

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

You can't change the system tomorrow by yourself, but think about what you can do within your circles, but it has to start with taking care of yourself. If you don't care of yourself, including what you put in your body and what you do with your body, it's going to be very, very difficult for you to impact the lives of other people to the degree that you'd like to.

Rip Esselstyn:

One of the reasons I love doing this podcast is because each week, I get to connect with each of you and bond over the one big thing that we have in common and that's our shared love of living plant strong and celebrating the heroes who continue to mobilize this movement in the right direction. I also know that like me, you're realizing that we can never really grow together unless we continue to have these important shared learning experiences.

Rip Esselstyn:

This week, we continue our conversations and open dialogue about health, race and shared human connection with Doctor Jarik Conrad. Not only is Doctor Conrad a human resources expert and consultant, but he is also a certified emotional intelligence expert and intercultural sensitivity expert and author of the best selling book *The Fragile Mind*.

Rip Esselstyn:

His life's work is to help others find common ground and develop deep and meaningful relationships, both in the workplace and in society. Despite our vast difference, how can we come together to make our lives better and more fulfilled? How can we, regardless of our backgrounds, foster empathy and understanding? These are some of the questions that we explore in today's eye opening episode.

Rip Esselstyn:

And did I mention that Doctor Conrad and his family are also whole-food, plant strong advocate? Indeed, as you're going to hear, this man who grew up in poverty stricken East St. Louis, holds a certification in plant-based nutrition and is passionate about helping others develop healthy relationships with food. As Jarik suggests, when you rid your body and mind of unnecessary toxins and processed junk food, it will have a direct positive impact on your emotional IQ and leadership style both at work and at home.

Rip Esselstyn:

It's also Doctor Conrad's belief, as well as mine, that changing what we eat will also help us forge deeper and more meaningful connections with each other right here in our communities. And the world could use a little more of that right now, as we all know. Welcome Doctor Jarik Conrad.

Rip Esselstyn:

We discovered a silver lining through COVID-19. By forcing us to change our 9th annual Plant-Stock event to an online format, it has allowed us to reach many, many more plant curious around the globe. And right now, the need has never been greater for people to adopt a whole-food, plant-based life. This year's event will feature the brightest luminaries in the scientific research, including Doctor Michael Klaper, Doctor Saray Stancic, Doctor Michael Greger, my father Doctor Caldwell B. Esselstyn Junior and a host of other brockstars.

Rip Esselstyn:

Join us for our upcoming online Plant-Stock weekend from August 14 to the 16. We are packing this live event with science and practical application and offering you a chance for your whole household to learn and cook along with us. We're going to also give you a front row seat to the Esselstyn family farm. And if you can't watch it live, don't worry. Video access is including for a year with every ticket and partial proceeds will benefit the Esselstyn Foundation, a 501(c)(3) and financial assistance is available for those who need it. Visit plantstock2020.com today to learn more.

Rip Esselstyn:

Doctor Jarik Conrad, I want to welcome you to the Plant-Strong Podcast. This is season two. Season two is really about welcoming people that have the heart of a hero. And in reading up on you, reading your book, *The Fragile Mind*, the beautiful introduction that was given to me of you through our mutual friend, Doctor Elizabeth Winings, I feel really, really fantastic about having a very open conversation with you. And let me just frame it up right now for people because obviously right in America, we have all these conversations that are going on around racism and anti-racism.

Rip Esselstyn:

I think it's really important that you and I can have a conversation that will bring value to this current narrative. And specifically, I'd like to have this conversation be more around kind of nutrition and health, or lack thereof, that's going on in this country.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Absolutely.

Rip Esselstyn:

Let me also say, Jarik, that I know that you are so well educated. You're an intercultural sensitivity expert and I want to say up front that if I say anything that is inappropriate or like, "Hey Dude, that was not cool," I hope you'll call me on and then help me figure out the best way to say it or phrase it because I don't even want to pretend like I'm nuanced or very good at this.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Well, let me let you in on a little secret as we get started. You can take these words 'expert,' you've got to take that kind of stuff with a grain of salt. I am studying this stuff. I talk a lot about it, but all of us are still trying to learn as much as we can about human behavior, what makes us tick and why? And so, same here. If I say something that rubs you the wrong way, I hope you say, "Well, Jarik, buddy, when you say that, it feels like this this. What do you mean?" Because if we don't have these open conversations, then we can't move anywhere.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

And anytime you engage in some discussions, when you start talking about things like race, for instance, it can get dicey for people, but I'm always willing to take that risk because I'm looking toward the other side of it where we can all learn and grow together. So don't be worried about that.

Rip Esselstyn:

Well, that's good. So it's okay if we get a little uncomfortable, it just allows us to get more comfortable down the road.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

That's right. Absolutely.

Rip Esselstyn:

All right. Good. I want to just start out by just a little bit about you and then I want you to correct me or go back if anything... if I missed something or you want to add something. So first, and I think it's important that we say this, you're a black man. Right?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Right.

Rip Esselstyn:

And to start out, because a lot of people are just going to be hearing this on audio and not, right? Is that the correct way to refer to yourself when I reference you?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I am fine with African American, with black. I've really been trying to think about these labels and I'm really encouraging people to use American from African descent, something like that because I am... In some ways, I think when you put something before American, it serves as a little bit of an asterisk and it almost subconsciously makes people think that that's a different kind of American or lesser of American or not full American, so I would prefer... Even though I'm the only person probably saying this right now, I'd prefer that we move away from the Asian American or African American or LatinX American. I would prefer that we say American of African descent. I want to emphasize the fact that we have that shared experience as Americans.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

But on a personal note, black or whatever, that's fine.

Rip Esselstyn:

Okay. Okay. You grew up in East St. Louis and what's considered probably the most distressed, I think, part of town in America.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

That's probably fair to say.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

Right?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

It's had some challenges.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yep. Yep. I want you to talk about that. You are, like I said, you're incredibly well educated. You've got a bachelor's degree from University of Illinois. You have two master's degrees from Cornell University and you've got a Doctor of Education degree from the University of North Florida.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rip Esselstyn:

Okay. And I know you've got a lot more degrees that maybe you can tell us about, but I'm going to stop there for now. You and your family eat a whole-food, plant-based diet.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Absolutely. Absolutely. Absolutely.

