

Paleo Solution - 322

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Robb Wolf: Hey folks. Robb Wolf here, another edition of the PaleoSolution podcast. Today's guest is Hamilton Stapell. He is an associate professor in the Department of History at State University of New York New Paltz. He has also been one of the longest running academics supporting the ancestral health society and the ancestral health movement. He's also been known to have a heck of a deadlift and is one of my very good friends. Hamilton, how are you doing?

Hamilton Stapell: I'm doing great. I'm doing great. Thanks so much for having me on the show Robb.

Robb Wolf: Oh, it's a huge honor to have you on the show. We don't get to hang out nearly enough but we get to spend a little bit of time today. Hamilton, tell folks about your background. So you are working on or you just authored the book Remaking Madrid Culture, Politics, and Identity after Franco. You're an expert clearly in the history with different areas of focus which I think lately you've been focusing on some of the post-World War II elements of Spain and the Americanization that occurred there. What the heck does any of that have to do with ancestral health? I mean how did you get involved with this stuff?

Hamilton Stapell: That's a great question and I really live two lives academically. I was trained as a European historian and as you said, I teach European history here at the State University of New York at New Paltz. I'm also part of the evolutionary studies program here which got started back in 2007-2008.

A few years ago, I designed one of the first ever college level courses on evolutionary human health and I've been teaching that online here at SUNY New Paltz.

Robb Wolf: Hamilton, why is this evolutionary medicine idea important? We were talking a little bit before we rolled and hopefully we're able to grab some of that stuff because there was actually some really good material. But why is this evolutionary medicine perspective important or it is not important? What are your thoughts on that?

Hamilton Stapell: I think it's absolutely important and I think it needs to be rolled into traditional medical school and nutritional thinking of doctors in all disciplines. As we were discussing, that has been a slow process.

Sometimes there's been active pushback and sometimes there just hasn't been a lot of interests from within those organizations to bring it in.

I think it's impossible...to me it seems obvious right that we need to think about health and disease in this evolutionary framework. It's now how traditional medicine has been practiced and thought for 400 years. So I think it's a process of trying to work that in. some places are more receptive to it than others.

Robb Wolf: So Hamilton you have really built in. I've got to ask you. So you've had a three-part series that you've presented at the Ancestral Health Symposium and I think at other locations also. The first one dealt with the similarities between the ancestral health movement and the physical culture movement that occurred in the early 1900s and then you had a state of the union within the ancestral health scene. Then you just recently published a paper making the case asking is the ancestral health movement a fad, will it go mainstream? You make a pretty emphatic case that it will not go mainstream.

I want to look at each one of those but I've got, I'm curious. Did you have that three-part series in mind from the beginning or did that itself evolve as you moved through this whole process?

Hamilton Stapell: I totally had that in mind.

Robb Wolf: Okay.

Hamilton Stapell: I had this grand trilogy in my head and I had no idea if I could pull it off because it involved a big online survey and it involved a lot of different moving parts and over multiple years. I didn't know if they would be interested in it or how people would receive it. But I totally had this thing in my head to say oh, you know, the paleo movement came from somewhere and then it's at a certain place today and where the heck is it going in the future? That really excited me.

I'm not an exercise physiologist. I don't have a PhD in nutrition or biochemistry. There are only so many things that I can offer to the ancestral health movement, right? What I can offer is looking at this thing as a social movement. I was really, really excited to do that.

Robb Wolf: Well it was fascinating stuff. Walk people through your first piece, the corollary or between or the similarities between the ancestral health movement and the physical culture movement of the 1900s.

Hamilton Stapell: Sure. Sure. So back in 2012 at Boston Ancestral Health Symposium in Boston that year, I gave a talk on how the physical culture movement of a hundred years ago was so similar to the paleo movement of today.

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I had all of these different examples how exercise and food and being outside and getting sunlight and wearing no shoes or very minimal shoes and compressed feeding windows. I meant fasting, intestinal health. People were talking about all of these things a hundred years ago, a hundred fifty years ago back to the 1850s, 1860s, 1870s. This was super, super popular.

Just recently the New York Times had an article about Walt Whitman and how he was eating paleo right. He fits dead center into this broad, physical culture movement that people have totally forgotten about today. So I want to say hey, this paleo thing, we think it's really new and cool, sure it's cool but it really isn't new. It really echoes what I was happening a hundred years ago. My key point, my key point to that presentation was really that both the ancestral health movement and the physical culture movement were reactions to rapid social economic and technological change.

So a hundred years ago is the industrial revolution. Today, it's the digital revolution. Right? So both of those movements both of those phenomena make people stressful. It creates a very disorienting world and the physical culture movement and the paleo movement it gives people a sense of autonomy, of control, the satisfaction of exercising one's own body, feeling engaged with others, comparing and noting improvement. You know, all these things that are deeply entwined in both the physical culture movement of a hundred years ago, and the paleo movement today.

Robb Wolf: Interesting. So Hamilton and this is maybe jumping to your last piece but I'm curious why did the physical culture movement of the 1900s die out or where there elements of it that did continue but it just went down to a low simmer instead of the prominence that it once had?

