigration or the racialization of Latinx as immigrants. There is a feel that while not all Latinx feel this hostility, it is an undeniable reality of the Latinx experience here in the U.S. As much as recent discourse attempts to suppress this culture in favor of becoming more like an "American," one aspect of Latinx culture that identifies and resists this sentiment is food



No Gracias:

Rejecting food and Assimilation

It doesn't take long for someone to recognize that machismo is deeply engrained in Latinx culture. Personally, my life and experiences were immensely controlled by the men in my family, as they have told me what or what not I could do my entire life. This included making the decision of what my diet should be. In Kafkas' (2000) book about female cultural gatekeepers, it is said that the gatekeepers enforce and perpetuate patriarchal cultural constraints onto future generations of Latinas; constructing and policing female identity, including their own. So, although women are typically seen as the gatekeepers of culture (Kafka 2000; Reynolds 2005; Vasquez 2014), my mother, didn't have as much as a problem with my vegetarianism. On the contrary, my father, who saw my denial of traditional Mexican foods that contained meat as a form of disrespect, immediately refused to let me be a vegetarian. Interestingly enough, as soon as my father showed his disapproval of my decision to go vegetarian, my mother soon developed the same opinion. In line to what was seen in Merriman's (2010) article, it was seen that women were often faced with opposition from men due to paternalism and the concern that it arises. In addition to this, my paternal grandmother saw my vegetarianism as a form of assimilating in U.S. culture and disconnecting myself from my Latinx culture (Ruth 2005). After hearing these words, I decided to go back to eating meat as I couldn't let my journey to liberating myself come to a stop. So, only after only two days, my vegetarian days were (temporarily) over.



Vegetarianism and Latinx Culture

According to Professor DeLessio-Parson:

In Argentina, popular culture reveals the nexus between idealized masculinities and meat. Cookbooks targeting men send the message that a 'real man' eats meat; he should play the powerful role of *asador* when hosting family and friends. This is not just a story of men, masculinities, and meat; it is also about women, femininities, and food work. Butler (1999) posits that gender is performative: it involves the continuous producing and reproducing of gender through performance of sociocultural norms and practices that have the effect of creating gender itself.

People simultaneously make assumptions about sexuality within the framework of the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1999). When overlaid on food spaces, this framework makes visible the ways food preparation and consumption deepen differences between women and men under heteronormative assumptions where real men eat meat and women prepare meat for others. Previous research, for example, shows how women often defer to the preferences of people they cook for especially male partners, in a dynamic exemplifying the woman's role as homemaker. Feeding work rest near the identities of many women, helping maintain family ties and cultural traditions, while also reproducing the arrangement of the patriarchal family.



Veganism

Veganism has been something I personally have always been wrestling with and have always been interested in. As someone who has struggled to become fully involved in the vegetarian community due to my strong connection with my Latinx identity and it's ties with meat, the vegan diet, community, and lifestyle has always been something that I have wanted to learn more about. I was eager to know more about how oppression and injustices are seen in a community that solely focuses on the oppression and injustices of animals. After reading Aphroism- a book that discusses veganism and how it revolves around a white racial frame- I have been influenced to not only be more cautiously aware of how "animals" are oppressed, but how their oppression has influenced and validated the oppression and violence directed towards POC communities, especially Black communities.



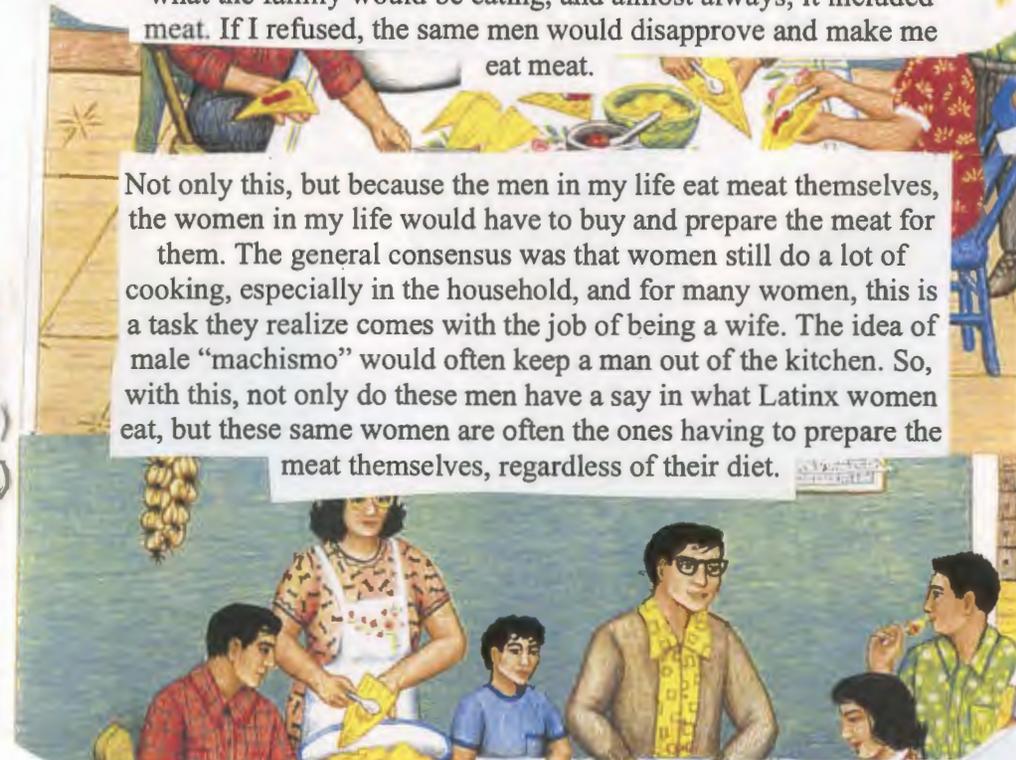
How Machismo Lingers in our Diets

Scholar Amanda R. Martinez writes:

"Machismo describes adherence to traditional masculinity and the authority figure image of men who regain strength and health independently."

