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Spreading the word: communicating about veganism

Brendon Bosworth

University of Colorado at Boulder, brendon.bosworth@colorado.edu

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SPREADING THE WORD: COMMUNICATING ABOUT VEGANISM

by

BRENDON BOSWORTH

B.A., University of Cape Town, 2008

A thesis submitted to the
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This thesis entitled:
Spreading the Word: Communicating About Veganism
written by Brendon Bosworth
has been approved for Journalism and Mass Communication

Deserai Anderson Crow, PhD.

Nabil Echchaibi, PhD.

Patricia Malesh, PhD.

Date_____

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

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ABSTRACT

Bosworth, Brendon (M.A., Journalism and Mass Communication)

Spreading the Word: Communicating About Veganism

Thesis directed by Assistant Professor Deserai Anderson Crow

Veganism, a practice that involves excluding animal products from one's diet and life, chiefly due to ethical concerns, is largely at odds with contemporary cultural norms. Scholars have framed vegans as members of a movement that seeks to affect change at the cultural level. This study addresses the role individual vegans play in promoting veganism to non-vegans, based on the assumption that vegans have the potential to attract others to veganism, normalize the vegan lifestyle, and increase the movement's numbers.

This study employs a qualitative design and directed interview method. Based on responses from a sample (n = 19) of self-identified vegans, it explores the ways in which vegans communicate about veganism with those who are not vegan.

Since food is the prime site where vegans deviate from cultural norms, respondents emphasized the way in which they seek to normalize vegan food. In public advocacy situations this entails offering food samples that are usually coupled with vegan literature. In interactions with non-vegans within a vegan's social network, vegans might prepare food for friends, share recipes, and guide others in how to source and prepare vegan meals. These actions play a role in spreading veganism by creating a familiarity with what vegans eat and introducing others to an alternative mode of eating.

While vegans see movies and books that expose the maltreatment of animals in the modern food production system as valuable educational tools, it is not always the case that this is

the type of information disseminated to non-vegans. Vegans also see value in sharing texts that focus on the human-health benefits of following a vegan diet. Online, vegans report disseminating a range of content through personal social media channels, ranging from videos of animal treatment at factory farms to pictures of vegan food.

It was found that the majority of vegans in the sample see value in promoting the lifestyle. However, in sharing vegan food, as well as information, vegans do not always aim to foment a vegan conversion among recipients. Some vegans report trying to prompt friends and family members to simply reduce their consumption of meat and other animal products. In some cases, vegans report having played a role in converting others to vegetarianism or veganism.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world it is considered normal to eat some types of animals and the things they produce, such as eggs and milk. Psychologist Melanie Joy (2009, 448) has labeled the unseen “belief system” that enables people to eat certain animals, such as pigs and chickens, while caring for domestic pets, like dogs and cats, as “carnism.” While the carnist ideology is largely ingrained due to traditional use of animals, the media and institutional bodies also serve to reinforce its dominance. Those who choose to step away from the carnist norm, and refrain from eating and using animal products, thereby challenge tradition and institutional wisdom.

Vegans, those who seek “to exclude, as far as possible and practical, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose” (International Vegetarian Union, 2011) provide a challenge to the carnist framework, largely manifest through their dietary choices. Veganism is not a mainstream undertaking. As it stands, roughly 1 million people in the United States identify as vegans (Vegetarian Times, 2008).

Research into ethical vegetarianism and ethical veganism, which are driven chiefly by moral concerns about animal welfare, has framed ethical vegetarians and vegans as “members of a socio-cultural movement that challenges and attempts to dismantle the cultural ritual of meat-eating” (Malesh 2010, 53). It has also been proposed that vegans form part of a cultural movement that “measures its success in terms of cultural and lifestyle changes” among adherents (Cherry 2006, 156). If veganism is considered a movement then it is valuable to better understand the ways in which those who identify as vegans communicate about veganism with

non-vegans, since this communication can serve to educate non-vegans about what veganism entails and potentially attract others to the movement.

Certainly, vegan organizations, such as Vegan Outreach and Vegan Action, among others, work to promote veganism, as do vegan activists and advocates, who campaign in public via various methods. While this research addresses the ways in which publicly active vegans communicate about veganism, it is also concerned with understanding how vegans who do not necessarily engage in public advocacy communicate with non-vegans about veganism. It has been proposed that individuals who identify as vegetarians and vegans “can help to recruit and mobilize movement participants” through their personal interactions with others (Malesh 2005, 98). As such, this research is concerned with what type of knowledge vegans might share with others during their personal interactions, and how important vegans think it is to share about veganism with others.

While researchers have studied the role of information about animal treatment in the food production system in prompting people to pursue vegetarianism (Rozin, Markwith and Stoess 1997) and veganism (McDonald 2000), there is less research into what type of information those who adhere to veganism feel is important to pass onto others. With that in mind, this research is concerned with gaining an understanding of how individuals who identify as vegans choose to communicate about veganism. Such research could be of interest to scholars of movements that seek to produce change in the cultural and social spheres, as well as provide an example of how less publicly active movement members have the potential to influence others within their social networks.

Based on the experiences and insights of 19 individuals, this research project seeks to explore the ways in which vegans create meaning around the concept of veganism, what

knowledge and information they might impart to others, and the methods they use to do so, both in the physical world and online.

This thesis is laid out as follows: Chapter 2 provides an assessment of contemporary literature regarding various aspects of veganism. This literature addresses the reasons people choose to pursue veganism, as well as scholarly perspectives on how veganism can be considered a social or cultural movement. The literature review also highlights the ways in which frame analysis can be used to better understand the way in which vegans might seek to frame veganism when discussing it with non-vegans. It addresses research that has investigated the role of information about how animals are treated in the modern day farming system in prompting individuals to pursue vegetarianism or veganism, as well as the different ways vegans may choose to communicate about veganism with others.

The third chapter provides an explanation of the research methods employed as well as a description of the sample (n = 19). Following that, the findings are listed in Chapter 4, grouped under five headers. *Section 1: Framing the Message* identifies the ways in which vegans frame their reasons for being vegan. It also highlights how some vegans frame the meat, egg, and dairy industries as having a hand in controlling knowledge about what is considered normal and healthy to eat. *Section 2: Promoting Veganism and Spreading Knowledge* addresses the value individual vegans place on promoting veganism, and considers some of the ways in which they might do this. *Section 3: Educating About Food* focuses on the ways in which vegans can act as food guides for others who are potentially interested in veganism, through helping others gain familiarity with sourcing and preparing vegan foods. It also considers the sharing of vegan recipes as an important communication tactic that can serve to normalize vegan food and promote the vegan diet as a viable way of eating. *Section 4: Sharing Texts* highlights how vegans

make use of films and books as educational tools. *Section 5: Sharing and Informing Online* considers the tools and platforms vegans use to disseminate vegan information online, as well as the content of the information they seek to share among those within their online networks.

The findings are discussed in further detail, along with an acknowledgment of the study's limitations, in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Since this research is concerned with addressing the ways in which vegans communicate with non-vegans and potentially spread the knowledge they hold about veganism, it is necessary to discuss contemporary literature that deals with similar issues.

First, it is useful to look to research into why people choose to pursue veganism, since this provides an idea of the types of claims vegans may make about veganism. Following that, the literature review will address how theorists have sought to locate veganism as a cultural or new social movement, and provide examples of how we can consider veganism to be such. Since members of social movements engage in the process of framing when directing their messages to others (Benford and Snow 2000; Jasper and Poulsen 1995; Snow and Benford 1988), the literature review will also address the concept of framing, and how it is employed by social movement actors. The concept of “moral shock” (Jasper and Poulsen 1995) and its capacity to attract people to a movement will also be discussed.

The next portion of the literature review deals with contemporary studies on the role of information about animal maltreatment, as well as environmental concerns, in prompting people to pursue veganism. This section includes an appraisal of the role of individual vegans in disseminating this information in the physical world and online.

While veganism is the focus of this research project, there are instances where literature on vegetarianism is referenced. The aim is not to conflate the concepts, but rather to illustrate broader themes that can be applied to both practices in general. While vegetarianism challenges

“conventional culture,” it has been argued that veganism does this to a “greater degree” (Povey, Wellens and Conner 2001, 16), and this should be borne in mind when considering this literature.

Reasons for Pursuing Veganism

Research indicates that vegans tend to cite moral concerns regarding animal welfare as the key motivation for pursuing veganism (Larsson, Rönnlund, Johansson, and Dahlgreen 2003). Additionally, vegetarian and vegan organizations (see the Vegetarian Resource Group¹ and Vegan Outreach² websites, for example) promote the environmental benefits associated with vegetarianism and veganism, based on the premise that animal farming contributes to emissions of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide, which contribute to human-induced climate change, as well as land degradation, deforestation and water usage. According to the United Nations, “the livestock sector is a major player, responsible for 18 percent of greenhouse gas emissions measured in CO₂ equivalent. This is a higher share than transport” (United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization 2006).

Ethical concerns about workers in the animal farming system as well as spiritual reasons may also tie into individuals’ reasons for pursuing ethical vegetarianism (Malesh 2005). From a more critical perspective, people may see their veganism as a form of revolt against the production processes characteristic of postmodern society in which animals are commodified in what Noske (1997, 22) refers to as the “animal industrial complex” (Adams 2010). Broadly speaking, these factors can be viewed as a pool of reasons individuals may draw on in order to

¹ “Environment.” Vegetarian Resource Group. Online: <http://www.vrg.org/environment/> [Accessed March 15, 2012].

² “Environmental Destruction.” Vegan Outreach. Online: <http://www.veganoutreach.org/whyvegan/environment.html> [Accessed March 15, 2012].

explain or justify their commitment to veganism, with individuals identifying more readily with some reasons than others.

Personal health reasons can also provide the impetus for people to start eating a vegan diet. Health vegans adopt a vegan diet for similar reasons that those who choose a vegetarian diet based on health concerns do: to combat heart disease or high cholesterol (Jabs, Devine and Sobal 1998). A prominent example of a health vegan is ex-president Bill Clinton who claims to be following a vegan diet after having quadruple bypass heart surgery and an angioplasty procedure (Martin 2011). Popular books, such as *The China Study* (Campbell and Campbell II 2004) also promote the health benefits of following a plant-based diet as opposed to one that incorporates meat, dairy, and eggs.

While there is a distinction between those who adopt veganism due to ethical concerns, and those who eat a plant-based diet for health reasons, it should be borne in mind that it is possible that individuals' reasons for pursuing veganism may change over time. One might take up veganism, or rather the consumption of a plant-based diet, based on health reasons, initially, and later become more aware of the philosophical underpinnings of ethical veganism and then work that into his or her guiding rationale, as Amato and Partridge (1989) and Maurer (2002) propose can happen with vegetarianism.

Veganism as a Social or Cultural Movement

A small number of scholars have sought to situate veganism as a cultural or social movement that seeks to realize changes in the way society uses animals (Malesh 2005³, 2010; Cherry 2003, 2006; Rawls 2010). The work of Malesh (2005; 2010) and Cherry (2003; 2006) is

³ In this work Malesh focuses on ethical vegetarianism as a social movement. Ethical vegans are included among the ranks of ethical vegetarians.

valuable in the context of researching how vegans communicate about veganism since both scholars address the role of individuals in furthering the movement. This research shifts the focus away from analyzing traditional forms of collective action as movement activity and broadens the area of analysis to include the personal interactions that occur between vegans and non-vegans.

