

The Carnivore Diet Debate

Rhetorical Analysis by Mitzi Collinsworth

The Purpose

As a certified nutritionist and fitness professional, I am often referenced for my opinion regarding diets. There are many popular diets individuals follow to lose weight. South beach, keto, paleo, vegan, and vegetarian diets are to name a few. The carnivore diet is the latest diet to take the fitness world by storm. I will use information and arguments regarding this new diet as a rhetorical analysis to explain how the literature is used to persuade, including the most applicable rhetorical method.

The carnivore diet serves as an example using rhetoric to influence their intended audience. Popular Instagram and YouTube fitness personalities persuade their followers to practice their program to achieve the same fitness goals. However, the information provided is often lacking peer-reviewed research and one-sided, with the eventual goal of profiting from their audience. There is a need in this industry to provide impartial and responsibly researched information to consumers. This will decrease misinformation and frustration that swarms populations researching the best means to lose weight.

The carnivore diet applies Aristotle's three rhetorical strategies to persuade their audience. First, the founder has to establish credibility (ethos) with the audience. The carnivore diet was created by an orthopedic surgeon from New Mexico. He uses his medical background and title to gain credibility with his followers.

Once trust is established through ethos, the founder increases the viability of his argument to favor the diet claims through emotion (pathos). Individuals seeking to lose weight stems from an emotional need. The table below displays the emotional connection between the weight loss and the why. These responses are based on common answers to weight loss intervention interviews.

Why do you need to lose weight?	How do you feel now?	How will you feel after?	Why is this important?
Wedding Dress	Unhappy	Happy	Confidence
Slimmer Work Clothes	Self-Conscious, Unhappy	Happy	Confidence
Find a Partner	Unhappy, Fear	Happy	Confidence
Prep for Surgery	Unhappy, Scared	Happy	Confidence
Overcome a Disease	Unhappy, Scared, Frustrated	Happy	Secure

Individuals have different reasons for losing weight. The chart above suggests that when we feel better and in control of our body, especially how we view ourselves, our emotional health improves.

The image in figure 1 below shows a “smiling” woman who has apparently cured her chronic illness following the carnivore diet. When there is no cure for a chronic disease, individuals often try many options to find relief or a cure out of desperation. Figure 1 appeals to the emotional fear individuals with chronic illness feel and provides a sense of hope.



Figure 1

The following is a second example, from the 2019 article *All You Need to Know About the Carnivore (All-Meat) Diet* by Lizzie Streit, MS, RDN, LD, that stands out regarding Aristotle's strategies:

"If your love of ribeye knows no bounds, perhaps you'd be interested in the carnivore diet. The rules are simple—eat only meat—and the purported benefits seem boundless. More energy. Less body fat. You can even cure your Lyme disease, depression, and rheumatoid arthritis."

This seems like the magic pill. The author is appealing to one's love of meat, and "hey, it's okay...eat all the meat you want" type of attitude appealing to emotional eating. The use of the word "cure" for diseases is also an emotional trigger. Everyone wants to be free of disease. If there was a way to avoid or cure them, we would all do it.

In order to substantiate a claim to cure disease through dietary means, proper reasoning (logos) must be provided. The carnivore diet's reasoning was developed from a few studies performed on the Inuit (Eskimo) diet in Greenland. The studies focused on the Eskimos ability to survive on mainly animal protein for their dietary means. Eskimos predominantly consumed fish, seal, and whale. The studies focus on how this diet rich in marine life effects their vitamin levels,

arteriosclerosis risk, and inflammation risk. The carnivore diet relies on these controlled studies to provide evidence to substantiate their claim.

However, when researching Inuit diets further, outside of these studies, there is evidence that they also consumed naturally available plants, since farming was an impossibility. Crowberries, cloudberry, grasses, fireweed, tubers and roots from tundra plants, and seaweed were available. Less isolated regions were able to trade for imported goods (Wikipedia).

Since the evidence is limited, most claims for the carnivore diet rely on personal accounts provided through social media and personal websites.

The Origin

The carnivore diet craze originated from one individual through digital means. The original author was Shawn Baker, an American orthopedic surgeon. This doctor is known as the “Carnivore King” and started promoting this diet on social media platforms, most notably, YouTube (Wikipedia).