Hamilton Stapell: Robb, that is a great question. That is really the key question. The key question in terms of for historians, what happened to the physical culture movement. It's in many ways the key question for the paleo movement today.

What's interesting is that there's no real consensus among historians as to what really caused the physical culture movement to die. There are several maybe I'd point to three important factors. So number one, we

have the invention of antibiotics at the end of 1920s into the 1930s. So what that meant is that before the invention of the antibiotics for the most part, medicine didn't work very well right? It was called patent medicine. We had a number of different treatments, a number of different "drugs" that really didn't work very well.

So people had to rely on eating well, sleeping well, getting exercise, bank time outdoors, all the things that we talked about today in order to stay healthy especially in these new urban environments. So the physical culture movement it grows up in part because of industrialization and urbanization.

So people are moving from the countryside to the cities in the late 19th and early 20th century and they get sick. They get really, really sick and "traditional medicine" and drugs are not really helping them. So they looked to this physical culture movement.

So antibiotic has come along and also in boom, they really work. Antibiotics worked, really, really well for what they're trying to do. I think there was a sense that boy, today we have a pill for antibiotics, for bacterial infections. Tomorrow we'll have a pill for.

Robb Wolf: Everything.

Hamilton Stapell: Cancer, heart...everything right.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Hamilton Stapell: Exactly, exactly. So for the first time really conventional medicine if you will really stepped up and offered something really, really significant and powerful. I think there was a sense that other great innovations were going to happen soon. That was number one.

Number two, the other issue is that the physical culture movement gets tainted by its association with fascism. So fascist Italy and fascist Germany they adopt many of the ideas and trappings and of the physical culture movement and incorporate them into their programs in Europe in Germany and in Italy.

It was about making people strong and healthy right by making their nation strong and healthy. So because of the association with fascism, I think the physical culture movement got tainted as well.

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Then the third point I would point to would be the discovery of vitamins. So up until late 1910s, 1920s, we don't have a sense of sort of the scientific individual components of food. We have the discovery and the breakdown of food into its scientific components, there's this notion that we can scientifically understand food and then have science tell us what to eat. So there's I think a step back from a "natural foods" or natural diet and saying okay, well now we have the tools of science to investigate food and tell us what's best.

As we know that's been a really, really complicated and contentious project. We still don't know it seems to me what the ideal, science doesn't what the ideal diet is or what even causes obesity or causes insulin resistance really and what those things are. So we haven't...medicine, traditional medicine or conventional medicine it's been very difficult for it to solve or answer these questions.

Robb Wolf:

Interesting. You know, I was just reading some of the work that led into that RDA, the recommended daily allowances and this was from almost a hundred years ago, right around a hundred years ago when we still did have rampant disease caused by nutrient deficiencies. We have goiters from iodine deficiency, we had scurvy from vitamin C deficiency, Rickets from vitamin D deficiency. So that's a really fascinating point. What's interesting within that maybe not to diverge too far but those recommended daily allowances were basically levels that were considered to be the minimum that folks needed but it really hasn't been well evaluated since then as to okay this is going to prevent diseases of deficiency, are there higher levels or different ratios that could help mitigate the development of degenerative disease.

Now we're in a really wacky scenario in which large tracks of the population are overfed from a caloric standpoint but still malnourished from a micronutrient standpoint. It's a really fascinating problem to deal with but that's so interesting that we really are at another inflection point with dramatically changing ways of eating, processed foods being comparatively inexpensive at least so long as you don't pull back the curtain on farm subsidies and stuff like that. There's all kinds of cultural trends pushing us towards eating quickly prepared foods, really interesting stuff.

Hamilton Stapell:

I totally agree and as you just said, I think the difference there between is the difference between having the minimum and having an optimal amount. We've been very good at identifying what is really optimal and what is really optimal of course is such a tricky question because as time

goes on even in the past year, I think we've seen that what's optimal really varies person to person. Right?

Robb Wolf: Um-hum. Um-hum.

Hamilton Stapell: It varies by the individual. There was this study, I know you've spoken about it, that was in Cell last fall out of Israel how individuals responded so much so differently to different foods that they were fed. So what the optimal for you might be could be very different than for me and vice versa. So I think this is a really tricky question.

This is the problem with doing "public health", right is it has to be a one size fits all.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Hamilton Stapell: We have a country of 320 million people that's really hard.

Robb Wolf: Right. Right and then even relative to say like Scandinavia which is pretty ethnically homogenized the US is really interesting in that you've got a native American population with a significant amount of variation. Just within that you have northern Europeans, north and south Asians. You have African-American and all of these different groups we're finding have really different considerations when we are working in the clinic. African-Americans have much tighter cut points on what constitutes insulin resistance because it seems to...deleterious problems seem to manifest earlier when we're looking at things like triglyceride to HDL ratio. Like basically we're seeing heterogenic progression at points of what we would typically call insulin resistance but it's happening much at biomarker levels that we would not assign a particularly high risk if we were in a Northern European population.

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So we're definitely getting some really interesting nuances there. And then to your point if we have a public health policy that prescribes a one size fits all approach, that at best is going to leave a lot of people out in the cold to maybe be injurious to them.

Hamilton Stapell: Yes, that's a great point. I totally agree.

