

Effects of Celiac Disease on Religion and Language

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Introduction

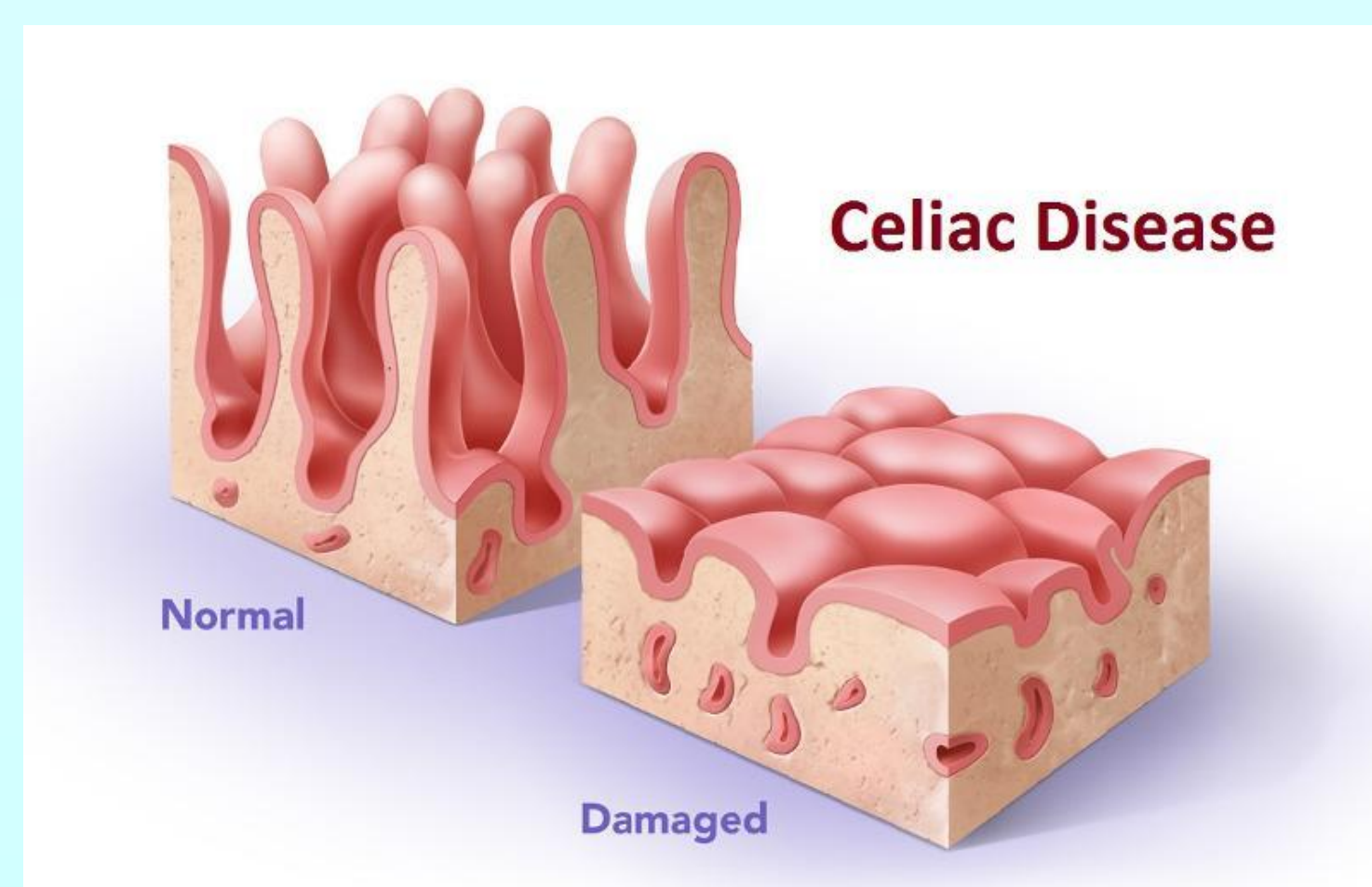
Cultural anthropologists aim to learn about human lives within their society and how different variables affect them. Celiac disease is one of those variables. Those with the disease discover that a diagnosis not only entails lifestyle changes but cultural and emotional ones as well. This summer we explored the personal ramifications of celiac disease, not the way it physically manifests itself as an autoimmune disease, but rather the ways in which it irrevocably alters aspects of social and emotional life for those living with it.

Toto... I have a feeling we can't eat bagels anymore.



What is Celiac Disease?

Celiac disease is an autoimmune disorder that can occur in genetically predisposed people where the ingestion of gluten leads to damage in the small intestine. Celiac disease is "the most common genetically-induced food intolerance in the world" (Rivera, Assiri & Guandalini 2013).