Specifically, Cherry (2006, 156) proposes that “vegans represent a new form of social movement that is not based on legislation or identity politics, but instead is based on everyday practices in one’s lifestyle.” She argues that since the vegan movement is not as well developed as the animal rights movement, the task of promoting veganism falls chiefly to individual vegans who “present themselves, as vegans, to others who might be ‘potential vegans’” (Cherry 2003, 28).

With a focus on the changes that must take place for people to become an ethical vegetarian or vegan, Malesh (2005, 100) suggests that individuals within the movement can introduce others to “philosophies of consumption that differ from the cultural norms.” To this end, she proposes that researchers “examine and understand the dialectic between individuals that takes place in less- or non-public arenas as movement activity” (47).

With an emphasis on the role of vegan organizations, Rawls (2010, 12) argues that the aims of the vegan movement go beyond lifestyle changes and that the movement is also focused on promoting “legislative changes that support and advance vegan principles.” She provides examples of how vegan organization Farm Sanctuary, which “campaign[s] relentlessly to prevent cruelty, and to encourage legal and policy reforms that promote respect and compassion for farm animals” (Farm Sanctuary 2006-2011), has helped enact animal welfare legislation in states such

as California, and also highlights the public education efforts of other groups, including Vegan Outreach and Vegan Action (Rawls 2010).

When considering veganism as a new social or cultural movement, it is worthwhile to note that definitions of what, exactly, constitutes a new social movement tend to vary. So much so, in fact, that Buechler (1995, 442) contends that it is more apt to consider “new social movement theories,” as opposed to a singular new social movement theory. This, he notes, implies “that there are many variations on a very general approach to something called new social movements” (ibid.) Since it is not the aim of this research project to evaluate the numerous theoretical contributions to this area of scholarship, it is, perhaps, most useful to highlight the ways in which previous researchers have argued in favor of veganism being conceived of as a movement. This provides a framework through which we can understand how veganism qualifies as a movement.

In her appraisal of veganism as a cultural movement, Cherry (2006) makes use of Melucci’s (1984, 825) definition of a new social movement as “a form of collective action, (a) based on solidarity, (b) carrying on a conflict [and] (c) breaking the limits of the system in which action occurs.” In this instance, we can think of “solidarity” as it pertains to the common beliefs and behaviors vegans subscribe to. The continual “conflict” would be the denouncement of animal products, which flies in the face of cultural norms. The “limits of the system,” meanwhile would be the cultural sphere, bound by the norms related to eating and using animal products. Using this definition, it is relatively easy to see how veganism can be considered a type of new social movement with a focus on cultural change at the personal level.

Malesh (2005) also draws on the work of Melucci in her analysis of the ethical vegetarian movement (which for the purpose of her work includes ethical vegans among its ranks). She

focuses on the way in which Melucci (1985, 800) highlights how new social movements occur as “a network of small groups submerged in everyday life which requires personal involvement in experiencing and practicing cultural innovation.” She also highlights the value of applying Melucci’s work in studying an ethical vegetarian movement, since he focuses on “the ways that [hegemonic cultural codes] are disseminated, the effect they have on movements and on movement participation, and the strategies that movements use in order to resist and reconstruct cultural norms” (Malesh 2005, 69).

Importantly, Malesh (2005, 58) notes that, while useful, traditional Resource Mobilization Theory is not sufficient for addressing an ethical vegetarian movement, chiefly “because the Resource Mobilization model was designed for movements whose aims were state-centric or civic in nature.” Typically, Resource Mobilization Theory would emphasize the role of organizations in social movements; it would seek to examine the success of social movements based upon the movement’s use of money and participants’ time, the work of movement organizations, the role of those outside the movement, and the “cost and reward” to individuals and organizations in the movement (McCarthy and Zald 1977, 1216). While Malesh (*ibid.*) acknowledges how the lens of traditional Resource Mobilization Theory can be used to assess the role of organizations within the vegetarian and vegan movement, such as PeTA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), the Vegetarian Resource Group, and Vegan Outreach, in fostering “civic and civil changes to the ritual of meat-eating in the US,” she maintains that ethical vegetarianism “lies outside the traditional domain of resource mobilization scholarship.” This is why she proposes focusing on the “dialectic between individuals that takes place in less- or non-public arenas” as a form of movement activity (47).

Rawls chooses to apply the work of Tilly (2004) and Tarrow (1994) in her analysis of veganism as a social movement. As she notes, for Tilly (2004) social movements must have: a) a “campaign” – defined as a “sustained, organized public effort making collective claims on target authority,” b) a “social movement repertoire” – which can entail “creation of special-purpose associations and coalitions, public meetings, solemn processions, vigils, rallies, demonstrations, petition drives, statements to and in public media, and pamphleteering,” and c) “WUNC displays” – the acronym denoting Worthiness, Unity, Numbers and Commitment. In Tarrow’s (1994, 4) description, movements can be viewed “as collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities. This definition has four empirical properties: collective challenge, common purpose, solidarity and sustained interaction.”

To satisfy the conditions set by both theorists, Rawls argues that veganism has been a sustained effort and cites a growth in the number of vegans in the United States between 1994 and 2008 as evidence of this. She defines veganism’s core “collective claim” as being “the consumption of animal products is undesirable for a number of reasons” (Rawls 2010, 23). To satisfy Tilly’s premise that collective claims must be made on “targeted authorities” as well as Tarrow’s emphasis on “interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities,” she highlights how vegans have made claims to non-vegans as well as governments and businesses in order to foster social change. This, she notes, is done chiefly by vegan organizations that lobby for “legislative changes” (ibid.). Of course, various vegan organizations also include Tilly’s “social movement repertoire” and engage in various public advocacy efforts, including demonstrations, pamphleteering, and engaging with the media. Through these efforts, vegan groups like Vegan Outreach also adhere to Tilly’s concept of “WUNC displays,” according to Rawls.

Based on the available literature, it becomes evident that if we conceive of veganism as a new social or cultural movement then there are both individuals and organizations working to advance its aims. Since this research project is concerned with the role of individuals in promoting veganism, it becomes important to assess how important vegans think it is to do this, as well as identify the type of information or knowledge vegans might pass on to non-vegans in order to educate them about veganism.

With that in mind, the next section of this literature review will consider how the concept of framing has been used to assess the ways in which those within movements construct messages they may use to try and recruit others to the movement.

Framing the Message and the Concept of “Moral Shock”

If vegans communicate with non-vegans about their veganism, then it becomes important to understand how vegans engage in “meaning work: the struggle over the production of mobilizing and countermobilizing ideas and meanings” (Benford and Snow 2000, 613). To do so involves drawing on the concept of frames. An “issue frame” can be thought of as “the central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding story of events and weaves a connection among them” (Gamson and Modigliani 1987, 143). Frames can also be defined as “packages of proposals and critiques that fit together to highlight certain aspects of the issues” (Jasper and Poulsen 1995, 495).

Researchers focus on the role of frames as they pertain to issues that can be “presented in multiple ways which may potentially influence how people think about an issue” (Terkildsen and Schnell 1997, 881; Popkin 1991; Gamson and Modigliani 1987). In this sense, “framing refers to

the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue” (Chong and Druckman 2007, 104).

While frame analysis has been performed in media studies to understand the ways in which media and journalists communicate about complex issues, it is also useful for analyzing the ways in which members of social movements construct their messages and seek to recruit others to the movement (see Jasper and Poulsen 1995 for example). Of importance, when considering the ways in which social movement participants construct frames, is that the process of framing is “contentious” because new frames challenge pre-existing ways of seeing the world and understanding it (Benford and Snow 2000, 614).

While constructing frames that often times threaten dominant cultural mores, movement participants also draw on the tapestry of existing frames constructed around, and enmeshed within, prevailing cultural “myths, narratives, values, ideologies, beliefs, and practices” (ibid., 629). In this manner, movement participants engage in a two-way process of consuming existing meanings and creating “new meanings” (Tarrow 1992: 189).

When seeking to impart the movements’ message, or messages, to others, movement participants may engage in framing their messages in specific ways in order to recruit new members (Snow and Benford 1988). This is important because frames can “affect the attitudes and behaviors of their audiences” (Chong and Druckman 2007, 109). Importantly, as Jasper and Poulsen (1995, 496) emphasize: “Frames resonate with potential recruits precisely because these recruits already have certain visions of the world, moral values, political ideologies, and affective attachments.” That is, “strangers can be recruited because of the beliefs and feelings they already have” (494).

As an example of what constitutes a frame, it is useful to consider Jasper and Poulsen's (1995) work on the animal rights movement. They propose that animal rights activists make use of a "suffering of innocents" frame when advocating for animals rights. This frame locates animals as similar to humans, and appeals to an emotional response to the suffering of (innocent) animals at human hands (505). Additionally, they argue that animal rights protesters also frame their messages in a way that might resonate with those who subscribe to "left-liberal" ideologies. This entails animal rights protesters focusing on how corporations maltreat animals in "reckless search of profits" as well as highlighting the ways that "agribusiness deploys ruthless technologies that intensify the suffering of farm animals" (506).

The work of Benford and Snow (2000) is also crucial to the understanding of frames. Importantly, they stress that "collective action frames" are partly developed as "movement adherents negotiate a shared understanding of some problematic condition or situation they define as in need of change, make attributions regarding who or what is to blame, articulate an alternative set of arrangements, and urge others to act in concert to affect change" (Benford and Snow 2000, 615). In this process, Benford and Snow (*ibid.*) identify three core framing tasks: a) "diagnostic framing" involves defining a problem and apportioning blame to those deemed responsible for it, b) "prognostic framing" entails creating a roadmap for remedying the issue, and serves as "an articulation of a proposed solution to the problem," c) "motivational framing" serves as "a call to arms" for movement participants to take part in collective action.

Since frames have the ability to affect the way others perceive certain issues, and can connect with an audience's worldview, movement participants may tailor their messages for different audiences in the hope that these messages will resonate and prompt others to join the movement. Tailoring the message for different audiences is something vegans report doing

(Cherry 2003). In telling others about veganism, Cherry (2003) found that punk vegans (those affiliated with the punk subculture) would adapt the way they argued in favor of veganism dependent on what they perceived would resonate with the person they were speaking to. Usually, this entailed focusing on the environmental and health benefits of veganism before addressing animal welfare issues, if at all. Importantly, however, Cherry proposes that “recruitment is not the main goal of all vegans” (28).

While research has addressed how the nature of social movements’ messages might impact an audience, another branch of literature suggests that whether or not new members will be drawn to a movement is largely contingent upon who those spreading the information direct their messages at (Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olson 1980). Snow, Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson (1980, 792) propose that “outsiders” who are already connected with movement members through “extra movement networks” are more likely to be recruited into the movement than people who are “outside of members’ extramovement networks.” Their work suggests that movements that seek to recruit strangers in “public places” and “through networks” tend to find greater success in recruiting “acquaintances, friends, and kin” (797).

The term “extramovement network” refers to people, who are not in the movement, but are associated with a movement member. This includes friends, acquaintances, and family members (ibid.) While movement members are more likely to recruit those within their social networks, some of them also take part in communicating with strangers. This might be done through various types of public action, such as leafleting and protesting, for instance.