Robb Wolf: With that stated, so I think this is one of the evolutions of the paleo diet concept itself. You have some folks that are still very close to that root tree under Loren Cordain looking at legumes as problematic because of lectins and whatnot. But then I think as we've progressed and interestingly it's been the influence of lots of clinicians who usually use

something that looks like a very orthodox paleo diet as a starting point but then they really encourage folks to find as much latitude within their diet as they possibly can just trying to avoid I guess immunogenic foods and then the glycemic load that would be problematic for that person.

Hamilton Stapell: Right. That makes a lot of sense.

Robb Wolf: So Hamilton what about your second piece to your trilogy? What did you look at with that and I think I actually ended up helping out a little bit on some of that survey.

Hamilton Stapell: You did for sure. So after I gave the talk about the physical culture movement about the past, I wanted to look at the present. So in this late winter/early spring 2013, I put together an online survey, the first academic large scale survey of the ancestral health community. I worked on that with the graduate student at Princeton and you were kind enough to help spread the word on that and get that out there so people would know about it and take it.

We got just incredible data back. So it's really hard to get people to complete online surveys today, right? There's survey fatigue. People don't want to do another survey. If you can get a couple hundred people to complete an online survey today, like that's great. That's a great in number. We had over 4000 people.

Robb Wolf: Wow.

Hamilton Stapell: Complete the survey right? I had some colleagues. This is the first...I'm not a social scientist. As you know I'm a historian so this is the first online survey that I was in charge of and put out. My colleagues were like how did you get 4000 people to do this survey? I said Robb Wolf.

Robb Wolf: [Laughs] Clearly there's a lot of suckers out there in the world if they trusted me with that stuff.

Hamilton Stapell: It was really great that we had so much buy-in from the community. In any case, we ran this survey and then we wrote a paper, my co-author and I David Schwartz wrote a paper and it's called Modern Cavemen: Stereotypes and Reality of the Ancestral Health Movement.

In it, we look at the common media stereotype and then we talked about what actually the survey results were. So just briefly, back in 2013 I think it's still pretty much the case today the media representation of the typical paleo follower is someone who is young, single, male, vain, eats a

lot of red meat and might be quite athletic. So there was a stereotype out there in the media and you saw this in print sources, online, across the board in terms of the mainstream media.

We wanted to find out if those stereotypes were true or not. What was so interesting about the results is that for the most part, those stereotypes did hold up. So we found that most participants were female, they were middle aged. The mean age was 38 years old. They weren't single. They were in committed relationships. They were highly educated, relatively affluent, but the one thing that was fit the stereotype was they were white. So 92% of the respondents in the survey were white. So that was one area where the stereotype did hold up.

In terms of motivation, people were motivated by weight loss and health concerns. Those were the primary motivators for going and staying paleo.

Robb Wolf: Hamilton you had a lot of other, to me very interesting data like you asked some questions about spiritual beliefs and beliefs and god and whatnot. Could you unpack some of that material?

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Hamilton Stapell: Yes. Unfortunately we didn't ask directly about spiritual beliefs and we didn't ask directly about politics because we didn't want the survey to turn folks off, to not complete the survey or to be upset about it and then...Because social media is so powerful we didn't want any kind of backlash about certain controversial questions. But the question we did ask about was evolution which that does touch on god and the influence of god. So this is super, super important.

65% of respondents, 65% of people associated in the paleo movement said they believed in natural selection in evolution and natural selection with god having no part, 65%. So that's a pretty number.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Hamilton Stapell: The national average in the United States is 15%. So 15% versus 65% it's obviously a huge difference there. I think that's perhaps problematic for when you start thinking about paleo going mainstream, right?

Robb Wolf: Right.

Hamilton Stapell: how is Paleo going to go mainstream if 15% of the your national population only believes in evolution by natural selection with no influence by god. So I think that doesn't bode well for widespread adoption. But maybe you don't have to buy into that because their side

argument is you don't have to buy into evolution to say I want to eat whole good foods and go for a walk and get outside and go to bed early and turn off my screen.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Hamilton Stapell: So maybe it's not necessary to buy into the mismatch argument or the discordant argument about our modern conditions and...

Robb Wolf: I think even, I may have this number totally wrong but even within the mixed US population if you throw in evolution could be an outgrowth of the influence of god. Like a creative design deal then I think that that number pops up to about like 35 or 40% in the US.

Hamilton Stapell: Yes.

Robb Wolf: Yeah.

Hamilton Stapell: That is correct. I don't have that number...

Robb Wolf: I mean I'm going completely from memory and it may be lower, it maybe a little higher but there is wiggle room in that but it is still a pretty striking difference and maybe I'll try to remember to bring this up when we talk about the third piece. I just don't know if academics are aware of the demography within the ancestral health scene but a lot of these evolutionary biologists you would think would...you know, whether we've got the story 100% right or 100% wrong according to their view, it really seems like reaching out to these folks instead of hiking a leg and peeing down their back. You know, you've got a reasonably large group of people that are quite years forward about the idea of evolution being an important driver in health. But then to your point as perhaps we'll talk about in a minute, even the folks that are really at the height of the game within evolutionary biology and evolutionary medicine sometimes seem to pooh-pooh the idea that we could get any mileage out of this idea.