My eating for liberation started with wanting a sense of connection and belonging to a country I have never visited. But as some of us may know, within every culture, we can find problematic and questionable aspects. My realization to these questionable aspects – such as gender inequalities, high reliance on women to do most house work and emotional labor, highly religious ties and shaming if one didn't go to church, and other aspects that almost all have machismo as the root cause. Upon looking at how machismo lingered in my own life, I immediately noticed that it was present in my diet. Almost always, the men in my life have had the say in what the family would be eating, and almost always, it included meat. If I refused, the same men would disapprove and make me eat meat.

Not only this, but because the men in my life eat meat themselves, the women in my life would have to buy and prepare the meat for them. The general consensus was that women still do a lot of cooking, especially in the household, and for many women, this is a task they realize comes with the job of being a wife. The idea of male "machismo" would often keep a man out of the kitchen. So, with this, not only do these men have a say in what Latinx women eat, but these same women are often the ones having to prepare the meat themselves, regardless of their diet.



My Diet as a Form of Liberation from Machismo

I began to eat for liberation from the machismo that has been controlling my life and its outcomes. Although I'd want to say that I have tackled the machismo that lingers in my life, I have yet to do so and the journey will be a long one. I continue to go home to a family that prepares and eats meals that contain meat. I also continue to go home to a family that invalidates every single one of my reasons why I decided and want to go vegetarian. Despite all this, I have worked hard on being critical of myself and staying true to my goal of fighting machismo. This is often seen as I either refuse to serve myself the meat that was prepared, or leave the meat to the side if it was served to me, strategically done to start a conversation on vegetarianism with my family. As discussed in Bossard's (1943) study on family table talk, the family meal is used as a way to have discussion of matters of interests and concern to family members. At the table, "questions are asked, answered, or evaded in turn" (Bossard 1943: 298). Whenever my family would notice the absence of meat in my meal, questions were always asked, allowing the conversation of vegetarianism to be discussed.



How Those Around Me Liberate Themselves: Mamá

As for my mother, she explained that although I see food as my way of liberating myself from the machismo in my life, her form of liberation was contradicting my father. Although my father has changed over the years, my mother has repeatedly told me over the years that before my siblings and I were born, my father wouldn't let her do anything - put on makeup, go out, wear clothes she wanted, learn how to drive, and so forth. After years of dealing with this, she finally learned that her way of liberation was to go against all these rules my father had made her follow.

Although difficult - because machismo is so deeply engrained in Latinx culture - my mother slowly starting to do the things she was told not to. Over the years, she has seen progress in not only her liberation, but my father's machismo as well.



"el machismo es una cadena que no se va romper hasta que nosotros lo rompemos en nuestra casa."

-Mamá

Abuelita's History and Memories Of Machismo

For my grandmother, she explained that her liberation was escaping my biological grandfather who forced her to marry him at only fifteen years old when he was in his mid-thirties. Unlike my mother and myself, my grandmother's approach to liberating herself from machismo involved moving to a new country, one where she could escape from a life where everything she and her children did was controlled. With four young children, my grandmother decided to migrate to the United States in hopes of feeling liberated from a world that did not allow her to live the way she wanted to. Although she still faced machismo, being able to take control of her life, despite being in a new country she did not know, allowed her to feel liberated and begin living a life where she could fully enjoy and appreciate her culture, instead of associate it with machismo.



The Importance of Storytelling

Stories are everywhere. We tell stories about who we are, stories about other people and stories about our past. We read stories and watch them on our screens. Storytelling and story-listening are important both because they are happening all around us, whether we realize it or not, and because stories can lead to change. In particular, they can help lead to equitable and just change.

Storytelling has been a significant part of my journey as well, as it has been the way in which I have been able to learn about my culture and the country my ancestors originate from.

Growing up, I would hear my maternal grandmother, tell endless stories of her time in Mexico before she, along with her children, migrated to the United States in hopes of leaving a toxic relationship and start a new life. Leaving home was a tough decision for my grandmother, as it meant leaving her mother and sisters, all who were widowed or single women. As my grandmother Irene would tell these stories of her childhood and family, they most often involved some sort of food or would be told as she was preparing a meal, almost always being a Mexican dish, which is commonly seen with recent immigrants (Evans et al. 2011). Because of this, I believed that eating the food described in the stories would allow me to connect and feel close to my motherland. Although I had never stepped foot in the country that my ancestors once lived, eating the food originating from Mexico allowed me to feel as if I was there. Although a wall was built to divide my family and I, food could unite us.



M

What do you do to feel liberated?

In what ways does your relationship to food help you feel liberated?

L
lib

What are the layers

of your identity?

Add words/sentences/etc to the layers of the torta that you believe make up your identity