When it comes to recruiting strangers, Jasper and Poulsen (1995, 498) contend that strangers can be drawn to a movement if they experience a requisite “moral shock” once they are made aware of the injustices the movement is opposed to. Studies of how “moral shock” has

provided the necessary impetus for people to take action have largely focused on political action (Krauss 1989; Luker 1984). For example, anti-abortion protesters in the 1970s reported joining the movement in response to the 1973 Roe vs. Wade ruling, some of them on the “very day the decision was handed down” (Luker 1984: 137).

Although veganism is not considered a political movement, but rather one that is social or cultural in nature, the concept of moral shock is particularly valuable when considering how people might be attracted to veganism. As evidenced by Luker’s assertions about Roe vs. Wade, events or information that is rage-inducing enough creates feelings of indignation that prompt people to take action, even though they may not already be part of a network of others compelled to take action in a similar way (Jasper and Poulsen 1995). This reaction can be so powerful that Jasper and Poulsen (ibid., 498) argue it [moral shock] can “serve as the functional equivalent of social networks,” and attracts people toward taking action by speaking to their “existing beliefs.”

In order to generate “moral shock” among people, animal rights organizations, as well as vegetarian and vegan organizations, make use of graphic material, such as visceral images of animal murder and maltreatment in recruitment flyers and on websites. The film *Meet Your Meat* (2002), produced by PeTA, is a well-known example. Narrator Alec Baldwin opens the video with the ominous statement, “what you are about to see is beyond your worst nightmares.” The film goes on to show factory farm scenes: a farmer bludgeoning ill chickens to death with a metal rod, farm workers castrating and de-horning a bull sans anesthetic, and pigs having their throats slit while still alive. The grisly montage ends with a plug for vegetarianism, which emphasizes the ethical, environmental and health implications of vegetarianism. Baldwin says: “Please choose vegetarianism. Do it for the animals, do it for the environment, do it for your health” (*Meet Your Meat* 2002).

With an understanding of how social movements frame their messages, as well as the potential for information regarding animal maltreatment at human hands to potentially incite a “moral shock” among an audience, it is necessary to consider the role of vegan and animal rights information in prompting people to pursue veganism. This will be addressed in the following section.

The Role of Information in Vegan Learning

With the advent of the internet, videos of animal abuse at factory farms, fur operations, and other settings, are easily accessible. Such information has played a role in converting people to vegetarianism since it raises awareness about animal rights issues (Jabs, Devine and Sobal 1998). Additionally, vegans cite “catalytic experiences,” such as watching videos about animal cruelty, or reading books about it, as events that prompted them to take up veganism or learn more about vegetarianism and veganism (McDonald 2000, 9). McDonald (2000, 6) notes, however, that individuals might repress such information and “put it at the back of their minds until a later time,” when another “catalytic event” causes it to be recalled.

When it comes to the type of information vegans might impart to others, it has been found that one of the most common methods of educating others about veganism is to provide them with “literature about animal cruelty” (McDonald 2000, 14). The type of information found in books and documentaries, which may take the form of graphic visual footage from slaughterhouse floors, battery hen facilities, and fur factories, as well as narrative accounts of animal suffering at human hands (see the *Earthlings* (2005) movie or *Eating Animals* (Safran Foer 2009)) provides a window into the ways in which animals are treated and killed in the process of becoming food. This information serves to promote an “animal-meat connection,”

which may act in concert with concerns over animal welfare issues to prompt individuals to pursue vegetarianism/veganism for ethical reasons (Jabs, Devine and Sobal 1998, 1999). With regards to veganism, it is useful to consider that information can produce an animal-milk, and animal-egg connection too.

Jabs, Devine and Sobal (1998) use the lens of cognitive consistency theory to explain the process of adopting a vegetarian diet. They found that people aggregated and processed information that was either related to animal welfare issues or the potential health benefits of vegetarianism. When their beliefs were incongruent with this information they “changed their behaviors to support their beliefs or changed their beliefs to support their behaviors” (ibid., 200).

In a similar vein, one can see a process of “moralization” at work in the conversion to vegetarianism (Rozin, Markwith and Stoess 1997). This process “involves the acquisition of moral qualities by objects or activities that were previously neutral” (ibid). “Strong affective experiences,” such as witnessing an animal being slaughtered, can play a role in promoting moralization. At the same time, “cognitive routes,” like reading books about animal rights, can also engender moralization (ibid.).

For ethical vegetarians, information regarding the ill treatment of farmed animals as well as the associated environmental consequences of factory farming can create an “internal dissonance” when they acknowledge that eating animal-related food flies in the face of “their values of compassion, nonviolence, and ecological preservation” (ibid., 68) By re-thinking their food choices and becoming vegetarian, people can assuage this dissonance and engender greater “cognitive consistency” (ibid.). The same can likely be said for vegans.

As the literature suggests, information about animal treatment in the farming system can serve to create a “moral shock” among people that might cause them to align with the aims of a

movement such as veganism once they realize that what they eat is in opposition to their moral values. At the same time, the way in which this information is framed and delivered is key to how it is received. Individual vegans can play a role in disseminating information about veganism to others.

The following section of this literature review gives an overview of recent studies that investigate the ways in which vegans might spread such information through communicating about their lifestyle choices with non-vegans.

Communicating About Veganism

One of the reasons vegans are prompted to discuss their veganism is that situations where food is involved can serve to highlight a vegan's difference and their dissociation from the carnist culture. One can learn a lot about someone from what they eat or do not eat, since the dietary choices we make can serve as an expression of our personal and philosophical commitments (Lindeman and Sirelius 2001) as well as our "moral, religious or political beliefs and values" (Lindeman and Stark 1999, 142).

One of the factors that needs to be taken into account when assessing vegans' proclivity for promoting veganism and communicating about their worldview is that vegan to non-vegan interactions can be fraught with tension (Adams 2001; Malesh 2005). This may serve to dissuade less confrontational or thick-skinned vegans from talking about their veganism in certain social situations. Likewise, it may hinder vegans from taking part in public activity that seeks to promote veganism to strangers.

Vegetarianism can be an affront to meat-eaters' conception of themselves as "moral individuals" (Adams 2001, 58) and the same can likely be said for veganism. There may also be

a perception among non-vegans that vegans are self-righteous and preachy about their lifestyles (Santosa 2010), which can exacerbate matters. Further evidence of a stereotype vegans may be associated with is readily available online, on blogs and comment boards. As blogger Morgan Orion (2010), himself a professed vegan, claims on his blog: “Sad, but true--vegans seem to be an ornery, pretentious, high-and-mighty, stuck-up, and rabid group of people on the whole.” The mainstream media may also play a role in promoting negative stereotypes of vegans. A discourse analysis of national British newspapers reveals that “newspapers tend to discredit veganism through ridicule, or as being difficult or impossible to maintain in practice” (Cole and Morgan 2011, 134). In their work, Cole and Morgan found that British newspapers stereotype vegans as “ascetics, faddists, sentimentalists, or in some cases, hostile extremists.” This, they argue, amounts to “vegaphobia” (ibid).

When it comes to vegan communication styles, Cherry (2003) found that punk vegans (those associated with the punk subculture) tend to be more “militant” than non-punk vegans when talking about veganism. At the same time, she highlights that most of the subjects in her study, including the punks, would discuss veganism with others when approached to do so, as opposed to going up to strangers and telling them “they should be vegan” (ibid., 30). Cherry notes that many of the punk vegans were militant in the early stages of their veganism, but became increasingly less so over time. Their actions changed from “protesting and acts of non-civil disobedience” to “more conventional forms of support for veganism,” which include preparing vegan food for non-vegans (ibid., 35).

While Cherry looks at the differences in degrees of “militancy” among vegans, Larsson et al. (2003) identify differences between vegans who place a varied degree of importance on communicating about veganism to others. According to Larsson et al., “organized vegans” are

active in protesting against animal exploitation, seek public attention for the vegan cause, disseminate vegan information, and foment boycotts of certain products, while “individualistic vegans,” do not seek to align themselves with other vegans and seek not to be associated with the “militant” veganism practiced by “organized vegans” (ibid.). These “individualistic vegans” do not perceive veganism as their identity and, due to the media maligning some of the “organized vegans” as “militant,” tend to be wary of revealing their veganism to others if they anticipate that their audience holds anti-vegan prejudices (ibid).

While these categories appear fixed, Larsson et al. note that vegans move in and out of them at different points during their veganism. This is consistent with Cherry’s findings regarding the way in which vegans might be more militant in the early stages of their veganism, but then become less so over time.

Vegan communication has been studied in the physical world, but less research has focused on vegan communication online. The internet and its associated social media platforms has given rise to an era of “mass self-communication” (Castells 2007, 248), with millions of people around the world sharing about their lives, politics and views. The era of mass self-communication is of value to social movements and their actors, since it provides a platform for them to “build their own autonomy and confront the institutions of society in their own terms and around their own projects” (ibid., 249).

If veganism can be seen as a movement that confronts institutional wisdom and cultural norms, then it is valuable to better understand the ways in which individual vegans communicate about veganism online. Furthermore, when investigating how individual vegans use social media platforms to communicate about veganism, we can consider Goffman’s (1959) notion of “self presentation,” which proposes that in social interactions individuals seek to shape the

impressions others have of them (Kaplan and Heinlein 2010). This process is partly “driven by a wish to create an image that is consistent with one’s personal identity” (ibid, 62).

According to Goffman’s paradigm, people both “give” and “give off” expressions in their daily interactions with others. The expressions “given off” are “more theatrical and contextual, usually nonverbal, and presumably unintentional,” while the “expressions one gives are easier to manipulate” (Papacharissi 2002, 644). Thus, we can consider how individuals constantly engage in an “information game,” in which “the impressions formed of him/her become a result of his/her expertise in controlling the information given and given off” (ibid.). Papacharissi (2002) emphasizes how personal web pages are platforms where individuals have a high degree of control over what type of information they release or “give.” The same could be said for social media platforms like Facebook and micro-blogging tool Twitter.

Researchers have studied the ways in which the sharing of links to other websites plays into a self-presentation strategy that Leary (1995) refers to as “social association” (Dominick 1999, 655). In this sense, people who share links from personal web pages to other online resources “indirectly defin[e]” themselves, via association with others, and point their audience toward sites they think are worth viewing (ibid.). While Dominick’s research focused on links posted on personal web pages (social media tools like Facebook and Twitter were not yet in existence), the concept can be applied to social media platforms and online link-sharing in general.

Research into the information vegans share online is scant. However, researchers have addressed the ways in which vegans who use online forums to discuss food options with new vegans, vegetarians and others, tend to frame veganism in these online forums (Sneijder and Molder 2006). This work concludes that vegans who use such forums tend to frame the vegan

diet as easy to follow or “not out of the ordinary” and seek to normalize the use of food supplements, such as Vitamin B12, so that veganism is not perceived as a “complicated and unhealthy” undertaking (ibid., 627). There is, however, a lack of research that focuses on what types of information individual vegans choose to share with others online, through social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

Research Questions

As discussed in the preceding literature review, veganism can be conceived of as a social or cultural movement. It is not the purpose of this research project to prove or disprove this claim. Rather, based on the work of Malesh (2005; 2010), Cherry (2003; 2006), and Rawls (2010), this research accepts the premise that veganism is a movement. With that in mind, the researcher accepts the notion that individuals play a primary role in promoting veganism to non-vegans.