But what else do you remember that's pretty significant from that second study that really stood out to you?

Hamilton Stapell: The evolution number stood out to me. The other thing was some of the....oh, how recently folks that come on board on the paleo diet. So we asked people how long they've been paleo and this was back in 2013 again. What we found was that 85% of respondents had joined, had started living a paleo lifestyle in three years or less. 85%.

So what it really looks like is that between 2010 and 2013, you have participation and interest just skyrocket. If you look at Google Trends, you can see the same thing. Between 2010 and 2013, there's this massive run up of interest in paleo diet, paleo lifestyle. What's interesting is that it peaks in 2013 and 2014 and since then we've seen a pretty rapid decline in interest and you can see that on Google Trends. Perhaps we can talk about other ways in which we see less interest in the paleo movement or maybe we don't. maybe we see a sustained or continued growth.

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Robb Wolf:

Right. Well you know one piece of that and I forget if you included this in the paper but the paleo concept really piggy backed or worked synergistically with the growth of the crossfit globally. They really tend to advocate a paleo-esque type diet. I was involved with those guys virtually from its inception and if you overlay the growth and decline of crossfit so crossfit has been on a decline since the time that paleo was found to decline. So that was a pretty significant social driver because you had people showing up in these gyms again similar to this at the physical culture movement where you had community, you had exercise, you had somebody talking to you about sleep and all this stuff got woven together.

But as the crossfit movements has started to wane in popularity and probably similar I guess to some of the points that you make in your final paper. I think that some of the estimates were somewhere between like with one to three million people eating paleo. I think maybe about double or triple that number of people globally doing crossfit. But I think that because of the rigor and the social differences, social isolation, social stigma. You know some element of that. But we had strip-mined as many people out of the rest of society that were very amenable to both of these topics. That was the—as far as that infection was going to progress.

Hamilton Stapell:

I'm so glad you mentioned that because I happen to see that too right? I happen to plot crossfit and paleo diet on Google Trends and they almost mirror one another in terms of the rise up and then the decline down. I thought that was fascinating too. Actually I was surprised that the crossfit that interest had declined that much or as much as it has because it seems like in some ways crossfit is bigger than ever with the games and sponsorship and Reebok and all that stuff. But maybe new people coming into it, I know there's been some discussion about gyms it's more difficult today to get new clients in a gym than it was three years ago. I don't know. You can maybe speak to that better than I could.

But that's the rumor on the street. So maybe it's as you say the low hanging fruit if you will has already come on.

Robb Wolf: Right, right.

Hamilton Stapell: To Crossfit and Paleo.

Robb Wolf: Yeah, yeah that seems to be my sense with that absolutely. Like the crossfit phenomenon has become a little bit of a commoditized entity with so many players out there like all commodities people start reducing the price and that becomes the driver and then I think that a number of people entering into that scene without any type of business background, they never looked at like a profit and loss projection or anything and they just said, well if I charge \$85 a month and get a hundred people that's almost 9 grand a month and then they forget that they have expenses and then if the guy down the street charges \$65 a month but he's a part-time firefighter and he's basically subsidizing the gym because he's got a legitimate fulltime other employment gig then you're able to undercut people.

I think that we've seen a fair amount of attrition of crossfit gyms because just it's a bubble and I forget the guy's name but he wrote a piece back around 2013 talking about describing what a bubble is like economic bubbles and real estate bubbles and drew the parallel with crossfit. I think that we're seeing some of the backside symmetry of that now both for crossfit and the paleo diet concept.

Hamilton Stapell: Right. Right. That makes sense to me.

Robb Wolf: Yeah. Yeah. So Hamilton what about the last paper going mainstream or just a passing fad? What did you cover in that piece?

Hamilton Stapell: So this was a third part of the trilogy. So I talked about the past before and the present with the survey and I want to look ahead towards the future. You have to remember I originally presented this at the ancestral health society in 2013 in Atlanta. In many ways this was the peak of interest and activity.

Robb Wolf: Um-hum. Uh-hum.

Hamilton Stapell: I was looking around. I was going you know, I don't know if this is going to last. Right?

Robb Wolf: Right.

Hamilton Stapell: Past performance is no guarantee of future returns right? That's the phrase that kept going through my head that just because things have gone so well...you know, what was one of the things that really struck me?

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In 2013 there was a Dummies' Paleo Living For Dummies was published.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Hamilton Stapell: And an Idiot's Guide to Eating Paleo. I was like boy, right? This is really, really interesting here. I don't know if we're going to continue to see this kind of growth. So I really started thinking about what is going and what are the major obstacles out there for continued acceptance of the ancestral health movement. Again this is in 2013, I gave this talk and I don't think everyone was really excited about my talk. I think I touted the end of paleo.

Robb Wolf: Right, right.

Hamilton Stapell: This is at 2013 at the height.

Robb Wolf: I think there was standing room only for it thigh. It was very good.