Rip Esselstyn:

And we're going to dive into that. Is it fair to say that today, are you the CEO and President of the Conrad Consulting Group?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yes, I am. I am. I still have... I have the Conrad Consulting Group. I also work full-time with an HR software company, Ultimate Software, that's soon to change our name. We've just merged with Kronos. I am the "thought leader". I run the Thought Leadership Group for Ultimate Software, where I get to delve into some of these issues around nutrition and health and wellness and all of that as well. I spent 20 years as a HR practitioner, so this really gives me a chance to go back to my roots a little bit, but still think about these ideas and try to solve these really complex problems that we're still struggling with.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. In 2008, you wrote this book right here, The Fragile Mind, right?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yes.

Rip Esselstyn:

And the subtitle is How It Has Produced and Unwittingly Perpetuates America's Tragic Disparities.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

This first came out 2008 and then you updated it in 2015.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

You've done your homework, man. I'm impressed.

Rip Esselstyn:

Well, well... In the preface of this book, you wrote, and I quote, "A lot has happened regarding race relations in America since the publication of the first edition of *The Fragile Mind* in 2008," meaning President Barack Obama, right?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

"Of course, most notably, yes, the election of Barack." You go on in this updated version to say, "Individuals who thought that such a momentous feat would open the door to racial understanding and reconciliation in America have to think again." So, I mean, wow. It's almost like you had a crystal ball. My question to you is it's 2020, obviously we are staring at a racial crisis like I don't think any of us have seen in our lifetimes.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Right.

Rip Esselstyn:

My question to you is how do you view what's going on right now? Before we dive into the nutrition part. I just, I feel like this is kind of the white elephant in the room and I want to address it.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yeah. Yeah. I think... And I'm glad, I'm really glad that you're addressing this, even though your show focuses on health and nutrition, it's just such an important conversation for all of us to have, so I appreciate the opportunity to talk about it a little bit. Number one, I view it a little bit differently. I mean, everybody views differently, right? We all have our own perspective. But because I talk about these issues and I write these issues, I'm probably going to look at it from a different lens, from a different perspective than your average person that's working every day, who doesn't get a chance to talk about these things.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

It wasn't that I had a crystal ball, it was that all you have to do is read history. You can just follow the pattern in history. When there is some significant achievement as it relates to diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, some significant milestone, it's immediately followed by some type of retrenchment. Right? While there are forces that are pulling for change, there's still those forces that are desperately trying to hold on to the status quo for whatever reason that is. Just as night follows day, you can know that there was going to be some resistance to this change. It's too much, too soon for some people. It's changing what they know about what America is, so this was very predicable.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I'm not as surprised that we're having these challenges. I'm disappointed. I'm disappointed that we're dealing with these at such an outward level. I guess I should be happy that what was under the surface is finally coming out so that we can deal with it.

Rip Esselstyn:

When you say it's such an outward level, do you mean like with the protests and everything like that or just?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I mean with people's feelings about these issues around race in America. I mean, the fact that when you look at hate groups that those memberships have grown. When you look at hate speech that people used to say maybe in their own homes or in pockets, now they found their way to social media and sometimes to workplaces. I'm talking about the things that like what we saw on the streets of Minneapolis, what just... It troubled all of us.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Some people who didn't feel as comfortable, they knew it wasn't "politically correct" to challenge some of these advancements from a diversity, equity, inclusion standpoint, but they might have been quiet in the past. Some people have been more vocal about hate really, more vocal about the whole range from hate to skepticism, that whole range. I think by people being more vocal, I don't know if there are more people who feel that way or if they're just more vocal, but I think many of us who had hoped we had moved past that were disappointed to see that that was still there.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

On the other hand, when you look at the protests in the street, I'm hopeful and I'm encouraged by the fact that the protestors didn't all look like me. All right. There were protestors from all walks of life, all backgrounds, saying, "Look, enough is enough. We have to do something." It's an interesting time. I think many of us who are black and I'm sure that there's some whites that are going through the same thing, we go through this emotional rollercoaster. We're hopeful, something... We see something about that just gives us some encouragement about humanity, but then we see something that discourages us, but then we see something that encourages us.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I think a lot of us are on a little bit of a rollercoaster and hoping that at the end of this ride, we end up in a better place than we are right now.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. There is an intensity in the air that I have never felt before. And between COVID-19 hitting us right now, between probably looking at another... if not one of greatest recessions, if not depression, and then what's going on with really this racial injustice, but it's just been taken to a whole nother level, at least we're seeing it now in ways that we didn't see in the past. There's something in the air right now and I'm... I hear you, man. I mean, I can't help just... I have a very optimistic kind of nature, think that good has got to prevail here and come out the other side.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

It will.

Rip Esselstyn:

It has too.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

It will. It will. There are enough people now. There were always more good people than bad people. I've always believed that. It's just that I always try to put myself in somebody else's shoes. If I didn't look the way I do, if I grew up in different situation, born to a different family and I didn't have to worry about this issue, we have enough to worry... everybody has enough to worry about. I got to work hard. Do I look good enough? Am I tall enough? Am I smart enough? Am I attractive? All these kinds of things, right?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

It's a struggle for a lot of people. The fact that they hadn't paid as much attention to what's going with somebody that looks like me, I can almost see that that could happen, but I think this has now forced people to say, "Well, wait a minute. This is about humanity. This affects all of us. I probably should do more. I thought that not doing any harm was good enough." The fact of the matter is, in America when you've got disparities built into all these systems like the healthcare system, for instance. When you have those disparities already built in, if you decide, "Well, I'm not going to do anymore harm," but you don't do any proactive stuff to close the gaps, it's impossible to close the gaps. And so doing no harm really maintains the status quo and the status quo obviously impacts people that look like me in negative ways.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yep. No. Yeah. I think that before this whole Black Lives Matter really hit full force, I think that... And I'll speak here, I think that probably most of white America maybe didn't know, didn't really care, but I can't help but think that now almost everybody knows and almost everybody cares. And of course, you're going to have your outliers, right, the hate groups that you mentioned, but I think that that's... those are few and far between. I hope.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yeah. I believe that. I think that what we have to work on, number one, is making sure that we isolate. If we're going to isolate anybody, isolate the people who hate. You know what I mean? I think we sometimes make excuses for people and we sometimes try to maybe look the way and hope that this stuff will go away. It's not going to go away. It hasn't in all these years. I think all of us who want equality, I think all of us have to figure out how can we be a little bit more active? How can we address... Sometimes it's people in our families who harbor these old ideas about inferiority and superiority and all that. It's having conversations sometimes, even with people in our families that we love.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I do believe, Rip, that over time, the positive will certainly outweigh the negative. I hesitate to say good and bad people because they just... People are motivated for a whole host of reasons. My job is when I'm talking with people about this who may be on the other side, who maybe doesn't... They don't see

things the same way I do. My goal is always to try to get at the root of it. Like, where are they coming from? Where did those ideas come from? And if I were in their situation, would I have those same ideas?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

And if that's the case, now I can address them at a human level and start to talk about our differences and how we can move forward. But if I just label them and put them in a box, they're going to retreat and then they're going to come back really defensive and we'll never move anywhere. So it's tough, man. I try to stay away from most people do this or most people do that or all people do this or all people do that or white people should do this or white people should do that, because whenever we start putting those labels on, we've already... It's kind of a nonstarter because you can't say black people feel or black people... because nobody can speak for all black people. I can't.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Yeah.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

We can't say white people do this and white people... because nobody can speak for all white people. This is interesting, man. I'm weird in that I enjoy talking about this stuff because it's a puzzle. It's a puzzle that I'd love to be able to solve.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Well, in your book, you actually address that. I mean, you address a ton of stuff in your book. I recommend everybody read it.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I appreciate it.