With a focus on the role of individuals in spreading veganism to others, this research seeks to understand how much value individual vegans place on promoting veganism, as well as the ways they seek to do so. Since subjects include vegans who advocate in public, as well as those who do not, it aims to identify similarities and differences in the way vegans communicate with those within their social networks as well as with strangers.

While previous research (Cherry 2003; 2006) addresses the difference between two rather specific groups, punks and non-punks, this research is concerned with gauging the importance a spectrum of vegans unaffiliated with a subculture like punk place on promoting veganism. Additionally, it seeks to understand what type of information, and texts, including movies and books, individual vegans might choose to share with others in order to educate about veganism.

As already discussed, certain types of information, such as graphic footage of animal maltreatment, slaughter and abuse, can foment an “animal-meat” connection among individuals who have previously not considered how their animal food is treated (Jabs, Devine and Sobal 1998). Such information can also generate a “moral shock” that might be sufficient to prompt an individual to align with the movement’s aims (Jasper and Poulsen 1995). At the same time, veganism can be tied to environmental and health concerns and vegans may choose to focus on these themes as opposed to animal welfare issues when discussing veganism with others (Cherry 2003). This is congruent with the concept of how people can use certain frames when discussing issues that can be presented in multiple ways (Terkildsen and Schnell 1997, 881; Popkin 1991; Gamson and Modigliani 1987). This is relevant to studying social movements because social movement participants may engage in framing their messages in specific ways in order to recruit new members (Snow and Benford 1988).

To that end, this research project seeks to identify the ways in which vegans frame their reasons for being vegan and attempts to identify how these frames may be advanced through personal interactions that take place online and offline, as well as through texts vegans might disseminate to non-vegans.

Based on the literature summarized above, this research focuses on five research questions:

R1: How do vegans frame the knowledge that informs their reasons for being vegan?

R2: Do vegans choose to promote veganism or share about the lifestyle with others?

R3: Why, if so, do vegans think it is important to communicate about veganism?

R4: What information do vegans think is important to pass on in order to educate others about veganism?

R5: What methods to vegans use for disseminating this knowledge, online and offline?

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS AND SUBJECTS

When seeking to study people's personal experiences and understand how individuals relate to others, it is valuable to make use of a qualitative research design. Such a design "assumes that the best way to learn about people's subjective experience is to ask them about it, and then listen carefully to what they say" (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003, 23). A qualitative study that makes use of in-depth interviews also provides a broader scope of research than a set questionnaire and provides an opportunity for the researcher to have a "unique" conversation with each respondent (Rubin and Rubin 2005, 4). Since it was anticipated that subjects would offer varied perspectives regarding the research questions under consideration, it was decided to employ a qualitative, directed interview method for this study.

Sample

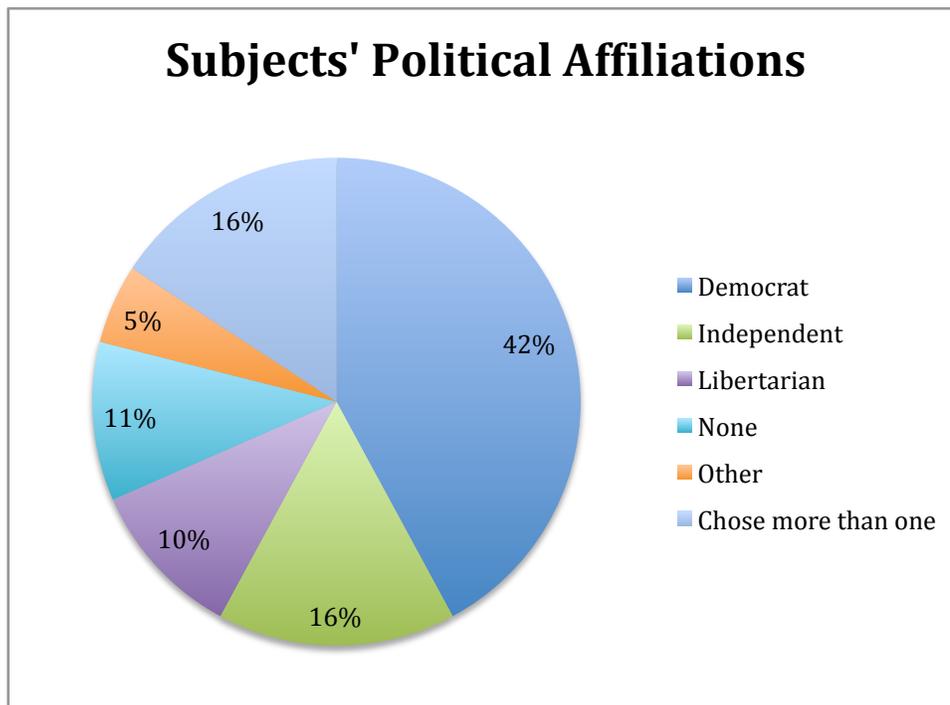
A sample of 19 self-identified vegans from Boulder, Colorado, and its surrounds, including the greater Denver area, was interviewed, using a semi-structured interview format. This geographical area was selected as a matter of convenience, since this is where the researcher lives and studies. Additionally, the area is home to an active vegan community, which made it likely that it would not be difficult to procure respondents.

The sample was recruited via three methods: a) a recruitment email (see Appendix A) was sent to all members of a popular Boulder-based vegan Meetup group, which at the time was comprised of close to 600 members; b) subjects were asked to refer other vegans they knew who

might be willing to do an interview; 3) a non-vegan friend put forward the name of a vegan she knew.

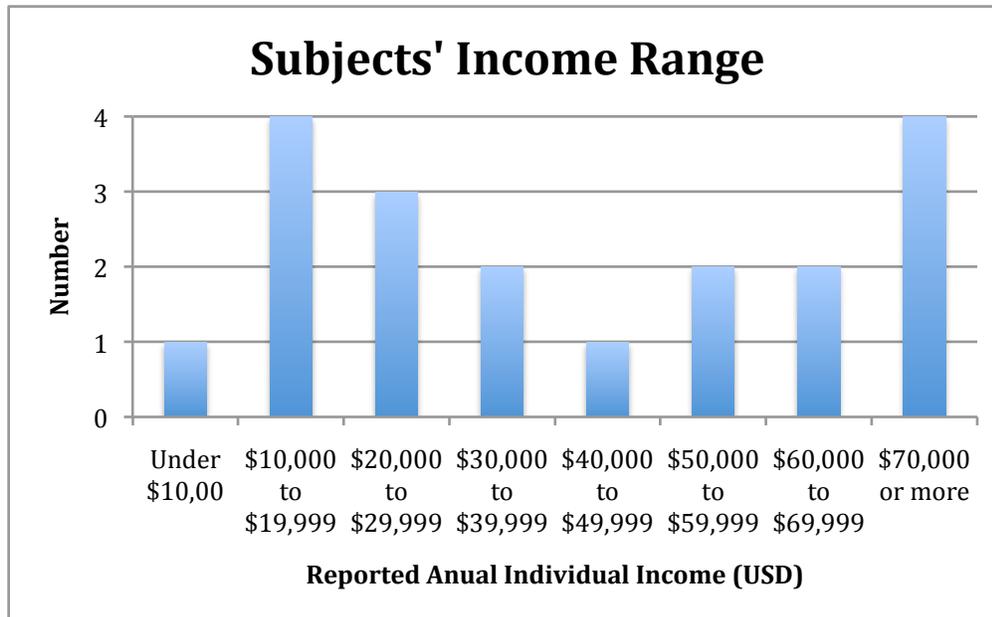
In total, 16 subjects were recruited from the email to the Meetup group, while three subjects were recruited by snowball sampling. Pseudonyms are used for all respondents represented in the research findings presented here. The sample comprised 6 males and 13 females. While no authoritative data exists on the common ratio of male to female vegans, research on British vegetarians suggests that females are “more than twice as likely to be vegetarian” than males (Beardsworth and Bryman 2004, 319). The mean age was 38.9 years with a range of 20 to 64. Politically, the majority of subjects identified as Democrats, as represented in figure 1 below.

Figure 1.



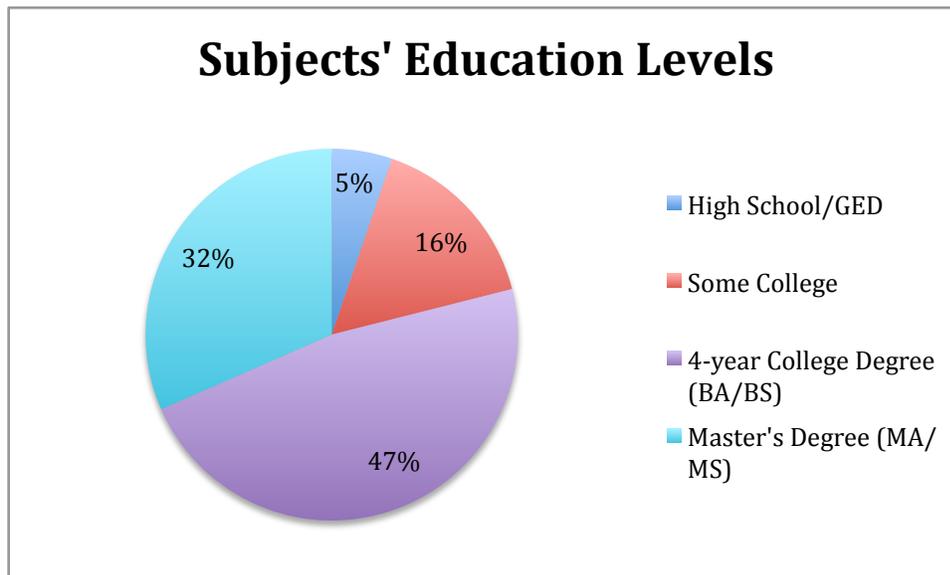
The subjects' reported individual annual incomes are represented in figure 2 below. More than half (n = 11) the sample's annual individual incomes exceed the Colorado state individual per capita income of \$28,723 per person (U.S. Census Bureau 2010).

Figure 2.



With regards to education levels, almost half the sample reported having an undergraduate degree, while 6 respondents hold master's degrees. The sample's education level is represented in figure 3 below. In Colorado, estimates indicate that among residents 25 years and older, educational attainment is as follows: high school or equivalent (22.8%); some college (30.5%); bachelor's degree (23.4%); graduate or professional degree (13%) (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). The sample exceeds these proportions.

Figure 3.



Since veganism is not a mainstream lifestyle, with a small number of adherents, the demographic population regarding Colorado's average per capita income and education levels is simply used to describe the research sample and indicate how participants differ from the broader Colorado population.

Research Methods

In order to answer the research questions, a qualitative research design that involves a form of interviewing known as "responsive interviewing" (Rubin and Rubin 2005) was used. This technique makes use of a questionnaire, but the interviewer is an active participant in the conversation. The researcher guides subjects through semi-structured interviews, while responding to their answers and prompting them for further information and clarification of key points, so as to produce detailed and rich qualitative data (ibid.).