Hamilton Stapell: It emptied out quickly. That room emptied out quickly. So here I am talking about these three major obstacles and the three obstacles I called them cultural physiological and social. So these were three broad obstacles that I saw they need to be overcome in order to get widespread penetration of these ideas. We can talk about those three different ideas if you'd like

Robb Wolf: I would love for you to unpack those, yeah. Because even for me not being a social scientist like the distinction like I would probably erroneously use cultural and societal interchangeably whereas clearly it's not within this context.

Hamilton Stapell: Maybe.

Robb Wolf: [Laughs]

Hamilton Stapell: We'll see if I can explain. So I was... the number one culture right? So I don't think people appreciate how deeply woven or tightly woven Neolithic foods are in the fabric of our society right? So it's really because of Neolithic foods that we have civilization at all right? It's the invention

of agriculture that leads to civilization. So to say, oh we're going to now 8000 years later, 10,000 years later remove these Neolithic foods, that seem to me to be really unlikely right. That wasn't going to happen so easily.

We can think about some examples right? So the importance of bread within Christianity right I think is a good example. This is how bread and grains they were the staff of life whether it's rice or corn or wheat. These were things that allowed for the accumulation of wealth, the division of labor, new technologies, social hierarchy. All of these, the fundamental aspects of civilization were made possible because of grains and Neolithic foods, dairy, legumes, right? To say okay after all this time, we can remove these, that's going to be easy that seems to me close to impossible.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Hamilton Stapell: Close to impossible. In addition, there are industrial foods. So in the past 200 years there's been a whole new set of foods created, vegetable oils, refined sugars, refined grains, widely available alcohol etc. So if you add those up, if you add up Neolithic foods and industrial foods, that represents something like 70% of the American diet. 70% of the American diet which I'll talk about in a minute especially carbohydrates would seem to be quite physiologically addictive.

So when you say to someone okay, why don't you start living a paleo lifestyle or eating a paleo diet you're asking them to give up perhaps 70% of the foods that they eat on a daily basis. That transition seems like something that's very, very difficult for most people.

Robb Wolf: That weaves into then the physiological and the social elements I guess because we're making a move to go away from foods that are easily accessible, tasty, they hit the palatability centers of the brain in a really profound way and so you're asking folks to let go of that and then from a societal standpoint you're basically asking folks to take on all of that onerous activity and also be socially isolated or hang out with nutcases like yourself. The two of us that are still on this podcast. Everybody else has bailed on it but basically us. So like that's a really big ask.

Hamilton Stapell: Yeah, yeah especially because I'm the biggest nutcase around. Right? Totally. So you're right number two is physiological the second major obstacle and as you said carbohydrates, simple carbohydrates in particular seem to be physiologically addictive. Not only that but the

modern food industry spends billions of dollars to engineer foods, to make them hyper palatable.

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I know you weren't writing about engineered foods but you were talking hyper palatability in a recent post talking about with your daughter Sagan even.

Robb Wolf: Mm-hmm.

Hamilton Stapell: How a certain kind of cookie can be really, really palatable in a way that whole foods are not right. Now imagine if you spent billions of dollars to find the perfect mouth feel of the fat and the perfect crispiness of the chip , how is broccoli going to compete with that, against that.

Robb Wolf: Right. [Laughs]

Hamilton Stapell: So there are these physiological challenges that need to be overcome. The third point as you said are these social or what I would call maybe values right, this value argument. As you said, social isolation or the difficulty of doing this is a big part of it. I think another really big part of it is that we live in a society today that privileges on unhappiness over true mental and physical flourishing. Right?

So the Greeks had this term, eudemonia which means flourish. I think in essence that's what the ancestral health movement is all about, optimizing our health today, really flourishing physically, mentally in our home life, in our professional lives, in our community right. That's what we're really trying to achieve. Yet our society really again privileges or looks to having fun, just being happy, a certain sense of escapism.

I think I've said this in the past but I think we see it as cross generation. I will be an equal generational offender here right. so I think we see this among millennials and GenX-ers and baby boomers. Right? So there's all kinds of thing that people engage in. There are forms of escapism to avoid facing the difficult challenges and problems that we had on individual level and that we have on a societal level and these forms of escapism are well known right?

So videogames, movie, television, pulp fiction.

Robb Wolf: Social media.

Hamilton Stapell: Social media, pornography, self-medication, drugs alcohol and etc. So there's whole a spectrum of things out there that people use because I

think it plays into this desire to just be happy, just have fun. Of course there's nothing wrong with being happy and having fun but it's not the only goal in life. Right? This is the thing. I hear from people and I'll often ask my students like what's most important to them? They say to be happy. That's great but we can have different goals as a society. We could have social justice or the creation of knowledge, sexual ecstasy, there's all kinds of different values that we could prioritize about just personal happiness.

Robb Wolf:

So Hamilton you know, one thing popped into my head when you were talking about that. So when I was both coaching in the gym and when I was writing my first book, one of the things that...so I was thinking about this like the fun, kick your heels up kind of thing. I saw all kinds of problems with gluten and gluten related items which is a remarkable cross section of like the refined foods. Like you can just do stuff with wheat that you really can't do with corn or other substances. Like it's really unique and really tasty in that regard. So I was trying to think what's a bone that I can throw to people so I make this whole prospect more palatable and it was booze. It was booze largely in the form of the NorCal margarita like clear booze, some lime juice.