Communion



In the Roman Catholic faith, the Communion wafer must be made with only wheat and water with "sufficient gluten to attain the confection of bread." This creates problems for people with celiac disease; however, there are a number of solutions available. The first option and probably the safest would be to receive Communion with only the wine. According to Catholic belief, "the whole of Christ is contained in the Precious Blood alone" (Coughlin, "The Options"). A second option would be the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration's wafer that has less than .01% gluten.

- On Twitter, reactions to the gluten free wafer vary.
- "**Gluten-free Communion wafers and barbecue raves. Seattle is starting to descend into self-parody**" (Mike Seely @mdseely 28 Dec 14).
- "**So apparently Aley Church's communion now has 'Jesus' and 'Gluten-free Jesus'"** (Joey @ovobrien 24 Dec 14).
- "**excuse me are these gluten free and whole grain? -health nut taking communion**" (celeste oconnor @boston_CELtic 24 Dec 14).
- "**Every single person in my church is white and they're making a really big deal about having gluten free bread for communion**" (Betsy Boo Bambo @sistersome 01 Dec 14).
- "**@sistersome gluten free? More like sin free. Ha ha. Gluten free is such a dumb fad**" (Catscade @HolyCatscade 01 Dec 14).

Those who have the disease would be more likely to appreciate a gluten free wafer:

- "**Painful watching mum wait behind after communion and ask the priest for her gluten free substitute**" (gabby @GabbyWard 05 Apr).
- "**TOOK COMMUNION AT CHURCH AND THE WAFER HAD GLUTEN I KNEW MY GOD FEARING PERSONALITY WOULD EVENTUALLY BE MY DEMISE**" (virginia?, @virgintheturkey 21 Jun).
- "**Beautiful prayer and communion service - but no gluten free option?**" (Michelle Henrichs @LIT_Labyrinth).
- "**when you're allergic to gluten and can't even do communion at church**" (syd @sydneymckenzie 09 Nov 14).



"Glutard"

The term "glutard" is most commonly used to refer to someone who cannot digest gluten. The origin of "glutard" is unknown and there is not a universally agreed upon definition. Twitter users express their grief living with celiac disease or gluten intolerance and many use "glutard" as a means to humorously frame their struggles.

- "**my digestive system is supposed to do one thing, digest, and mine can't even do that right #glutard**" (Angie @angie1o2, 7/28/15).
- "**I was just called a 'glutard' (a person with coeliac disease) #thatsafirst #mademelaugh**" (Brad Norris, @BradNorris_NZ, 7/28/15).
- "**Been gluten-free for several months now. Big fan of the term #glutard. Seems so appropriate in more than one way. #glutenfree**" (Jamilia T. Lasante, @JamiliaCcoast, 6/5/15).

Glutard:
One who must think outside the breadbox

Many find the term funny, but some object to its reference to "retard." It seems to be an especially controversial word when referencing or addressing young children with celiac:

- "**I'm not sure my 9 year-old Celiac Disease daughter is going to like that glutard monicker**" (Jorge Ezeta, @grancartavio, 8/8/14).
- "**Oh honey, please tell me you didn't say Glutard. Any variation of 'retard' is so hurtful to people with cognitive disabilities**" (Dona, @sixthstevens, 11/28/14).
- "**All wheat intolerant people, I have a question: 'Glutard' is offensive for a few reasons - would you guys prefer 'Glutineer'? I know I would**" (In the Mouth of Mad, @theexcitableboy, 8/12/14).
- "**To be 'glutarded' or not to be? This blogger believes the term is demeaning and unintelligent. Others think it's fine**" (kitty sallas, @kittysallas, 5/14/14).

The self-help book *The Gluten-Free Cheat Sheet: Go G-Free in 30 Days or Less* addresses this issue, "some people with a terrific sense of humor...call themselves 'glutards.' But don't assume we all appreciate a slang name that also plays off another population that certainly doesn't deserve to be insulted."

Celiac Awareness in Society

The gluten free diet brought new products to the grocery stores and new options for meals but also lowered the chance of someone taking a person with celiac disease seriously by a great deal.

- Lauren Barack** wrote, "you'd think gluten-free awareness would open more options to us. In some ways, yes. Others no. We (Lauren and her daughter, Harper) are now met, in particular, with the cold stares of waiters who lump us with members of the latest food fad."
- Laura Bennett** said, "A few weeks ago, I visited a new dentist for the first time, and he asked if I had any food allergies. 'Gluten,' I said. 'Let me try again,' he replied. 'Do you have any real allergies?'"

Another example of one of the problems celiacs face in society is the idea of a "glutard helicopter mom." The term first appeared on Twitter and refers to overprotective parents, especially mothers, who micromanage their children.

- Amy Leger**, a self-proclaimed GF helicopter mom, said, "I was frustrated over the lack of communication to get [her child] a gluten free meal. But at the same time worried I would be tagged as 'THAT Mom'...you know the one who is even more overbearing than a typical overprotective mom."

Parents in this position are repeatedly torn between knowing that they are being somewhat overbearing and feeling that they must be in order to ensure that their child is not harmed.



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