Participants were asked questions about their reasons for pursuing veganism, views on whether they thought it was important to tell others about veganism, or share about it, how they communicate about veganism to non-vegans, and whether they had taken part in public actions, such as protests or leafleting. As expected, subjects often tended to guide the interviews in unanticipated directions, which helped to build a robust qualitative dataset from which to explore the research questions.

The interviews generally lasted one hour. A few were completed in 45 minutes. The longest took 105 minutes. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. If clarifications were needed, the researcher sent follow up questions to subjects via email. In addition to the one-on-one interviews, participants were asked to fill out a brief, seven-question demographic survey, which included questions regarding age, gender, employment status, occupation, education level, income, and political affiliation (see Appendix C).

Data Analysis

Each interview was transcribed verbatim. Transcription was performed manually, and with the assistance of Dragon Dictate software. Since this voice transcription software is trained to recognize one voice, the researcher listened to the audio recordings and then repeated them to the transcription software, while constantly checking the accuracy of what was transcribed.

Qualitative analysis software HyperRESEARCH was used to analyze and categorize the transcripts, using the “constant comparative method” (Glaser and Strauss 1967). What is key to the method of constant comparison is the identification of core themes within the data that are generated by the participants as they share their insights and tell their stories. In this instance, a theme can be considered a “patterned response or meaning within the dataset” (Braun and Clark

2006, 82). Once key themes were identified they were ordered into categories. Doing this allows the researcher “to conceptualize the key analytic features of phenomena, but also to communicate a meaningful picture of those phenomena in everyday terms” (Dey 2007, 168).

Based on the available literature, it was expected that themes such as moral concerns about animal welfare, environmental degradation related to animal farming, and health benefits related to eating a vegan diet would form part of the category “reasons for being vegan.” However, not all themes and categories were predetermined before conducting the interviews. This is because the analysis of qualitative data is not a separate “self-contained” phase (Basit 2003, 144), but rather a continual effort that develops along with the research, and researchers should be open to further categories that emerge as the research progresses (Strauss and Corbin 1998; Weston et al. 2001, in Crow 2009). Therefore new categories and themes were added based on the interview data. One theme that emerged, and had not been previously considered, was that some subjects viewed veganism as a biologically predetermined way of being (see section 1.4 (b) in Findings).

Researcher as participant

Most subjects either asked before, during, or after the interview, why the researcher was interested in this particular research topic and whether he was a vegan. Since he had attended two of the Meet-up events, which took the form of potlucks, some of those in the sample already had this information. To those who were not aware of this, the researcher explained that he was a vegan, albeit a relatively new vegan, since he officially took up veganism just before starting graduate school. While it is possible that the subjects’ knowledge of the researcher’s veganism might have impacted their responses, it was necessary to be truthful. Additionally, other

researchers, such as Cherry (2003), suggest that subjects might share opinions with fellow vegans that they would not feel comfortable sharing with non-vegans. Indeed, as Corbin (in Cisneros-Puebla 2004) notes, researchers can build on personal experience when performing qualitative research, while Charmaz (2006, 189) advocates that the researcher employ a “reflexive stance.”

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter outlines the study's findings, based on the research questions listed in Chapter 3. *Section 1: Framing the Message* addresses R1: *How do vegans frame the knowledge that informs their reasons for being vegan?* It identifies the ways in which vegans frame their reasons for being vegan. It also highlights the ways in which some vegans employ what Benford and Snow (2000) label “diagnostic framing” in identifying problems and attributing blame for why less people identify with veganism. This is chiefly done through locating others as *lacking knowledge* about the cruel machinations of the meat, dairy, and egg industries, as well as blaming the *institutional influence* of industry in controlling knowledge about what is considered normal and healthy to eat.

Section 2: Promoting Veganism and Spreading Knowledge addresses R2: *Do vegans choose to promote veganism or share about the lifestyle with others?* and R3: *Why, if so, do vegans think it is important to communicate about veganism?* It groups subjects according to three categories: *publicly active vegans*, *less publicly active vegans*, and those who have *no desire to promote veganism*.

This section addresses the reasons publicly active vegans feel compelled to advocate for veganism in public spaces, and identifies the methods they use to do so. It also outlines how less publicly active vegans also place value on promoting veganism, or at least certain themes associated with veganism, through their personal interactions with friends, family, and work colleagues. Related to the ways in which vegans might promote and communicate about veganism, this section also highlights how some vegans are *reluctant to be seen as pushy* when

discussing veganism with others. In line with Cherry's (2003) findings, it includes a consideration of how some vegans report being less strident in their promotion of veganism over time.

Section 3: Educating About Food focuses on the ways in which vegans can act as *food guides* for others who are potentially interested in veganism, through helping others gain familiarity with sourcing and preparing vegan foods. It also considers the sharing of vegan recipes as an important communication tactic that can serve to normalize vegan food and promote the vegan diet as a viable way of eating. The section addresses how both publicly active and less publicly active vegans use *food as a tool* in interactions with those within their social networks as well as with strangers.

In order to answer *R4: What information do vegans think is important to pass on in order to educate others about veganism?* *Section 4: Sharing Texts* highlights subjects' views on the usefulness of movies and books in educating others about veganism. It considers how films are used as educational tools by publicly active and less publicly active vegans, and focuses on whether vegans think it is valuable to expose others to graphic films that advance the frame *animals are maltreated in the food production system*. Likewise, the types of books vegans might recommend to others are detailed.

Finally, *Section 5: Sharing and Informing Online* considers the tools and platforms vegans use to disseminate vegan information online, as well as the content of the information they seek to share among those within their online networks. This final section address *R4: What information do vegans think is important to pass on in order to educate others about veganism?* and *R5: What methods do vegans use for disseminating this knowledge, online and offline?*

Section 1: Framing the Message

In order to answer *R1: How do vegans frame the knowledge that informs their reasons for being vegan?* subjects were asked about their reasons for pursuing veganism, and maintaining the lifestyle choice. Through this process a set of frames emerged, with different respondents often choosing to highlight certain frames, and not making mention of others. These dominant frames are outlined below, substantiated by examples of claims made by subjects.

1.1 Animals are maltreated in the food production system

As would be expected, based on the prevailing literature and understandings of what veganism entails, the majority of respondents (n = 18) referred to how animals are maltreated and killed for human benefit in the modern day farming system when discussing their reasons for initially pursuing, or maintaining, their veganism.

“They’re running ‘em across an electrical bath and killing them, or electrocuting them to kill ‘em. They’re plucking all their feathers off when they’re still alive and de-beaking them; for their whole life they’re shoved in with a million other chickens with no beak so they’re not pecking the other chickens to death” [Andrew].

“For me the transition [from not eating red meat and pork] to being vegetarian made sense, but what made more sense was going completely vegan. There was still cruelty to the animals, regardless of whether you’re factory farming them for their meat, or for their eggs, or for whatever” [Aaron].

“Six years ago I went vegan. It had a lot to do with animals - how awfully they’re treated” [Robin].

“It’s important for us to realize that, um, as individuals we need to treat them [non-human animals] as individuals...we need to respect them as individuals” [Zach].

“I would say now I’m a stronger vegan because of the animals” [Liz].

While most of the subjects referenced their concern for the way *animals are maltreated in the food production system*, and explained how this played into their reasons for being vegan, some subjects also referenced frames that highlight how veganism has benefitted them or others they know. These frames were based on assertions about the health benefits of following a vegan diet, but also included broader frames about how being vegan contributes to an overall global good. The frames, grouped according to dominant themes, are listed below.

1.2 A Vegan Diet is Healthy

As discussed in the literature review, there are people who will pursue veganism based on the belief that it is better for their personal health. Others might adopt veganism for ethical reasons and then realize unintended health benefits as they continue with the vegan diet, as can happen with vegetarians (Amato and Partridge 1989; Maurer 2002). Thus, it was expected that some subjects would make health claims about the perceived benefits of following a vegan diet. Indeed, the perceived health benefits of veganism featured prominently for the subjects. Many respondents (n = 15) made some type of health claim related to veganism. These claims tended to focus on how a vegan diet had improved the health of either the person making the claim, or somebody they knew, often a family member.

“I found out when I went vegan that I’m actually allergic to dairy, and it was kind of amazing: all these health issues I was having that sort of evaporated over the course of about a week” [Sarah].

“As soon as I gave up the cheese and all the other stuff that coincided with that - eggs and dairy products...my endurance, my stamina just felt better. I felt cleaner; I felt lighter. I didn’t have all like this extra, like, mucus. And mostly I noticed my respiratory...everything got easier once I gave up the dairy” [Aaron].

“My father has pretty aggressive heart disease, and he’s had a heart attack, quadruple bypass surgery, and all these things...he hasn’t been vegan for even a year yet and he’s already to the point where his doctors were telling him, ‘yeah,

you can actually eat, you could probably eat a lot more fat if you wanted to”
[Simon].

While subjects identified to varying degrees with the health benefits of veganism, one subject, in particular, focused on how a vegan diet had improved his health. His reflections give an insight into how personal experiences can play into which aspects of veganism are viewed as more salient to the individual. Andrew said he had been a vegan in his early twenties, but had later gone off the path after eating a piece of turkey at Thanksgiving, which resulted in him consuming meat for a three-and-a-half year period. However, nearly eight months before our interview he had decided to return to veganism, and was very aware of the physical changes he experienced through his second vegan conversion.

As he explained, “I find that if I’m a vegan it gives me a sense of awareness about my health that I didn’t have when I was a meat-eater.” He described how he had been staring into the mirror and looking at his body, realizing that he had lost about 30 pounds since going vegan. As a survivor of a brutal car accident, that left him in pain with nerve damage that he said “can bring tears to my eyes on a regular basis,” he also attributed his diet to an overall sense of wellbeing, even though he had recently been to the doctor due to a bad infection.

According to his account, a recent blood test indicated that: “I have a healthy heart that’s pre-teen. All my blood work, my good [and] bad cholesterols, they’re like I’m 13- [or] 12-years-old...My doctor is highly impressed with that. I’m like, ‘it’s because of my diet you know.’”

While Andrew spoke of the positive health consequences he attributed to his diet, two respondents discussed negative health impacts they had experienced from following a vegan diet.

In one case this was specifically a raw vegan diet.⁵ Another respondent, Bianca, discussed how she saw the vegan diet as healthy but not a salve for “all health ills.”

“I actually had some health impacts from it. Definitely take supplements if you’re not taking them, please do. B12, Omega 3s, you know, watch your vitamin D: those are all things I’ve been deficient in. Even though I eat pretty well, I’m not like a health food nut. I don’t eat all raw foods, all vegetables, all the time, but I eat pretty well. I cook a lot. When I go out I don’t eat a lot of fast food or anything like that. I eat vegetables, tofu, seitan, tempeh, and I still had all these deficiencies. So, I definitely take my vitamins now. So, health is no longer a reason for me to be vegan. At this point, it’s mostly, uh, I don’t want to say habit, but it, it’s just who I am now. It’s kind of ingrained. Like, I can’t imagine eating a burger anymore than I can imagine eating my dog, you know” [Dani].