Funny enough that thing has been like recirculated a hundred times more than all the recipes, all the other recipes in my book combined. Like that one recipe like it's poked around on the internet. People share recipes and I have a recipe for nutty hot cereal and that one is like number two but it's just miles behind the booze piece. So I guess on an instinctual level I was looking at this fairly big ask that I was putting towards people and then saying okay we'll hear a concession on booze which is really like Loren Cordain was really, really perturbed about that and some other people. I'm like listen, we got have some flexibility here somewhere and I've always tried to couch this thing with let's start with this basic paleo template, get healthy and then see what type of shenanigans we can get away with from there.

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But the booze was really my effort at not making this thing seem super stodgy and untenable and even just looking into the eyes of my clients as we were working through what this new dietary shift was going to look like when I was still recommending that people really cut back on the booze there was just like immediate trail out the gym practically. And then I was started saying well let's maybe shift from beer to red wine and this thing I called the NorCal margarita and I had pretty good buy in with that. What do you think about that?

Hamilton Stapell: Buy in is super important. Right? I mean if you're not, if you can't get people to get started or as you say to go with the basic template then you don't get anywhere. So I think that's really important. It makes sense to me. I guess the problem or the issue that I had is that we place such a...we think that we have the motto of our country right, life, liberty, happiness that there's so much emphasis put on I deserve this, instant gratification, I want it, I need it now, I want it now. That's not how you achieve lasting lifestyle changes and optimal health I think. At least not when you're in your 30s and 40s and 50s. Maybe when you're in your teens and your 20s but as you get older that takes some effort.

I think living a paleo lifestyle takes an effort.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Hamilton Stapell: I think that's often runs into problems or is an intention with some of our societal values today. That's my big point. Not that of course not that no one should be drinking alcohol.

Robb Wolf: Right, right. Right. Hamilton so I think you lay out a really, a super compelling case in all of this. I think even just the...you know, Google is never wrong. So you know, the Google trend stuff is pretty compelling. I think that we've seen the paleo bubble, crossfit bubble. It's still unclear where this will go, will there be a background of this activity that just kind of goes on in perpetuity. I'd had this idea that the -you know, so lots of people have had problems just with the term the paleo diet. I've been one of those people right from the beginning. It's unfortunate that it wasn't called like the evolutionary diet or the evolutionary template or something like that because I think that it immediately allows for things like lactase persistence and different amylase gene frequencies allowing for people to tolerate carbs to a greater or lesser extent.

But the goal that I've always had is to try to put on as many people's radar particularly if they're sick. You know, autoimmune disease, metabolic syndrome. Yet there may be some alternatives to the conventional pharmaceutical centric treatment. So that's been a driver for me is just letting people know hey you've got an option here. Maybe you do it, maybe you don't but if your situation is dire enough, then it's good to know that you may have an option that could be pretty effective for like rheumatoid arthritis or multiple sclerosis or something like that.

But I've had a hunch that this evolutionary medicine template would just kind of get absorbed into the mainstream of medicine. Not necessarily the mainstream of society but the mainstream of medicine. I've long

made the point that I'm perplexed even why I got into this stuff because this evolutionary framework should just be baked into the cake of medicine. I'm actually perplexed why it's not.

But what are your thoughts on that? Like will we see more and more practitioners taking this up and clearly that's never going to fix hyper palatable foods and social and cultural challenges towards implementation. But I've had a couple of docs who helped to run a medical school programs and they've been incorporating more ancestral health evolutionary medicine concepts into medical students education. Is that going to have a good buy-in eventually? Will that become the norm or is that too going to remain a fringe element?

Hamilton Stapell: That's a really great question. I think that what we see is there's an interest within medical schools today to include more an evolution. In fact there's research data out there that show this. So I'm currently working on a new project looking at registered dieticians and registered dieticians their belief in evolution and their acceptance of basically paleo diet idea so that we don't call it directly that. We're doing, I'm working with a couple of colleagues on a big online survey of RD students and current practicing registered dieticians.

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In order to do this study, we went and we looked at the existing scholarship on the acceptance of evolution within medical schools. So people have been studying this actually for a while and you're exactly right, there's interest, there's quite a bit of interest within medical schools, within the administration to include more an evolution. Those studies have been published now for going on a decade.

It seems like there's been some movement but there hasn't been that much integration of that content into the course work specifically. So there's a desire to do it but it hasn't really happened. I don't know if that's because medical school is already over filled...

Robb Wolf: Stoked on material yeah.

Hamilton Stapell: Right. Exactly. That could be the most important factor right. Medical students already don't have enough time, already don't get enough sleep and there's been an effort to try to fix that. So when you talk about adding more content into the curriculum that becomes quite difficult.

So I think you're right. I think that there is a desire to include information about evolution into these programs. Will it happen or not or how quickly it would happen, I'm not sure. I think more speaking more broadly about

the future, I don't think as I...towards the end of my paper, The Going Mainstream Or Just A Passing Fad paper that I published most recently, I make an argument that mainstream medicine will slowly catch up with the paleo movement. It will continue to confirm what the ancestral health movement already knows. But it's not going to... I don't think it's learning from "us" as much as we think it is or we want it to right? I can think of three examples here, right?