Rip Esselstyn:

But you also mention how you don't feel like people are good or bad, but rather they're human. Right?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yes.

Rip Esselstyn:

And that's really the fragility of the human mind, right? The fragile mind.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

That's right.

Rip Esselstyn:

And you also talk about how so many, in regarding to race, have been negatively conditioned to race and probably don't even know it. Right?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

That's right.

Rip Esselstyn:

It's just subconsciously in there and you're not even aware of it.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

It's fun to talk about these things when... And I know we're going to talk about health and the whole plant-based because there are some tie in, obviously, to race there, specifically around health disparities, but it's so fun to take some of these conversations outside of race and to prove some of these points in a different context and then come back in and lay in race. And then, people say, "Oh, okay."

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

[crosstalk 00:23:22] people keep saying, "I get it now."

Rip Esselstyn:

Well, and I just throw in a great example. In your book, you do so many great examples, but you talk about how I think there's a book out there about why are all the blacks sitting together the lunch?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yeah. Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

But the example you give is, well, if you're in Hawaii wearing like a University of Texas sweatshirt or a T-shirt and you see somebody wearing that, all of a sudden, there's a bond. There's a connection and you're going to go over to them and say, "Hey, all right. Go Longhorns."

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

That's right. It's a natural thing. There's something about the human condition that we are attracted to people who have these shared experiences. There's something very human about that. Look, when we got started, you have your St. Louis T-shirt. What did I say?

Rip Esselstyn:

You said-

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Right off the top, I'm like, "We're good, you have the St. Louis..." So that is a natural thing and that's what I mean about how we have to really understand what makes us tick. So if we understand that that's a natural thing, then we can see now how people can stereotype. It's really a function of the brain and the brain trying to work as efficiently as it possibly can. So do to so, it puts things in categories and

boxes to try to understand the world because there's so much stimuli out there we just can't focus on all of it.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

So if you start to really understand what makes us tick, you can see how we step into some traps when it comes to issues like race. And if you can predict those traps, now you ought to be able to get ahead of them. My brain is going to want to put things in boxes, so I've got to actively work against that. And how do I do that? By really expanding my experiences with different people. The more experiences I have with people who don't look like me, who don't think like me, who don't believe like me, the less likely I'm going to stereotype by default. My default mechanisms will be overrun by those experiences that I have.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. So let me ask you one more question before we dive into nutrition.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Okay.

Rip Esselstyn:

And that is like, so one of the examples that you gave in *The Fragile Mind* as far as... So there's a term out there called white privilege. Right?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yeah. Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

So I think you have discovered in your training, instead of calling it white privilege because then it makes probably whites bristle a little bit and all of a sudden on the defensive, you refer to it as cultural congruence. Right?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

And that's such a... probably a more palatable way for somebody to hear that. Can you talk about that?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yeah. Yeah. Again, This is... I told you I try to put myself in other people's shoes. I imagine if I were born a poor white person, born into a poor family in Appalachia or somewhere else, right, and I had to struggle and I had to really work hard and I was the only one in my family to graduate and go to college and I've created this middle class kind of life for myself and then I hear that term white privilege, it might make me bristle. Because I might read into that that somebody gave me something, that I didn't have to work hard and that's not what diversity practitioners are trying to say when they use that term, but that's kind of what people can read into it because they can point to other people who are white,

who might have been born into a wealthy family and say, "Now, that's the person that's privileged, not me."

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

What people are trying to say is, "Look, it's not that somebody gave you something, it's that you haven't had any artificial barriers, any additional artificial barriers set up against you just by virtue of your skin color like I might have. Given the same amount of work, because I might have to face more obstacles, more barriers over time, you might have fewer people like me that can succeed. Nobody gave you anything, you worked hard and nobody's taken away the hard work you've put into accomplishing what you have, but you've got to acknowledge that nobody's taken away anything."

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

The easiest example of that is if you take a middle class white person and if you take a poor white person and even a middle class or wealthy black person, put them all in the same outfit, like they're going to the gym, let them get in a car and drive to the gym, who's more likely to get stopped? Who's more likely to be looked at with a skeptical eye? When people see me on the street in some workout clothes, they don't see Doctor Conrad with the degrees on the wall, they see a black man. Whatever they think about what a black man is, they're going to attach that thought process... that perspective will be attached to me.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

And people say, "Well, that's no true. I don't see race." We have study after study of MRI data to show that even if we don't consciously see things like race, we subconsciously see it and that's part of our wiring as human beings. Our emotions work faster than our cognitive abilities to process those emotions, so we absolutely see these differences. We see whether that person is like me or not like me because I'm looking for those shared experiences. And the best clue of whether or not we have shared experiences, if I don't know anything else, the best clue I have is what I see.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

The race becomes this defacto here's our shared experience. Now, as you talk to people, you might find out yeah you look the same, but you don't really have anything in common or you look different, but you have a lot in common. But that's what our eight brains, these old brains that we have, that's not what our brains see. Our brains see the race first, then we start making associations based on that.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Let me give you another example that I just saw. Do you know who a guy named Ronnie Coleman? Eight time Mr. Olympia.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

From Dallas. I mean, the guy... He was a-

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Built like me, right? Built like me, right?

Rip Esselstyn:

Identical. But I think from Dallas. He was a cop and one of his friends suggested he start lifting. He goes to this gym, but there's a documentary right now on Netflix called Ron Coleman. It's phenomenal. I recommend people watch it. But he talks about how he went to college, graduated Magna Cum Laude, right? Top of his class. He had a propensity for accounting. He tried getting a job as an accountant, right, for two years and everybody said, "You don't have enough experience. You don't have experience." Obviously, right, you change the color of his skin, he's probably going to get hired up like that, right?