YouTube allows any user and subscriber to post content (except pornographic and extremely violent content) without regard to supporting evidence to back their claims. They stand by their platform as a means for users to express themselves freely staying within small guidelines. They rely on the users to flag the inappropriate content.

Dr. Baker has taken full advantage of this medium and began posting video diaries about his all-meat diet and his results coupled with bodybuilding. He then went on to make claims that this diet cured certain diseases. He quickly gained supporters, who then created their own channels and social media followings. This has flooded social media platforms with many claims to a diet that is backed by minimal credible research. In fact, in 2017, Dr. Shawn Baker had his medical license revoked based on promoting his claims irresponsibly to the public (Wikipedia).

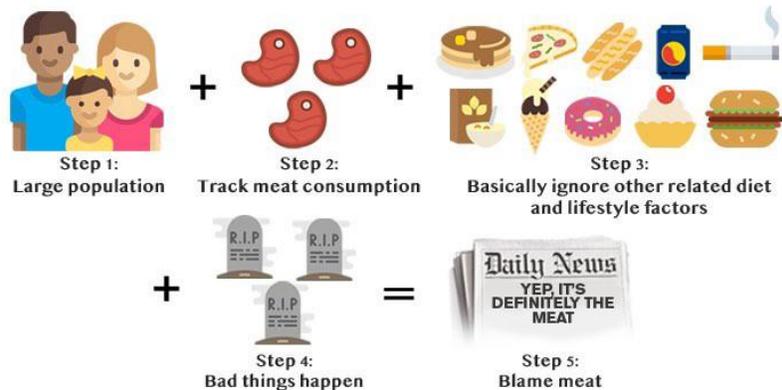
In order to perpetuate his claims, Baker and his supporters often target vegans on Instagram and Twitter to create reactions, even from those who do not wish to participate.

This scenario definitely shares a resemblance to the Gamergate incident on Twitter. Figure 2 below perpetuates unsubstantiated claims regarding the carnivore diet.

THE MEAT-CANCER MYTH

@MAXLUGAVERE

❌ Observational population studies



❌ Animal studies

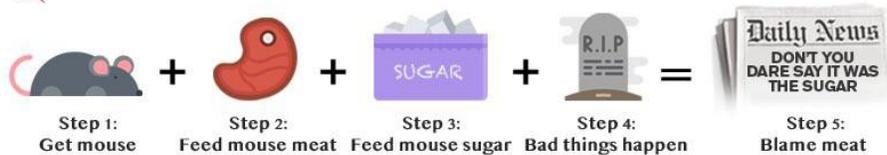


Figure 2

Figure 2 tries to vilify the use of sugar in the diet claiming it leads to death, unlike an all-meat diet. The figure also claims that meat is vilified without proper reasoning (logos).

The Complexities

Toulmin regards and argument to have "hidden complexities" as does the carnivore diet. The inventor of this diet uses rhetoric to persuade the public this diet is simple and has all the answers to achieve weight loss goals. However, this simplistic use of argument is not the case when you consider more elements of nutrition and the impact on the environment.

The carnivore diet claims you will receive all of your dietary needs from eating only meat. This claim is based loosely on evidence from certain Inuit (Eskimo) regions in Greenland from the past that lived on a similar diet due to food availability. The inventor of this diet, however, needs more evidence to support long term effects from this diet.

- What happens to the body after an extended period of time eating meat only?

- What happens to the body when you deprive it of vital nutrients like fruits, vegetables, and fiber?
- Are there any regulations on saturated fat intake?
- Will the high mercury levels have an impact on inflammation?

All of these questions prove this debate is quite complex. Unlike Aristotle's syllogism using specific and general data to support a claim, like the carnivore diet, the Toulmin model seems more appropriate utilizing more steps and warrants to support such claims.

Below is one possible argument that will need more evidence to support the carnivore diet.

If a large percentage of the public increases their consumption of meat to follow the carnivore diet, there would be a direct impact on the environment. As of 2016, the public already consumes more meat than is recommended by experts. In my environmental impact research from Dr. Tesdell's class, one article states "meat produces more emissions per unit of energy compared with that of plant-based foods because energy is lost at each trophic level." In fact, the production of ground beef has one of the worst impacts on the environment contributing to negative effects on climate change (Godfray .et al).

The carnivore diet will need evidence (warrants) to counter this concern and support their original claim.