“Before that [raw vegan diet] I really felt like everyone should be vegan and it will work for everyone, and I guess a part of me still feels that way, but it’s lessened, I think, after having that experience with the raw foods...I don’t know, I have a better – I guess, maybe, less judgment or arrogance from that experience, for sure - which is good” [Daniel].

“I’m not a part of the ‘a vegan diet is the cure for all health ills.’ I think it has worked for some people, and I think that’s great. But we still have a very strong need for medicine, and a very strong need for affordable care for people. I do think that, you know, diet is a part of that, and a part of that overall health and wellness, but I don’t think of it as the end. And I think some people, kind of, have this idea that if everyone just went vegan we wouldn’t need healthcare anymore because we’d all just be healthy. I’m like ‘no.’ I mean, I think it can help a lot of things, absolutely, but it’s not a cure all for everything. People will still get diseases, most likely, and people will still have high blood pressure, even if they’re vegans” [Bianca].

As these examples suggest, among those who identify as vegan there may be differing claims and ways of framing the perceived health benefits associated with a vegan diet. Some vegans may choose to focus on such claims and work them into the way in which they frame their understandings of veganism. These frames may be incorporated along with frames about the way in which veganism benefits animals. Others, such as Dani, a vegan of 21 years, who can

⁵ According to Walsh (2002): “A raw food vegan diet may be defined in various ways, but usually entails at least 80% by weight being raw plants.”

be seen as transitioning away from veganism since she claims to no longer identify “philosophically” as vegan, and has changed her views on the “humane treatment” of animals, while continuing to eat a vegan diet, may oppose the health claims some vegans make.

1.3 Veganism offers a solution to other global issues

While subjects tended to make claims about the ways in which veganism benefits animal welfare and human health, some of them (n = 12) also tied the benefits of veganism into overarching narratives of protecting the planet or promoting a better world. These claims were often framed as ensuring a sustainable future for Earth and its inhabitants, or helping decrease the levels of violence that prevail in the world. The key frames are listed and described below.

1.3 (a) Animal Agriculture’s Contribution to Environmental Degradation

Vegetarian and vegan organizations promote the environmental benefits associated with vegetarianism and veganism (see the Vegetarian Resource Group⁶ and Vegan Outreach⁷ websites, for example). In line with these assertions, some subjects (n = 12) worked an environmental frame into their narratives. In doing so, these vegans generally focused on how animal-based agriculture contributes to greenhouse gas emissions and climate change, as well as deforestation, and the use of resources, including water, land, and energy.

“If you look at the list of unsustainable things that humans do: meat production is undoubtedly at the top and so it’s just kind of a really quick dead-end for humanity” [Simon].

⁶ “Environment.” Vegetarian Resource Group. Online: <http://www.vrg.org/environment/> [Accessed March 15, 2012].

⁷ “Environmental Destruction.” Vegan Outreach. Online: <http://www.veganoutreach.org/whyvegan/environment.html> [Accessed March 15, 2012].

“More than all forms of transportation in the world, I think the factory farming causes more pollution than all the modes of transportation” [Daniel].

“If you look at the carbon dioxide or the, just the greenhouse gas emissions, if you look at that from a perspective of tallying up what you’re eating, um, the piece of steak on your plate, and what that has cost the planet and everybody, it’s like, it’s a big cost, and it’s not sustainable, and that evidence and that science has been out for a while now” [Aaron].

“We look across the world, and you look at, whether people call it global warming or just climate change in general, we’re already having decline in species. Do we want our species to decline because of our impact on nature? And that’s a part of why I want to be a vegan, you know” [Andrew].

As evidenced in these findings, veganism’s connection to environmental sustainability was a pertinent frame for some subjects. In addition to this frame, it emerged that particular vegans viewed veganism as having the potential to alleviate other social ills, chiefly those related to violence. These vegans tended to have embraced a vegan philosophy, which extended beyond simply following a vegan diet.

1.3 (b) Veganism’s Capacity to Alleviate Other Social Ills

The notion that veganism can help alleviate other social issues, besides decreasing animal suffering and environmental degradation, was strongest for two respondents. Both of them were longtime animal rights and vegan activists, who devoted their time to raising public awareness about veganism and animal rights in general. They were leading figures in the local vegan community, and worked to mobilize other vegans to take part in outreach and vegan community events.

“[It’s] the basis of all kindness and compassion in the world... if everyone were vegan in this world, there would be no child abuse, there would be no rape, or child pornography” [Liz].

“[It’s] the ultimate social justice movement... it’s the evolution that we need to take as planetary citizens to evolve, or, you know, you’re not going to have a place for your kids to inhabit” [Amy].

Within the general *frame veganism has the capacity to alleviate other social ills* it emerged that three of the vegans in the sample viewed meat eating as a factor that contributes to overall levels of violence in the world. This was generally attributed to the violence and fear animals experience when being slaughtered being passed onto humans who consume meat, or to how killing animals is inherently violent and contributes to human-to-human violence.

“Because you’re killing other mammals and birds, rather than going out and killing, or taking pieces of a plant or fruit that the plant gives readily, it’s a much more violent culture. And that violence I think gets translated onto fellow humans as well. If you look at vegetarian societies, they have lower crime rates than meat-eating societies, like India and places like that, where people are vegetarian. It’s undeniable, it creates a more peaceful society” [Aaron].

“...every animal, when they die they release some kind of poison toxin from the terror of it, and you can’t tell me that we aren’t eating part of that... I think that the violence in the world is getting more and more and more over time, and I think all of the stuff around animals and eating them, our thoughts and stuff around them, and all of that, contributes to that” [Rose].

“...before that steak became the steak you are putting in your mouth, before that cow was killed, it was full of all sorts of stress hormones and, you know, fighting for its life sort of thing...and you’re taking all that and putting it in your system and it seems to me that makes it that much easier to kind of up the levels of all that in your system and then perpetuate that sort of violence” [Sarah].

While these vegans saw a connection between violence perpetrated against animals and the violence humans inflict on one another, others in the sample chose to frame veganism in normative terms, either locating it as a moral baseline for human behavior or as a predetermined way of being, based on either biological or spiritual factors.

1.4 Normative Frames

Typically, frames are more likely to resonate with others if the frame connects with prevailing “cultural values, beliefs, narratives, and folk wisdom” (Benford and Snow 2000, 624). As Jasper and Poulsen (1995, 496) maintain: “Frames resonate with potential recruits precisely because these recruits already have certain visions of the world, moral values, political ideologies, and affective attachments.”

While veganism is largely at odds with prevailing cultural values, it emerged that when speaking about veganism, vegans might try to tap into existing belief systems and cultural norms, particularly those related to morality in order to make veganism appear to be something others could identify with. Within the context of framing, it emerged that individual vegans may highlight ways in which veganism interconnects with dominant moral paradigms and the ways in which humans ought to behave.

1.4 (a) Veganism as a moral baseline for human behavior

The strongest proponent of veganism as a moral baseline for how individuals ought to behave was Zach, an advocate of the Abolitionist Approach pioneered by Gary Francione. This school of thought is based on the guiding premise “that all sentient beings, humans or nonhumans, have one right: the basic right not to be treated as the property of others” (Francione 2006-2010). Those who subscribe to the Abolitionist Approach advocate for completely doing away with “institutionalized animal exploitation” (ibid.) as opposed to reform of animal welfare laws.

In line with the tenets of this philosophy, Zach sees veganism as a moral requisite. Likewise, Amy, who as already noted views veganism as the “ultimate social justice movement,” explained how veganism is about giving equal consideration to beings with their own interests.

“you can’t respect non-human animals while continuing to engage in violence and oppression against non-human animals. In order to reconcile our values of justice and respect with our actions *we have to at least* be vegan” [Zach].

“Yeah, it’s the umbrella, it’s the umbrella social justice movement for all the other justice movements. Because it’s all about, you know, equal consideration to other beings that have interests, whether they’re human or not” [Amy].

1.4 (b) Veganism as a predetermined way of being

When it came to framing veganism as a predetermined, or natural, human endeavor, two frames were dominant. One of these frames involved locating veganism as in alignment with religious beliefs, while the other positioned the vegan diet as a biological fit for humans. These frames were presented by a small number of vegans (spiritual, n=1; biological, n= 3), but are worth including here.

One respondent, Karen, identified as a “spiritual vegan” and thus chose to locate veganism as fitting with her Christian beliefs. She explained that she understands the concept of the Old Testament’s teachings about “being a good steward” as congruent with the vegan ethos. She built a narrative around the Garden of Eden story and framed the Garden as being entirely vegan, with no animal death. As she explained, for her this meant the “grand design” was meant to be “completely plant-based” because “it had the greatest reward for all creatures.” As Karen explained, “being a good steward would mean to cause no harm and align yourself with the divine will. If the Garden of Eden was designed for the template for wellbeing on Earth, then that would mean everyone should be vegan.”

In contrast to Karen's religious framing of veganism, three subjects argued that veganism makes sense from a biological perspective and humans are not predisposed for meat-eating, either due to their lack of hunting mechanism, such as claws, or the composition of their intestines and lack of suitable teeth for flesh-eating.

"It was, without a doubt, what humans' original diet was – was fruits and greens. All of our other closest relatives eat that. We don't have claws; we don't have natural hunting mechanisms. Until we started developing our brain, which didn't happen right away, we didn't have the ability to go out and kill anything, other than an earthworm, you know. All we had the ability to do was pick fruit from trees, pick fruit from the ground, just like gorillas and chimpanzees, the same basic food source as them" [Aaron].

"I don't believe it's meant to be. We don't have the teeth for it, we don't have the intestines for it...I believe we're herbivores" [Jen].

"Our teeth aren't made for it; our intestines are way too long. If you look at a carnivore, like a lion, their intestines are much shorter, so the meat can get through it, and out again. Ours are way too long, so it just, that rotting meat, sits in there, which is what causes bad things to happen" [Rose].

As discussed above, there are different ways in which vegans create meaning around their veganism, and frame messages about their reasons for pursuing it. Drawing from the responses of those in this sample, these frames include: *animals are maltreated in the food production system*; *a vegan diet is healthy*; *veganism offers a solution to other global issues*, including environmental degradation, child abuse, and violence; *veganism is a moral baseline for human behavior*; and *veganism is a predetermined way of being*.

Based on these findings, what becomes evident is that vegans generally hold a pool of constructed knowledge, imbued with meaning, which is sometimes linked to beliefs about the way things ought to be, or the way in which humans should best treat non-human animals and each other. Since this knowledge is largely antithetical to the dominant cultural paradigm, which as discussed in the literature review can be viewed as "carnist" in nature (Joy 2009), others might

be perceived as meeting these messages with resistance. The following section will discuss how some of those in the sample framed their awareness of this resistance as well as illustrate how they frame the institutional control of knowledge around animal products and meat eating.

1.5 Perceived Resistance to Veganism

When considering *R2: Do vegans choose to promote veganism or share about the lifestyle with others?* it emerged that some vegans viewed others as being resistant to veganism and its foundations, which might stand in the way of them being open to accepting veganism. As already noted, veganism challenges notions of what people have learned about what constitutes a normal diet, and the ways in which non-human animals can be used by humans. This re-constituting of the world and re-contextualizing of individuals' places within it can serve to challenge meat-eaters' conception of themselves as "moral individuals" (Adams 2001, 58).