Rip Esselstyn:

I mean, that to me was so just glaring. But to his credit, or maybe not, he didn't seem to be bitter. He didn't seem to be angry. He wasn't like, "Can you believe it?" He was just like, "Yeah." So he moved on and he decided to become a cop, right, because the accounting thing just wasn't happening for him.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

And obviously, he's doing very well today with a line of supplements and things, although his body has been obliterated and he has to use crutches and stuff. He's one of the only men that were able to... He was able to squat 800 pounds several times. Incredible, but I digress. But yeah.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yeah. Yeah. No, it's... In each one of those situations, if I were one of your listeners, I might say, "Well, just because that one person didn't get a job, that doesn't prove anything." Right? And maybe it doesn't, but what happens is when you look at these things in aggregate, when you not just take the one example, but now you take tens or hundreds of thousands of examples and you find out, for instance, which is a true stat, that at every level of education, the black unemployment rate is higher than the white unemployment rate. At every level of education, the median earnings is higher for whites than blacks.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

So when you start compiling all of these things and you see them on aggregate, you start to realize, "Okay, there's some systemic challenges. There's some structural issues that we have." That's one of the things, Rip, that's so important that I try to make people understand. The inclination when you hear about these kind of issues is to think about your own experience. So I could easily say, "Well, look, I'm from east St. Louis, one of the most challenging places to grow up in America and I've achieved 'some success', so all you have to do is work hard." That would be easy for me to say, right, and it captures people emotions and sometimes people like to say that kind of stuff about me to try and prove that all you have to do is work hard. Racism doesn't exist.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

But you can't look at one example. If you were doing a math equation and you're plotting out these dots and you get all these dots clustered over here and you have one or two way over in the corner over there, those are outliers. You don't really even look at those outliers anymore, right? You focus on where all these clusters are and realize we're just data points, right? I hate to reduce us to that, but we're just data points in this regard and we could be outliers. I urge people to kind of... Don't focus on your own experience and say, "Because I did this," or, "If I were in that situation, I would do that." Look at what happens to most people in that situation. That is what you learn about the human brain and the human condition, right?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

This is how the brain reacts in this situation or this is how people have reacted in this situation and that's where you really start to see the patterns and the trends emerge.

Rip Esselstyn:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative). You have such a wealth of information in that wonderful brain of yours. Thank you.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I appreciate it.

Rip Esselstyn:

So let's dive into nutrition. Now-

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Before I mention that, we talked about... We're not going to talk about all that other stuff that much [crosstalk 00:34:20]. See how it happens. People really do want to talk about this, if they feel like it's a no-risk place where we can talk about it and folks are not going to judge us and all that stuff. I really encourage people to engage in those discussions because they're important and we never have them. But yeah, let's go ahead and let's shift to nutrition.

Rip Esselstyn:

Good. Good. So you are a whole-food, plant-based brother of mine.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Absolutely. Absolutely.

Rip Esselstyn:

You even got your degree in plant-based nutrition from, I believe, eCornell.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yep. Yep. I do have a certification from them.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yep. Yep. So tell me, how is it that a black man from East St. Louis has now embraced and discovered whole-food, plant-based nutrition?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Well, partly because of people like you doing all these documentaries and you're putting all this information out there.

Rip Esselstyn:

Well, you know what, that's really nice, but I will say that I feel like, especially now that the veil has kind of been lifted, that I am not doing nearly enough for the black community, not anywhere near.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

We can talk about that. We can certainly work on that, but certainly the work that you, your father, I mean, all that has been very, very important. It's interesting, I don't think that I would have been the prime candidate for plant-based nutrition. I mean, I was absolutely a meat eater. I mean, I was meat and potatoes all the way, as was all of my family. I've always been very thin. People think I'm thin. I'm thin now, but I was skinny. Let me just... I was just like skinny. I was sickly looking skinny.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I thought because I was skinny that I could eat anything I wanted to and I'd be healthy. I was young. I could run all day, play basketball all day, play tennis, whatever it is, so I didn't think much about nutrition as a young person. But I did watch my family over time, so many people in my family would have these chronic health issues and several people in my family have been overweight as well. But I would watch all these issues and I'm just taking note of what I'm seeing and it's really hit me hard when I had... I think my cholesterol was 299.

Rip Esselstyn:

Whoa.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I had gotten out of college and I think I was in graduate school or just left graduate school. 299. So of course, I think it was when I first got to Jacksonville. So of course, the doctors wanted to put on a statin and I took the statin. I've never been one that wanted to take medication. I started to read and I started to think about what could I do on my own without the medicine? And then I'm still looking at my family and things started to get really bad. I had a sister who had breast cancer and passed away in her mid 30s. I had another sister just a few years later who passed of a heart attack at 48.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I recently, over the last couple of years, have a brother who passed away with prostate cancer. My father died of throat cancer. My mother just passed away this year of Alzheimer, so my whole immediate family has had these chronic health issues. It's not really that unique to my family. When you go back to where I'm from, I remember several years ago going back and going to a Walgreens or something to help my mother get a prescription filled. When you got back to the pharmacy, I mean, it looked like they were giving stuff away the lines were so long. I mean, they had extra chairs back there. People were waiting.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

You know how when you go to get a prescription filled, they say, "Oh sir, it'll be 20 minutes. It'll be 25 minutes. Would you like to stay? Would you like blah, blah, blah?" You say, "Sure. Sure. 20 minutes, I can do it." But when we gave them our prescription, they're like, "Sir, it's going to be five hours. Where can we call you?" because it was just a backlog. It was an unhealthy community, just like so many communities that are on the margins in America today, partly due to this whole notion of food deserts. You've probably covered it on your podcast in the past that there's some places that just don't have access to fresh foods or if they do, it's very expensive, so it's cost prohibitive in poor neighborhoods to do that. So that's what got me started, Rip.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. I want you to come back to that, but so you brought up food deserts.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

In your opinion, what exactly is a food desert? How far away do you have to be from a legitimate grocery store or something like that?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yeah. Now, there's probably a technical definition with the range and I don't know that. I think that from my perspective, can you practically get to a store, particularly if you're in an area that has... it's a poor area where everybody don't have their own transportation. Do you have public transportation that is practical that people can get to at store? So I don't know what the technical definition is in terms of the mileage, but can I wake up today and is it very easy for me to get to a grocery store where I can have access to some healthy foods.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

In many places, you have these little shops that just really charge really high prices for the few fresh fruits and vegetables they might have, the little convenience stores. They don't specialize in that stuff so they mark it up really, really high. That is a challenge. That's getting a lot better though over the last 15 years or so since I've been really looking at this. It's certainly gotten a whole lot better.