So for the past two years the ancestral health movement has emphasized the importance of saturated fats, circadian rhythms, and the microbiota right. For years now this has been a big part of the paleo message and only recently has mainstream medicine sort of it feels to me caught up and said oh yeah saturated fats they don't cause heart disease. Oh yeah, blue light it is detrimental to sleep. Well antibiotics and Caesarian sections, they can have significant negative health consequences, right?

That seems to be that in many ways that they've gotten there on their own and they have confirmed what was really widely known within the ancestral health movement. That's how I see it. I don't know Robb, do you see it that way as well or do...

Robb Wolf:

yeah. Yeah. You know, it's interesting, I do...so with Terry Wahls, so she was very much on the fringe of the whole mainstream multiple sclerosis story. there was a movement several years back to have her Ted Talk removed because it was pseudo-science or something like that. There was a pretty good backlash about that and so Ted ended up keeping her talk online. But it was interesting. There was a... I forget the exact numbers on this but on the big multiple sclerosis society website the forum where people talk about a number of different topics, medications and nutrition. The nutrition forum, the autoimmune paleo diet was garnering about 10 to 15 times more traffic than all the other nutrition topics combined.

That prompted her at least being invited to one of the big conferences and I believe presenting some of the material and now she actually has some human trials and the results are pretty impressive. So things are moving forward there. So I do think that just the background chatter that folks in this community produce it does put eyeballs on the topic and it does sometimes dislodge the entrenched tradition and cause people to need to reevaluate and just ask okay well maybe there is something to this, to this topic. So I do think that there's a little bit of a push and a nudge here and there but to your point, it's...

I guess maybe you could liken it to a catalyst. Like it's not the primary driver but it's lowering the activation energy where if we didn't have the ancestral health movement, these topics may have taken another 10 years to really reach the prominence that they have. But we've cut a pretty good chunk of the evolution off of that because of the both the market forces are brought to bear, the amount of social media presence that can be brought to bear on this. So I do think that it catalyzes the change.

[00:50:20]

Hamilton Stapell: Yeah. I think that's a really great way of looking at it. I think that make a lot of sense.

Robb Wolf: So Hamilton before we wrap up here, what about some of the big players in evolutionary biology, evolutionary medicine? I know that some efforts have been made to build some bridges with those folks and generally the overtures has been pretty cool that you received. What do you think is happening with that?

Hamilton Stapell: that' a great question. I think it relates to what we just have been discussing. The example, a couple of examples come to my mind but one is would be Randolph Nesse who is now the director for Center for Evolution and Medicine at Arizona State University. He's known in many ways the founder of Darwinian medicine. On one level you think would be very sympathetic or supportive of what the ancestral health movement is doing but he has come out and he's been openly critical more than once of applying evolutionary principles to the current practice in medicine.

His major argument is that we don't know enough yet to...we don't know enough to have principles to apply. I see where he's coming from. But at the same time, we do have this template that does seem to work pretty well that is based on these several different lines of evidence, clinical, anthropological, etc. So it's surprising to me that folks like him or we could talk about Daniel Lieberman who is at Harvard at the Human Evolutionary Biology program there. He wrote the book The Story of the Human Body which was some quite popular. He was on Fresh Air with Terry Grosse. He's also been at times critical of the whole paleo movement or paleo lifestyle.

So it's interesting. I don't know exactly what's going on here. maybe these folks are rightly being cautious or maybe there's a little bit of turf that they are...

Robb Wolf: That's been my sense in a lot of ways, yeah. Yeah.

Hamilton Stapell: I see...sorry to interrupt I see this here in my program. So at the beginning I said that I am part of the evolutionary studies program here at SUNY New Paltz and it's an interdisciplinary program with faculty members from different departments. You know, folks in biology are rightly sometimes suspicious of what people really know or think about evolution because they're very rigorous in their work.

So I experience this here on a personal level people hesitant to accept new ideas or new approaches especially if they're coming from disciplines outside of biology.

Robb Wolf: Right. Which I find fascinating. Like some of the best insights that we're seeing in medicine, particularly in nutrition is oftentimes somebody from a rigorous but completely unrelated discipline like engineering or physics. Getting in and having an interest in the topic and then these folks are able to bring a fresh set of eyes typically little baggage and oftentimes some superior analytical skills to the topic. Although most of it tends to get published more in blog format than a journal format. But I've seen some of the best contributions coming from folks that had no classical training in say physiology or medicine or whatnot. But it definitely raises some eyebrows.

Art Devany is a person that comes to mind in that regard. He's an economist and that guy was talking about some very high order stuff back around '93, '95 in a very early blog that he maintained at UC Irvine. Now 20 years later, we're just now starting to really crack into some of this stuff and provide I guess further academic credibility to some of the things that he was throwing out there. I just...that guy is totally amazing to me. But it's fascinating, I did a talk once for Chico State University the anthropology department and wrapped the whole thing up with this, a pat on the back to the anthropology department basically he's saying you guys really are the future. You guys could change medicine and you could change the way that things are done. About half the faculty it was like they had just won the world series. Their team had won the world series and the other half of the faculty looked at me like I had three heads.