Among the vegans interviewed, some respondents relayed a sense of being aware of how others may be resistant to the vegan worldview, while also noting the role of institutions, such as the meat and dairy industry, in upholding the cultural standards in which meat, dairy, and eggs are perceived as regular foods that are healthy to eat. This is what Benford and Snow (2000) refer to as "diagnostic framing," which involves identifying a problem and the actors perceived to be at fault for it. The ways in which vegans in the sample perceive this resistance are listed in the following section.

1.5 (a) Lack of Knowledge

In some cases, respondents ($n = 6$) viewed resistance to veganism as a function of others not having the information required to understand veganism. In this *lack of knowledge* frame,

non-vegans were not perceived as resistant, in of themselves, but rather ill-equipped to make informed decisions about what they consume. Those who could not understand veganism were seen as not having adequate knowledge to do so. In some cases, it was perceived that if others did have access to the “truth” (the way in which animals are maltreated in the food production system or entertainment industries like the circus, or the availability of vegan foods), they would find it easier to accept veganism.

“You know, I don’t think that my vegan ethics are, like, stronger than the average person’s ethics about animals...I think the big difference is that I know what’s going on and the average person doesn’t know what’s going on in these factory farms, and things like that” [Simon].

“I think a lot of people don’t know. Look at the meat industry: it owns this country and the same with the pharmaceutical industry. They work together; you can’t have one without the other... So, I think a lot of it is undercover, like circuses – oh my God if people knew what happened at circuses, like to those animals, they’d never take their kids there” [Robin].

“This woman, for instance, a very intelligent lady, didn’t even know what I was talking about when I said almond milk, she had no idea... so many people don’t even think about, don’t even know to think about an alternative way of eating that may be beneficial to their health...” [Rose].

1.5 (b) Denial of Truth

While focusing on how a lack of information about animal maltreatment contributes to resistance to veganism, some respondents (n = 10) framed other consumers as in a state of denial of the machinations of the meat, dairy, and egg industries, as well as entertainment industries that use animals, along with the impacts of animal agriculture. This was seen as a way for non-vegans to continue with their daily lives and enjoy the food they are accustomed to eating without having to consider changing their behaviors.

“A lot of people just want to turn a blind eye to it because they find it’s just easier” [Andrew].

“People don’t really want to hear about stuff that negates the status quo. They want to get off the hook; they want to be like ‘everything is fine and I’m enjoying my life.’ Not want to kind of own up to there’s some changes that need to be made to have the world, you know, be really safe for all inhabitants” [Karen].

“You know, sometimes people just don’t want to know what’s going on and I feel like that’s really sad: just to turn away and not really acknowledge what’s going on” [Jen].

“People don’t want to think about what they’re eating. I’ve found that with my mom especially ‘cause she’s a really caring person...but if she happens to, like, come across a PeTA video online. You know, she read half of *Skinny Bitch*⁸ until the factory farming part. I’m just like ‘mom, you know what’s happening.’ She’s like, ‘I just can’t think about that.’ So she just decides to not think about it, not address it. I think for a lot of people it’s easy to do that. You don’t think that this was chicken; you just think that it’s a piece of meat on your plate” [Ashley].

“So, it feels really good to be able to promote veganism. It just feels like something positive in a really negative, um, society, really, you know. I mean, God, what we’re asked just to not look at, not question. You know, it’s pretty rough. Yeah, we’ve got choices, we’ve got choices. Many people don’t, and we choose to support, to create this whole, just the food system is insane, and what that does to global poverty, uh, the food supply, going to feed the animals, and feed us... it’s insane. But people by and large don’t want to hear that. They want to hear what the next TV show is. They want to hear cheaper gas, and yeah... So, to just, it’s as much therapy for me to promote it as it is, you know, for the animals and the planet. And the health concerns, frankly, for people, you know. I’m sorry the information is out there for people: wake up. I just...you know...I mean geez” [Faith].

Daniel noted how electronic musician Moby once asked former U.S. vice president Al Gore why he did not include animal farming’s contribution to climate change in Gore’s documentary on global warming, *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006). Apparently, Gore told Moby: “getting people to drive a hybrid car isn’t that difficult [but] getting people to give up animal products is almost impossible” (Moby 2009).

In line with Moby’s narrative, some in the sample emphasized how people often prefer not to think about the reality of how the meat on their plates is treated prior to being packaged

⁸ Freedman, R. and Barnouin, K. 2005. *Skinny Bitch*. Pennsylvania, PA: Running Press Book Publishers.

and sold so that they can continue consuming animal products. This is also a factor that contributes to some vegans self-censoring their own truths, even though they may feel as if they want to disseminate the knowledge they own.

Four respondents, all of whom did not take part in public vegan advocacy, shared about how they would refrain from discussing their truths, chiefly due to an unwillingness to sour a social relationship or spoil an occasion with a non-vegan.

“I mean, now I’d love to share that [how chickens are treated at factory farms] first off with everybody when I meet them. You know, when they start eating meat and I have that sinking feeling in my stomach like you’re killing something. But I don’t” [Andrew].

“It’s a fine balance because you want to be speaking the truth – telling people what’s going on. I want to tell people the abhorrent real truth: that there’s millions of millions of animals that are being killed and there’s all this... like I was saying before about the environmental degradation, you want to have that be known. And if I were to say that as much as I might feel it sometimes, I’d be, like, the downer always, at every conversation...” [Aaron].

“I’ve had people, not a lot, but I’ve noticed some people, depending on the culture that I’m dealing with, get a little defensive about it – about not being vegan. And I don’t talk about animals and, like, right away. I don’t talk about how disgusting it is to eat animals” [Robin].

“So, as much as I want to say something – talk about murder and slavery and all these horrible things that go along with meat production, or whatever, if you’re out to lunch with someone they probably really don’t want to hear that” [Sarah].

1.6. Institutional Influence

What emerged as a recurrent theme among respondents (n = 6) is how knowledge is controlled by the influence of industry. Generally, the meat, egg, and dairy industries were located as sources of informational control that set the agenda when it comes to what is considered “normal” and healthy to eat.

“I know that a lot of vegans are stuck with having to promote veganism at a personal level because there is really nothing else they can do, because, you

know, the lawmakers aren't really behind us. I mean, they're really corrupted by the meat and dairy industries..." [Simon].

"When you have a big industry, like the meat and dairy industry, or the oil industry, or the armament industry: they have a lot of influence over the norm, what cultural norms happen, you know, and what products are available...people are being controlled, in many aspects, by people who have a vested interest in making money and not in peoples' health" [Aaron].

"Because the meat and dairy industry wants our money they want us to think it's not wrong to eat animals" [Liz].

Summary of Section 1: Framing the Message

As has been detailed in the preceding section, vegans make an array of claims about veganism. These claims include: *animals are maltreated in the food production system, a vegan diet is healthy, veganism offers a solution to other global issues and has the capacity to alleviate other social ills*, as well as normative claims about how veganism is a *predetermined way of being*. This repository of knowledge is understood to varying degrees by those who identify as vegan.

Some vegans identify others as being resistant to this knowledge, through a *lack of knowledge, denial of truth*, or due to the *institutional influence* of industries that sell animal products in promoting the normalcy of meat and other animal products. With that in mind, the following section addresses the degree to which vegans seek to share the knowledge they hold with others, since this could serve a function in spreading the frames listed above, as well as ameliorate the ability of non-vegans to maintain a *lack of knowledge* and *denial of truth* about this knowledge.

Section 2: Promoting Veganism and Spreading Knowledge

This section addresses *R2: Do vegans choose to promote veganism or share about the lifestyle with others?* and *R3: Why, if so, do vegans think it is important to communicate about veganism?* Firstly, the degree to which vegans choose to promote veganism is addressed.

Most of the vegans (n = 18) in the sample expressed a degree of commitment to promoting veganism. As used here, the term “promote” refers to a willingness to share vegan-related knowledge with others or educate others about veganism, prepare vegan food for others, as well as actively promote veganism in public spaces. In some cases, subjects reported discussing veganism with others only when asked to do so.

According to their responses, subjects are grouped as “publicly active vegans,” “less publicly active vegans,” and those who have “little desire to promote veganism.” As might be expected, those who engaged in various forms of public outreach were more inclined to directly promote veganism to strangers, while those less involved in public outreach were less so, and tended to share with others, usually within their social networks, about veganism if approached for insights.

It was also found that those who did not engage in public outreach might seek to educate those within their personal networks, including friends and family, about veganism in subtle ways. This might entail using *food as a tool*, or guiding others toward healthier ways of eating based on plant-based foods, but not necessarily full-blown veganism. This will be discussed in further detail as part of *Section 3: Educating About Food*.

2.1 Publicly Active Vegans

Those vegans (n = 8) who regularly engaged in different forms of public outreach, such as demonstrations, public leafleting, tabling, giving talks about veganism to university students, volunteering for vegan student groups, organizing vegan meet-ups, and, in one case, hosting vegan cooking classes, tended to share the belief that they had a responsibility to promote veganism.

“[I] totally feel guilty if I’m not doing anything. Yeah, you can never do enough” [Margaret].

“So, yes, my identity is – everything about me – my whole life is about veganism... I created my work; I started my own business. I was making a lot of money working in a very challenging, non-vegan position for a long time and was so wrought with anxiety and guilt about it that I knew I needed to make changes and not be so compromising. So, my whole work is about veganism and promoting vegan products...” [Amy].

“Every person I educate, that many more animals are saved, so for me outreach is huge” [Liz].

“It’s not just enough to do the right thing when you’re in a world when the wrong thing is happening all over the place. I think that, you know, like all the social justice advocates in history...when we understand these things it’s important for us to take a stand for the oppressed” [Zach].

“And for me, then, it wasn’t enough to just be vegan. I wanted to tell the world...”[Faith].

“...I feel because I’m interested in advocacy in social justice, that for me I would be remiss to not do it [promote veganism]” [Karen].

The vegans quoted above adhere to veganism due to a strong commitment to ethical concerns about how *animals are maltreated in the food production system*. This is the guiding rationale for the vegans who support this position. In conjunction with feeling a sense of responsibility to promote veganism, three of the publicly active vegans focused on how they felt

compelled to advocate for veganism since non-human animals cannot advocate for their own protection and rights.

“I know vegans who don’t really care, who try to be very quiet about it and not tell other people. I find that very confusing. Um, I think a lot of that might have to do with, you know, like when I didn’t really understand animal rights I didn’t view non-human animals as persons with their own needs, desires, thoughts...Now that I do I can’t imagine not advocating on their behalf” [Zach].

“I’ve done many demos all by myself. The animals only have me to be there and if I’m going to make the commitment to go and be there I don’t care if anyone shows up at all – I’m there for the animals” [Liz].

“...it’s about protecting the victims. So I want to protect the victims from everybody. So yeah, if I could, if I knew how to make the world vegan, I would do it” [Margaret].

It is not always the case that publicly active vegans see themselves as having a responsibility to guide others toward veganism. Such is the case with Daniel, a vegan who takes part in public actions, including leafleting, tabling, and protesting at circuses and rodeos, and whose veganism is rooted in an ethical foundation. While not seeing himself as having a responsibility to guide others toward veganism, Daniel values the ability of public action to foment change. He spoke about how his involvement in vegan advocacy, especially the efforts he was involved in early in his veganism, which included collecting signatures for a ballot that resulted in an amendment to ban small gestation crates for pigs in the state he was living in at the time, made him feel like he “was making change in the community.”