Rip Esselstyn:

All right. I didn't mean to interrupt you there, but so you were saying that you would go to like the pharmacy and five hour wait and everybody in your family has now, it sounds like, that's close to you has perished from some sort of chronic western disease.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

So I'm looking around, man, and I've always had... And this is probably part of what fueled me to make it out of those challenges in East St. Louis. I've always tried to figure out how do I learn from the mistakes of other people? I don't want to have to experience all the bad stuff to know it's bad, right? If you did and this happened to you, I'm going to probably try to avoid the thing you did. I started reading at the same time and I realized that there is this link between nutrition and some of these chronic health

issues. So I decided let me stop this statin. Let me figure out if I can just, on my own, start eating things that won't cause my cholesterol to go up.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

And I did. I let go of that statin and within a year, my cholesterol was back to like 155.

Rip Esselstyn:

Whoa.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

And that was it. So once that happened, I said, "Not only is this important for me, but I got to find a way to tell more people about that." That's why I got engaged with the eCornell program to go and learn about plant-based nutrition. I hate to give people advice unless I've studied it, the science of it. You know? So I wanted to really understand it before I go out and start to give people advice about it and obviously, it's been something that's been very important to me. I have two kids, a nine year old, a six year old. They've been 100% plant-based all their lives.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

My wife, while she was pregnant, was 100% plant-based, had great pregnancies both times. It's just been such a part of our lives. And slowly, as you extend out to our... Not our immediate family, but as you start to get out into cousins and in-laws and our external family members, we're starting to see lots of shifts. People are starting to eat a little bit differently. They might tease us about it, but then we secretly find out that they're starting to dabble in plant-based nutrition. I hope that we've had some influence.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I've been working hard, Rip, to try and figure out how do I get at the root cause? Here it is, we have all the science in the world that demonstrates pretty straight forward that plant-based nutrition is our best approach, that and exercise obviously, is our best approach to try and avoid these chronic, longterm health issues. I mean, all the evidence is there, but people still haven't made that transition. I spent about 15 years studying emotional intelligence, so I've been working hard to try to get at is it something around emotional intelligence that is the root cause, that is really making it very difficult for people to latch on to this science, to take this science and somehow employ it in their daily lives.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

A lot of my work has been trying to... How do we look at impulse control? How do we look at people's self awareness, their own self regard? How do we get at these issues to try to get at if I can fix these issues, if I can help them improve in these issues, then maybe I can get them to now start to dabble in plant-based nutrition? But it's tough.

Rip Esselstyn:

As Doctor Conrad has written, every single piece of food that you eat will either help you or hurt you in the long run. The same goes for our pets. Every bit of food we feed our pets will either keep them healthy and active or hurt their chances of having a life filled with energy and vitality. Why compromise your pet's health with junk ingredients and unknown animal products when you can fill them up on a

healthy, all natural plant-strong diet with clean protein? Try it today by visiting The Episode Place at plantstrongpodcast.com to claim 50% off your order.

Rip Esselstyn:

You mentioned the science, right, and I think a lot of people are, for whatever reason, their skeptical of the science. They don't really understand the different levels of science that are out there, the different levels of studies that are out there and then you've got the keto and paleo people that are touting their science, right? So it's almost like depending upon whatever dietary religion you're embracing, you can try and find science that supports it. You correct me if you think I'm wrong here, but then as a black person, you also are probably even that much doubly skeptical about maybe information that's out there, maybe even if it's about health and nutrition.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

I think you talked a little bit about that in The Fragile Mind-

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

Kind of what's going on there, but-

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

It's true. It's true. And again, it goes back to some of... They have reason to be skeptical in some places. Black people have been subject of experiments where... The Tuskegee Experiments, for instance, where people who had syphilis were told by doctors that they were getting medication, but for years, they were getting a placebo just so we could study the effect on a body. That's just one example. There are many examples where the people who were supposed to be helping to take care of you were the people who were exploiting. There's a still lingering of skepticism that people have around some in a medical profession, so that's part of it.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

The other thing too is I talk... When I'm talking to people who look like me, I'm like, "Look, culture is great. Culture is wonderful." I mean, it's that whole thing about shared experiences, people that are like me in some way, that we can talk about these experiences. All that is great, but we got to step back and I call it the pride and the perils of culture. Right? It's a lot to be proud of for whatever your unique culture, however you define culture, right, whatever that unique aspect of it is, but I'll look at here are the things that are helping us and here are the things that are not helping us.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

The stuff that's not helping us, I don't want to do anymore. I am not going to eat pig feet. I'm not going to eat... We used to call them snoots, but it's a pig snout. We used to get them [crosstalk 00:48:03] and barbecue sauce. I'm not going to eat chitterlings. That stuff has zero nutritional value for me. Just

because my mother and my grandmother and her grandmother ate that, I'm not going to eat it and you can't take my black card away because I decided I'm not going to eat chitterlings. I'm still, I'm just as black as you are right?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

So I joke with people about that, but culture and tradition and all that is a real strong barrier sometimes for people making the changes that we obviously need to make.

Rip Esselstyn:

Well, so along those lines, in your book, you tell the story about how when you were living in Florida, Giant Jacksonville, you invited... I think your family came down to visit you and you made, just for them because you were already, I think, either plant-based or vegetarian-

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yep.

Rip Esselstyn:

But you cooked up a steak for them, I think it was, and you also did some asparagus and they ate the meat, but they wouldn't touch the asparagus. I think you said... In your book, you said that your mother basically turned to you and said something like, "Man, what are you doing? Are you eating white food?" Something like that.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Right. Right. Right. Right. You eating... This is what white people eat.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Yeah. Well, actually, I have it right here. You say, "You all are eating like them," referring to white people.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Like them. I've got to be nice to my mother [crosstalk 00:49:30]. But yeah, yeah, "You're eating like them." So I think-

Rip Esselstyn:

But so my question to you is, do you think that black people then see eating plant-based or if you're eating like vegan, then all of a sudden you're eating like white people? Which I can tell you, most white people don't eat that way.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I was just getting ready to say that, but I think that there is some truth to that because it's not how we grew up. It's how we've seen people on TV eat and people that we've seen on TV don't look like us, so it's like them. I was getting ready to say it's the same thing when you go into some poor white communities, they might say, "Are you eating like them?" but then they're talking about wealthy whites, right? It's always us versus them in some way, so I think it does apply. But it's just, it's fascinating and

that's why it's certainly been legitimate that we've had some issues with the food deserts. That's absolutely legitimate.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Also, though, even when we've had access to the healthiest foods, it's not the foods necessarily that we chose, right?