A second argument may counter the carnivore diet regarding the complexity of consuming an all-meat diet and elevated risks to cancer. According to my research on the environmental impact of meat, studies generally show that "total mortality rates are modestly higher in participants who have high intakes of red and processed meat," with evidence showing high intakes of processed meat leading to increased risk of colorectal cancer. In fact, recently, experts have now labelled bacon and processed meats, such as deli meats, as type one carcinogens (Godfray .et al).

How will the carnivore diet's claims simplify the argument that the carnivore diet is best considering the complexity of all of these counter claims?

Audience Perspectives

There are two distinct audiences in this debate. One side believes and supports the claim that an all-meat diet is best for weight loss, disease prevention, and to cure ailments. The carnivore diet rhetoric implies that the diet is simple, filling, and satisfying. The use of social media to support visual confirmation regarding weight loss success stories supports ties to digital rhetoric. Eyman, the author of *Digital Content* (2018), utilizes "the main elements of the rhetorical canon: invention, arrangement, style, delivery, and memory—in terms of their relation to the production of digital texts" (64).

Social media not only gives visual confirmation to the claim but creates followers who then share their success. When a large pool of diet followers gain success, this builds the audience's confidence. The creator of the carnivore diet uses the Inuit (Eskimo) study to "invent" the base

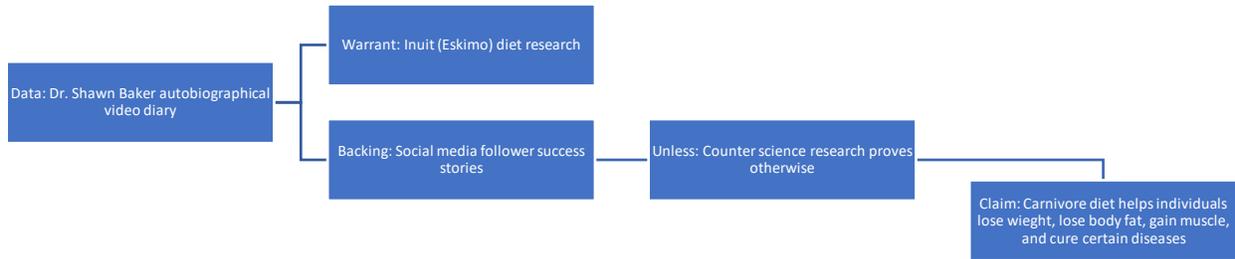
of his argument. He then “arranges” the material in the form of blogs, posts, and videos with links to other followers as evidence to further the claim. These links now create “memory” of the data and the audience discourse becomes the “delivery.” If enough audience members agree, the diet gains more credibility to persuade old and new audience members.

The opposite side of this argument believes an all-meat diet is too restrictive and dangerous based on the lack of plant based foods, high saturated fat content in the diet, and no long term evidence. Vegans, vegetarians, registered dietitians, doctors, and scientists also distribute digital rhetoric through the same means as the carnivore diet creator and supporters. This audience has a wider pool of research to pull from to support their refutes against the carnivore diet. There are ample studies on the positive health effects of plants in our diet and the dangers of high saturated fat intake. This audience gains supporters through scientific evidence, but also through visual success. However, due to passionate beliefs on both sides, this digital forum leads to trolling and attacks on both sides.

Conclusion

At first, I believed the carnivore diet needed the application of stasis theory to find common ground between actually proven research and personal accounts. This example compares to the Teston article regarding the debate over what defines clinical benefit and meaningful evidence. These concepts are in question regarding this diet and its touted benefits. However, due to the complexities of this argument, I believe the Toulmin model needs to be applied instead.

First, we have the claim that an all-meat diet will help you lose weight, reduce bodyfat, gain muscle and cure certain diseases. If we apply this to the Toulmin model, we begin with the data. The initial data that surfaced to support the claim was the autobiographical video diary from Dr. Shawn Baker. The Inuit diet research is the warrant providing evidence to support the data. Backing for the warrant comes in the form of the social media, podcast, and website supporters who also have proven results. This may all be true, unless there is sufficient evidence from scientific research proving there is no long term benefit and it negatively impacts the environment. The model would look somewhat like the chart below.



There is evidence that the carnivore diet does work for certain individuals. However, due to the complexities of this rhetorical analysis, I believe more research is needed to see why certain populations can withstand this diet with little to no harm. In addition, researchers need to discover the long term benefits or consequences concerning the carnivore diet.

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