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It was so interesting and there was a fair amount of internal debate within that department after that talk. I had put forward some ideas about some interdisciplinary work and some maybe alternate bachelor's degree process for people entering medical school or the allied healthcare sciences and the anthropology department providing a significant chunk of the course work for that. It could have meant a lot more students for them and some of the faculty was not really

comfortable with taking that on. You know, they felt again and I just couldn't help but get the sense that because I wasn't an anthropologist, there was a sense of like why would you tell us what our business is. So it was interesting.

We talked about this before we recorded. Max Planck's observation that science progresses one funeral at a time. So we may have to just wait some of that out.

Hamilton Stapell: Yeah. I think that's a really good point and I was thinking about when you were just talking about how we get these ideas from different groups of people or from outside of traditional disciplines. I think this is what's been really great about the ancestral health society right or the ancestral health symposium is that from the beginning that organization has really tried to incorporate academic perspective with an educated lay perspective with clinicians and to bring those three groups together and have them communicate, have them meet, have those ideas cross pollinate. I think that organization deserves a lot of credit for trying to do that really difficult task and I think it's a difficult line to walk, right? Because you have to be popular enough to have continued support at the same time you have to be academic enough to have that rigor and that...

Robb Wolf: Right.

Hamilton Stapell: ...at the same time right? So we've seen both Paleo FX and the ancestral health symposium try to walk this line and to draw a line between academic rigor and popular interest. That's been really fascinating for me to watch from almost a little been on the outside here to say how are these organizations doing that, how successful are they going to be, what is the secrete sauce that's making them work.

Robb Wolf: Right, right. Interesting. Well so your next project is actually looking at some of the beliefs related to evolution within registered dieticians?

Hamilton Stapell: that's right. I'm currently working with several different colleagues at different institutions. We have two online surveys that we are running. We already ran the first one which looked at students in RD programs and then we're going to run in the next month a survey for all RDs, professional RDs in different settings and asking them did they receive training in evolution, what do they think about evolution, how much they know about evolution and does evolutionary have anything to offer when thinking about nutrition, right. So it's like we're asking basic fundamental questions at the intersection between evolution and registered dietitians. We're doing this because no work has been done on this. So as I've said

earlier that there is, there has been this research done on medical students in medical schools but no one has thought to look at RDs. Right and what kind of...there's been no systematic look at RDs and what they've been taught and what they know about evolution.

So I had a student come to me and say he was interested in doing this and then we brought in some other people and it's been a really exciting project. We had about 900, 1000 responses to the first survey for the students, which is really, really great especially considering you weren't helping us with that. [laughs]

Robb Wolf: Always glad to help so.

Hamilton Stapell: Right. We hope to have a really robust sample size with the registered dietician. We're really trying to come up with some strategies to reach them directly and we hope to get some interesting data then maybe next year to be presenting that at a conference or two.

Robb Wolf: Nice, fantastic. Well...

Hamilton Stapell: Exactly. Let me say sorry that my, one of co-authors would be presenting a poster at the ancestral health symposium in Boulder in August on our work. So actually there's a poster presentation coming up here in August.

Robb Wolf: Fantastic. Okay. well you will be at AHS, right?

[01:00:04]

Hamilton Stapell: I will. Yes. I'm not...

Robb Wolf: Okay, I'll see you there.

Hamilton Stapell: I'm not presenting this year but I will definitely be there. Excited to be out in Boulder and to be back at the ancestral health symposium.

Robb Wolf: fantastic, well I will definitely see you there. Hamilton where can people track you down on the internet?

Hamilton Stapell: Sure. the best place to find me is HamiltonStapell.com. That has all links to my research, any videos that are online are there, podcasts, interviews, everything. more than you'd ever want to know about me.

Robb Wolf: Great.

Hamilton Stapell: HamiltonStapell.com and you can find the articles that we were talking about today at the Journal of Evolution and Health. So the two articles

that I wrote one about the survey, the stereotypes and reality and the second one about Is Paleo Mainstream Or A Passing Fad. Both of those are The Journal of Evolution and Health.

Robb Wolf: I'll have links to those in the show notes and I will also have direct links to your previous AHS talks which were the drivers for both of these papers.

Hamilton Stapell: That would be great. Super.

Robb Wolf: Fantastic. Well Hamilton I'm really looking forward to seeing you in person and thank you so much for spending some time with us today.

Hamilton Stapell: Well it's been great. Thank you so much for having me on. It's a real pleasure and honor to be on your show Robb. Thank you.

Robb Wolf: Thank you and thanks for the fantastic work that you've done. I don't know where this paleo ancestral health movement will go over the next couple of years but you've done an amazing job of helping everybody to look at it from both inside and an outside perspective. So it's been incredibly valuable work that you've done.

Hamilton Stapell: Robb, thanks for all your help along the way. I appreciate your help on all my projects as well.

Robb Wolf: Thank you. Well looking forward to seeing you with the first NorCal margarita is on me.

Hamilton Stapell: That's awesome. Sounds great.

Robb Wolf: Okay. Will talk to you soon.

Hamilton Stapell: Bye.

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