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Like my parents avoided the asparagus. I'm sure in the grocery stores in East St. Louis, they had asparagus. It's just not what we picked because it wasn't part of how my mother learned how to cook from her mother and then her... It wasn't part of their cultures, so I've absolutely tried to dismantle that whole thing with my family. And for me, Rip, it's even deeper than that. I try not to buy into the commercialism. I don't understand why emergency rooms have to be on call because they know on Thanksgiving night that they're going to have a whole lot of people coming in there with heart attacks, right? That, to me, is bizarre.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I'm not looking forward to the holiday so I can eat myself into a heart attack. That just doesn't make sense to me. For us, we just don't tie food to our celebrations in that way and we especially don't tie unhealthy food to our celebrations. Things are going really great for me, so I'm going to destroy my body with this unhealthy stuff. That doesn't compute for me.

Rip Esselstyn:

So you got that reaction from your mother. I don't know. How long ago was that? Wast that 10 years ago?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

That had to be 15 years ago.

Rip Esselstyn:

Okay, so 15 years ago. What have you found in the last five years? Are you still getting that kind of reaction? Or do you have different friends or your cousins and stuff, do they-

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

It's definitely changing.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

It's absolutely changing. I travel a lot. I'm usually gone speaking, presenting in some city somewhere and I always try to go to the local plant-based restaurants. I always see black people, even it's a community that there are not a lot of black folks in a community, I always see black people in the restaurant or working in the restaurant. Even amongst my circle... I mean, I'm in two different fraternities and I have a big group of friends and there are several of friends that are either 100% plant-based or either trying plant-based part of the time. And at the very least, they're not teasing me anymore about being plant-based.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Now, part of it is at this age now, we're getting close to that 50. Some of them have already had some health issues and that has caused them to look back and say, "Well, wait a minute, the stuff he's been saying over the last 10 years, maybe we need to think about that." So absolutely, I'm seeing a shift in a broader community, regardless of your background, race and all that stuff. I'm seeing more people open to this idea. More restaurants that are concatered to a plant-base lifestyle. And absolutely within the African American community, I'm seeing this being something that people are trying.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Some of it's celebrity driver. We hear about Beyounce and all this stuff. I know people, sometimes they'll listen to a celebrity before they'll listen to their doctor, but it's happening. It's happening.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Yeah. Have you seen the documentary that's out called Invisible Vegan?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I have not. I haven't seen that one.

Rip Esselstyn:

I highly reccomend it. It's basically narrated and directed by a black woman and it's all about the black culture. And it basically overlaps a lot of the conversation that we're having here, but she does a beautiful job telling this story about nutrition or the lack thereof in the black community and how things are changing. It's a beautiful thing.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I'll take a look at it. I'll take a look at it because it's absolutely changing. And it needs to, man. I think we mentioned this, but to really put a point on this, if anybody needs to be adopting a plant-based lifestyle, it is us because we struggle in all these areas of chronic health. We struggle. We experience these disparities. Now, it's not just because of our nutrition. Some of it has to do with stress and there's studies that talk about all of that. But the part that we can control, we ought to be trying to control.

Rip Esselstyn:

Wow. And the stats are that the blacks are 40% more likely to die from breast cancer, black women, 60% more likely to die from diabetes, 30% more likely to die from heart disease and then, as I think you said, maybe it was your father, right, the amount of prostate cancer in black men is just off the charts.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I saw an article several months ago about amputations and the rise in the number of black people who are having to get amputations as a result of complications from diabetes. I mean, I... We have got to... And it saddens me to think about people who are going through that struggle. That's why, again, I'm trying to figure out how do I flip that switch to help people start to make this transition so that they can save their lives and improve the quality of their lives while they're here?

Rip Esselstyn:

Well, again, I'll say it, I think you'd love Invisible Vegan. She also, she does it through the lens of a woman and it's primarily focused towards women. It's the first... Most documentaries that are out there I think are male kind of skewed, so this is... It's really beautiful and I bet if you watch it, you'll get a lot of great ideas. You should probably try and connect with the director. She seems really dynamic.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I'll definitely. I'm intrigued. I'll have to look that up.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. So let me ask you this, are you lactose intolerant?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I saw everybody is. But no, I'm not technically. Now, I was... I grew up with asthma until I was about five and the doctor recommended that I avoid any dairy products back then. But I think starting in kindergarten, I tasted some ice cream and it didn't do anything to me, so the doctor started to introduce dairy back into my diet. I think I was fine. I could eat it then, but I don't think, as an adult, I've had any negative reactions beyond the fact that I don't think my body wanted the dairy. I didn't have any.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Yeah. No, it's just... I mean, I think about that and I think about how many kids are probably going to school and they're basically being asked or almost forced to drink their milk when they've actually got a lactose intolerant that is doing them no justice whatsoever. It's almost a form of institutional racism.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yeah. It is. This is another whole conversation because I do think that... That's the thing about the isms, right? They got defined into a particular area of life, right? If you have a certain ideology about a certain group of people, that's going to carry across all aspects of life, so whether it's health, whether it's education, whether it's employment, whatever that category is that ideology will come with. There are systems and structures that have been put in place that suggest the some people's lives just don't matter as much as other people's lives.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I mean, I... All we got to do is look at the history book to see just blatant examples of that. We are not completely past that point. So yeah, absolutely, some of the things that we do, some of the ways that we market food to our people, our education system reinforces some of those things, so absolutely. Poor people get access to the least quality food, right, the food with the least nutritional value.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. We were talking probably five minutes ago, 10 minutes ago about your... You were like, "I'm trying to figure out what that switch is?" Right? What's the switch? And I think.. And I have found that when you can somehow let... And I'm particularly talking to men right now because I find women can much more easily embrace this lifestyle and this message. But men, they're so hung up on their masculinity, right? And if they're not having their meat, if they're not having their chicken, if not having their fish, if not having their dead animals, then they're potentially going to have their man card revoked, right?

Rip Esselstyn:

And if you're a black man, you're going to have your black card and your man card revoked, right?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Right.

Rip Esselstyn:

But I mean, I think that there's... If you can figure out the right way to spin that and have them realize that, "Listen, the most masculine way to eat is... You're not going to leave the planet at 35 or 42 from a heart attack or cancer, you'll be around. You're not going to go down the path of the status quo. You're going to do your own research and then figure it and then stand for something." I mean, but you got to put your spin on it and figure it out, but yeah.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yeah. Yeah, that's certainly part of it. And I think it's interesting, some of the last studies I read suggested that women are more likely to dabble in plant-based nutrition, but men have been more likely to stay if you can get them to dabble. And partly, it's because of that, "I got to do it, I'm going to see this thing through." [inaudible 01:00:52] relate to that whole... that idea of masculinity. But yeah, I found if I can get people to try things that they typically... They just wouldn't have come across, that would work.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Now, I'm not a big fan, Rip, of the substitutes. You know, the substitute burgers, the substitute all this, because they... From a health standpoint, some of that, it just... But for some people, I'm wondering if that is good transition food for them because it tastes like what they were used to in the past. So for some people, maybe that is the route that they might want to take.

Rip Esselstyn:

I think you're right. I think that can be a good stepping stone-

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Right.

Rip Esselstyn:

To try and bridge the lifestyle and have them go, "Wait, this is just made from plants." We don't need to hit a home run on the first day and have them doing all-in-tact whole grains and legumes and lentils and all that. But yeah, let's just try and get them there.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

We've got to try to figure it out.

Rip Esselstyn:

One step at a time.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

If I got one-on-one, I'm pretty effective, but you can't scale that. I'm in the lab, so to speak, just trying to figure out how do I scale this so that you don't have to have all these individual conversations. So again, I've been working hard. I did a clinical trial with the Mayo Clinic that I can't say a whole lot about now because we're going to be publishing the study soon, but I created a 12 week transition plan and really based it around emotional intelligence.

Rip Esselstyn:

Wow.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

The participants, they said, "Look, the most valuable part of this whole thing wasn't necessarily learning about the nutrition, I could have gotten that somewhere. The most valuable part was learning about the emotional intelligence piece. I mean, nobody had made me think about myself that way and why I make the decisions that I do." Examples that I would give people would be, you have a hard day, things didn't go right at work. You come home and the first thing you want to do is to bake these cookies that your grandmother used to bake and that's your comfort food. You bake these cookies and you start to feel better.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I'm urging people to go back and think about is it really the taste of those cookies that's making you feel better or is it that connection to your grandmother? And if it's that connection to your grandmother that really makes you feel safe and makes you feel better, maybe then we can watch some videos, go look through some photo albums, tell stories about your grandmother. Maybe there are other ways to have that emotional need satisfied without having the cookies there. That's the kind of stuff that I'm trying to get at. How do I help people understand what they're feeling and why they're feeling that way and not use food as the mechanism to temporarily comfort them? Because you're still going to have that issue once those cookies, the high from those cookies, are going away, you still got some issues you got to deal with.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I'm working on it, Rip.

Rip Esselstyn:

No, you are.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I'm not there yet, I'm working.

Rip Esselstyn:

So do you feel like this... It sounds to me like this lifestyle, you being plant-strong, whole-food, plant-strong, is having an impact on your leadership style? Maybe it like spills over into everything you do.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I think that there is some... Now, this is going to sound bias, so I apologize for anybody who's listening who is not plant-based. But I think for a lot of people who are plant-based, it's deeper than just the plant-based. It's like, "Who I am? What am I doing here?" I think people are asking bigger questions and then they start to think about the environmental impact and what this does to animals. It's bigger questions than, "Can I have something good to eat today?" I think that's where it crosses over into really all aspects of my life.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I try to be open. If I wasn't open, then I would have never tried the whole plant-based thing. Right? I tried to be able to roll with changes, so I got to eat something differently than I used to eat before. I try to have some confidence in who I am and assure enough in myself that I can make this change and other people might be pointing at me and laughing and teasing me, but I feel like I'm strong enough to withstand that. That's going to carry over to other ideas that I have about work or anything else. So it really is a lifestyle. It's a way of thinking about the world, your place in it, where you are vis-a-vee other species. It starts to get pretty deep, man, and I just think that that is something that I find in common with a lot of people who are 100% plant-based. It's bigger than just the food.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Yeah. But it is amazing how important food is in our life and how, depending upon what you eat or what you don't eat, it puts you into a certain group or subgroup and people identify you a certain way. Sometimes we even identify ourselves that way. I mean, just... I mean, like I just think about the bond that you and I have just because you're whole-food, plant-based. I mean, that just speaks volumes right there.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

That's right. Just off the top, we feel like we know each other a little bit because of that. I do think that it's... And I know that I'm going against the grain, but I really feel like it's important that people somehow can start to put food in better perspective. If we're celebrating somebody's graduation, it's that achievement that we're celebrating. Why do we have to have a big cake there? It's not about that cake. Let's say the cake wasn't there, are we not proud of them anymore for graduating? Does that change the whole memory? 10 years from now, we won't remember this person graduation because we didn't have the cake there.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

So it's really thinking about... It's taking an inventory as to how important food is in your life, how important food affects your life or food choices. You're spending your whole day thinking about what you're going to eat tonight, just thinking about how you might be controlled today by your food choices and what the quality of those choices are and start to try and unravel that. So the next holiday, if these are the traditional foods that you eat, certainly you can find vegan alternatives for those. But what if you just said, "Look, it's not about the food. It's going to be about the experience and the connections that I

have with other people." If you start to somehow untangle that toxic relationship that we have with food, it changes everything. I mean, it really does.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I like food that tastes good. I really do like a great meal, but I'm not... I'll drink a smoothie that might not be the best tasting smoothie in the world if I know that it has the nutrients that I need because that's what my body needs. I'm past that. My taste buds are different.

Rip Esselstyn:

So you said that you got two kids, six and nine.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Uh-huh.

Rip Esselstyn:

Boys, girls, one of each. What?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

One of each. One of each. My daughter is nine, my son is six.

Rip Esselstyn:

Okay. What are their thoughts? Are they excited and proud to be plant-based? Is that something that they wear with pride or not?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

So far, we're good, man. Obviously, we wanted to be sensitive to how it would impact their lives when they are eating differently than everybody else. Would they then feel withdrawn and all that stuff? And so far, that hasn't happened. I mean, they seem to be proud vegans. They will tell you, shucks, since the time they were two or three years old, if you tried to give them something that wasn't vegan and we weren't around, they'll say, "Hey, that's not vegan. I can't eat that."

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

So at this point, I feel like they're thinking about why they're eating this way and part of it is they don't want to eat animals because they read about animals. They go to the zoo and see animals.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yep. Yep.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

My daughter's like, "We're looking at these animals at the zoo, the restaurant is right there and they're eating the animals that we look at." It just didn't make sense to her. So, so far, we're good. We do have to deal with the fact that at everybody's birthday party or at every school event, what do they do? They want to bring in some unhealthy food. We have to make sure that the school has something in the freezer that they can thaw out and have the kids eat that's plant-based. So it requires us having to make

those adjustments, but they have not demonstrated, thus far, to us that they, in any way, are feeling isolated because of this.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

They've expressed that they feel lucky that this is the way that they eat and that it may help them avoid some of those longterm health issues that they have seen in my own family. They've seen it up close.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. That's fantastic. I think that it's one of the best gifts that a parent can give and pass on to their children. I'm like you, although I'm substantially probably older than you, but I've got a six old, an 11 year old and a 13 year old. And just like you, they're 100% plant-strong and have been their whole lives. My wife had all three of her pregnancies, all plant-based.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

That's right. That's right.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

That's right. So important.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. I want to... You wrote an article in your LinkedIn profile discussing the disproportionate amount of impact that COVID-19 has been having on communities of black people. We're going to link that in our show notes in the podcast.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yep.

Rip Esselstyn:

But just to kind of... What are some of the reasons that you wrote about in that article that make blacks that much more vulnerable?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Yeah. Yeah. You might remember some of them more than me. We've already talked about the fact that we have a disproportionate amount of chronic health issues. In some ways, we're like sitting ducks, right?

Rip Esselstyn:

It already sets you up, yeah.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Already set up, so that's one aspect. Another piece, unfortunately, is that because we still have some of these challenges around employment and the type of employment that's available for people of color, we are disproportionately folks that are on what are now mission critical jobs, like some of those jobs that we don't really value, we don't pay attention to. Those jobs have become very important, like some of these hourly jobs that people have working at the grocery store, keeping the lights on in some organizations with being front line people. So we're disproportionately situated in the types of jobs that have been essential jobs, so we've been required to go into work.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

We're not... Proportionally, we don't have the types of jobs that will allow people to work from home, so we're likely getting more exposed to COVID at a higher level because we're out in it because it's our jobs. It's the kind of jobs we have to have. So we're already vulnerable, more vulnerable, than the general population and then we're getting exposed at a higher level than the general population. You put those two together and it's pretty toxic.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Yeah. And probably not as much... Are you hearing a echo on my end or not? No.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Nope, I'm good. We're good.

Rip Esselstyn:

Okay. And then also probably not as much access to healthcare, testing and all those things.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

That's a big one.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

That's a big one. So access to healthcare is a challenge. We are less insured. Our percentage of people with health insurance is lower. And then, you have... We've already talked about the fact that when I do have access to healthcare, sometimes my treatment in the healthcare system has not been equivalent to somebody else's treatment in the healthcare system. So it's just you got a whole host of factors that are driving this issue. But my encouragement in that article was, again, the system needs to change, but we can't change that tomorrow. Right?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

We can't fix these structural things to, this stuff is killing us today. The one thing that we do have control over is what we put in our mouths.

Rip Esselstyn:

Exactly. I want to read the last paragraph that you wrote because I thought it was really, really powerful. You said, "Let's keep shining a bright light on the systemic inequities that contribute to poor health in

the black community and work hard to fix them. In the meantime, let's also control what we can control," what you just said, "every single piece of food that you eat will either help you or hurt you in the long run. Lastly, let's commit to doing what we can to make it much harder for COVID-19 or any other health threat to ravage our communities."

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Now, that sounds pretty good. That guy did a good job on that.

Rip Esselstyn:

That guy did a beautiful job, beautiful job. I just hope it's landing everywhere it needs to land, right?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I hope so. I hope so.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I think maybe the most important message that I'd like to close with is that these are times of uncertainty for a lot of people, right? We don't know about this disease, this virus. We don't know about this virus that's affecting all of us. We don't know what the next steps are going to be as it relates to our challenges with systemic racism and other forms of isms in our society. And for a lot of people, I think they're teetering on the edge of hopelessness as it relates to this. I wish I could fix that for them.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

I hate that people are feeling that way and I'm just hoping that people can just stand up, put one foot in front of the other and just carve out your little area. You can't change the system tomorrow by yourself, but think about what you can do within your circles, but it has to start with taking care of yourself. If you don't take care of yourself, including what you put in your body and what you do with your body, it's going to be very, very difficult for you to impact the lives of other people to the degree that you'd like to. So the first step is what are my thoughts and my behaviors? How am I taking care of myself? And then, try and figure out what am I uniquely situated to do?

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

From where I sit today... Don't want to be too ambitious because it's harder to do it sometimes, to take the first step. But from where I sit today, what am I uniquely qualified to do as it relates to recognizing the humanity in all of us and ensuring that all of us have a equal access at success in America. I think we all have a part to play, we just got to figure out what unique part is.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Yeah. That's beautiful, thank you very much. Well, I'll tell you what, let's do this again. Let's do this again.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

That'd be great.

Rip Esselstyn:

I'd like to check in with you again in a couple of months and we'll see where we are and hopefully we're making progress on all fronts.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Perfect. Perfect. That would be great. Things are changing rapidly week to week, so hopefully we'll be in a good place by then.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. So Doctor Jarik Conrad, it has been my pleasure having you on the Plant-Strong Podcast. I want to thank you for sharing this really important conversation with me at this very kind of crucial time with everything that's going on in this country. I'm sure that there's some people that are out there that are listeners of the podcast that will take great value and comfort in this conversation.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Well, I appreciate it. I can't thank you enough for having me on. I've been a fan from afar, so I'm glad to get an opportunity to meet you. And again, thank you for the work that you've been doing to spread the message.

Rip Esselstyn:

Thank you. So let's do the sign off. We go peace.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Peace.

Rip Esselstyn:

Engine two.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Engine two.

Rip Esselstyn:

Keep it plant-strong. Give me a fist bump. There we go. Yeah.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Fist bump. All right, that works.

Rip Esselstyn:

All right.

Dr. Jarik Conrad:

Take care Rip.

Rip Esselstyn:

Thanks so much for listening to this important episode and thank you Jarik for your optimism, enthusiasm, hopefulness and expertise. Only by truly understanding and accepting our past can we form better and more positive relationships with each other. We're all looking for shared human experiences and it is my sincere hope that you enjoyed this one today.

Rip Esselstyn:

Don't forget, plant-stock2020.com is the website if you're looking for a share experience with me and the Esselstyn family from August 14-16. We'll see you soon. Peace. Engine two. Keep it plant-strong.

Rip Esselstyn:

The Plant-Strong podcast team includes: Laurie Kortowich, Ami Mackey, Patrick Gaven, Wade Clark and Carrie Barrett. I want to thank my parents, Doctor Caldwell B. Esselstyn Jr. and Anne Crile Esselstyn for creating a legacy that will be carried on for generations and being willing to go against the current and trudge upstream to the causation. We are all better for it.