He thinks leafleting is a “good thing to do” but recognizes that it is “not for everyone.” While not seeing his outreach as a responsibility, and cognizant of how others might be resistant to veganism if not open to it, he emphasized that “just living it” is a good way to spread veganism.

Additionally, not all of these vegans saw value in traditional public advocacy tactics, such as leafleting. Such was the case with one respondent who saw more value in discussing veganism with those within his social network. He claimed to have convinced his family to be vegan, which speaks to the way in which vegans can educate those within their personal social networks about veganism.

“It’s not that I’m not passionate about promoting veganism because I certainly am. Promoting it in those particular ways [tabling or leafleting] is not really something that I’m extremely interested in...[a] lot of the times that I’ve been able to get someone interested in veganism and become vegan it just took so much time that I really have a hard time imagining that these leaflets really do anything. I mean, I think I’ve met so many people who have gotten things like leaflets and just didn’t care you know. To my knowledge, no one has really attempted to measure the effect of this leafleting, you know, and really say this is how effective it is” [Simon].

Simon also spoke of the potential living by example has for promoting veganism. When asked how he had influenced his family, he replied:

“I think it was more by example, mostly. I mean, after having been vegan for over a decade, and you know, being fine, and not, you know, dying of malnutrition or something, and actually being pretty healthy by comparison to other people in my family, I think that that eventually showed them that okay yeah this is something that people can do...” [Simon].

While living by example is one way vegans may seek to promote veganism, it is also the case that publicly active vegans might seek to constantly advertise their veganism even when not engaged in the advocacy efforts mentioned above. This will be discussed in the following section, with a focus on one respondent as a case study.

2.1 a) Advertising Self

As noted in the literature review, when presenting one’s self, individuals seek to shape others’ perceptions of them (Goffman 1959). One way in which vegans do this, without verbally

expressing a vegan identity, is through donning clothing that advertises veganism. One of the publicly active vegans, Liz, provided an example of this. She arrived for our interview wearing a t-shirt bearing a peace sign logo with the text “Peace begins on your plate” wrapped around it. She also carried a bag that read “Vegan for Life” on it.

Liz explained that she wears vegan t-shirts and buttons (typically a pin with a vegan related message on it) everywhere she goes and would even “wear a button to my parents’ funeral.” In this sense, Liz has created an identity for herself as a very public channel of information. By bringing vegan-related messages, and animal rights messages, into the public space she hopes to “plant seeds” among others, that may or may not lead to their ultimate conversion to veganism.

In her view, displays of vegan-related information, such as pro-vegan bumper stickers on her car, also have the power to “plant seeds” and in some cases spark a vegan conversion among people who see them. She relayed an anecdote of how a friend told her that she, and her family, decided to switch from vegetarianism to veganism after seeing a sticker on Liz’s car that reads: “milk comes from a grieving mother.”

2.1 (b) Exclusion as Protest

In contrast to what can be considered “presence as protest,” as described by Liz, is a behavior two of the publicly active vegans mentioned performing, which can be thought of as “exclusion as protest.” As used here, the term “exclusion as protest” refers to vegans choosing not to socialize with non-vegans or attend social, work, or family events where meat is served, based on their vegan principles. The two vegans who described doing this both identify strongly with the moral components of veganism.

“I know people have varying levels of tolerance for, you know, socializing, or you know, just being engaged with people who are not. I have, like, none because it’s like, I don’t, I can’t genuinely embrace people that are not vegan ‘cause it’s like being with Nazis, you know. That’s how differently we see the treatment of these animals. I don’t enjoy being with non-vegans, so I avoid it, except for some, like, superficial, there might be some common activity where I’ll tolerate being around people” [Margaret].

“I’m not going to participate in an event where I know human slavery took place. I’m not going to participate in an event where I know child labor took place. I mean, I just can’t...So whether or not it [not attending functions where meat is served] is alienating, it doesn’t really matter. I just, I mean, I can’t...it’s like physically impossible. It’s like I can’t do it without having kind of like a trauma response” [Karen].

2.2 Less Publicly Active Vegans

Among the sample there were vegans who did not take part in the public advocacy tactics mentioned in section 2.1 (n = 5), as well as those who had taken part in them, or volunteered for vegetarian organizations, in the past (n = 6). Two of these subjects had attended one public event each: a tabling event and a protest, respectively. Another subject sometimes took part in tabling events and said she had gone to some protests. Most of these vegans were still interested in sharing about veganism with others (but see *Section 2.3: No Desire to Promote*).

This type of sharing took various forms. One respondent, Robin, who claimed to have turned two whole families vegetarian, described supplying people with “PeTA propaganda” as well as introducing them to vegetarian restaurants. She sees importance in educating others about veganism, largely due to the *lack of knowledge* she perceives others to have about the meat industry, but emphasized that she tries “not to be militant” about it.

Another subject, Megan, takes part in an annual vegan bake sale, in which the funds raised are donated to a local sanctuary for farm animals. This has a dual role of helping disseminate vegan information and allows her to contribute financially to the sanctuary.

Rose, who teaches at a college, described offering food-related advice to some of her students, as well as raising awareness about refined foods, along with introducing students to the idea of veganism. This type of more subtle communication was common among interview subjects.

“I’ve turned a lot of people vegetarian and I’m working on turning them vegan. I’ve turned like whole families vegetarian; I’ve turned two whole families vegetarian” [Robin].

“Well, like I said, baked goods are a great way to people’s hearts and if people are eating a cupcake they’re more likely to listen, or pick up a piece of literature you have sitting on a table. It’s also, you know, I don’t have a lot of money so donating my baking skills and trying to turn that into money is more effective for me, I think...But I think it’s a good, passive-aggressive way to hand out literature, you know” [Megan].

“For instance, some of the ways I do it in class is when somebody will bring in something...I mean people talk about food all the time...They’ll have something and offer it to me [and I say] ‘no, I’m sorry I only eat real food’...
[student speaking] What do you mean?
[Rose speaking] That is not real food – what you just got out of the vending machine - not real food.
[student speaking] Well, what do you mean?
[Rose speaking] Then we talk about it a little and of course I’ll mention that I’m vegan and the first thing they say is ‘oh well I couldn’t give up my meat, uh-uh’ so I just kind of let that go. But it starts some discussions and then as the semesters go on it will come up here and there and more questions will be asked...” [Rose].

While anecdotes from all respondents are not included here, this section provides an overview of how vegans who do not take part in what would traditionally be seen as public advocacy still see value in promoting veganism, although this might be done in different ways.

2.3 Reluctance to Be Seen as Pushy

A reluctance to be seen as pushy was reported by 13 respondents. They were open to discussing veganism with others when approached about it, but tended to be wary of being

perceived as judgmental of others' lifestyles and choices. Two of the respondents, both of whom identified with the ethical aspects of veganism and had taken part in public advocacy efforts, commented on how individualism is prized in American culture, which makes people less likely to accept messages from those who try to force beliefs onto them.

“And, because, especially the way America is right now, people are really protective of their boundaries, and you know that, probably, from your friends: they can get really hostile, like ‘don’t tell me how to live man. Don’t tell me how to live’” [Jen].

“But it [food] feels like this really important choice that we’re making, for ourselves, and then it’s a personal issue: it has to do with your family and your tradition, and everything, and you don’t want other people telling you what to do. Of course, that in a larger sense is a very American concept. Like, don’t tell me what to do; I have the freedom of choice, like to eat whatever I want. I’ll kill whatever I want, and you know, so I think there’s a lot of pushback when people try to tell you what to do, in that way” [Megan].

Some of the vegans (n = 5) who were wary of being perceived as pushy claimed to have changed their tactics from when they were younger, or newer to veganism, and more aggressive in the way they promoted veganism or vegetarianism (since many of them had been vegetarian prior to going vegan). This was often framed as a function of gaining insights into how people do not like being judged, or told they are wrong, as well as a desire not to alienate others.

“Because I used to be a really strong proponent of being the activist part of being a vegan. And, I guess with age I’ve found that people do not like to be pushed into a corner...they don’t like for someone to show you, or to tell you, anything” [Jen].

“I like people to look at what I’m eating and ask the questions first, so I can be like, you know, this is why I do it, rather than me be like ‘hey man, you’re totally bumming me out, you know’” [Andrew].

“As time goes on, the more I’ve realized that, you know, there’s almost nothing black and white and most of it’s gray, and not only that: you know, you are not ever going to really change anybody unless they are ready” [Rose].

While the vegans who described changing their tactics when discussing veganism described being less forceful in their discussions of veganism, they still felt it was important for others to know about veganism.

“I don’t think it’s important to tell them about my veganism, but I do think it’s important for people to be informed about what they’re eating. So, you know, I definitely try to talk about veganism in that way” [Megan].

“You know, everyone’s protective of their own self, so, um, so now I approach it as sharing - sharing my story. And more people are interested in that aspect and how it’s changed my life – I mean it’s changed my life so much” [Jen].

“I choose to be vegan and I want to educate those around me that will never be vegan, but maybe they could be a one-day-a-week vegan. And, one, it will help their health, and two they might be able to inspire some of their friends to make better health choices for themselves” [Andrew].

“I’m not sure I would say I feel it’s a responsibility I have as a vegan, but I think from my, um, just kind of from the way I see the world in terms of, um, wanting to, um, you know, seek out truth, know truth, show truth, live a very compassionate lifestyle. Um, I feel a sense of responsibility from that place to share information about veganism...”[Sarah].

“I feel like people need to become aware. So, my idea, more, is I need to do it in modeling, so they need to see what I don’t eat, what I do eat” [Rose].

2.4. No Desire to Promote Veganism

While the vegans who had become less strident in their promotion of veganism were wary of being perceived as pushy by others, they still saw value in promoting veganism, albeit in more subtle ways than the publicly active vegans might. However, not all vegans in the sample expressed a desire to promote veganism. Such was the case with Dani, who while still consuming a vegan diet, can be viewed as in the process of transitioning away from veganism. This is largely due to her changing her perspective on what she feels can be considered humane treatment of animals, an assertion that veganism “seems extreme to most people,” as well as her

experience with vitamin deficiencies (discussed in *Section 1.2*). She did, however, claim to “try and raise awareness about the evils of factory farming.”

“I don’t think the world will ever be vegan - not just because people are resistant, but because a vegan diet isn’t healthy over the long term without supplementation, and I don’t think that exporting B12 pills and Omega 3 algae pills and fake bacon to people all over the world is either practical or desirable. We need to go back to sustainable, humane agriculture. That’s what I think is important to promote and raise awareness about. I think veganism can work for some people in some communities, but it will always be a chosen alternative lifestyle, like being car-free or polyamorous. People who will be successful vegans will be drawn to it. For the rest of the folks, promoting veganism is a waste of breath that could be more productively channeled toward harm reduction rather than all-or-nothing approaches” [Dani].

Summary of Section 2: Promoting Veganism and Spreading Knowledge

The preceding section addressed whether vegans think it is important to promote veganism, as well as their reasons for seeking to promote it or not. Publicly active vegans tend to be driven by a sense of responsibility to promote veganism and in some cases aim to orient much of their life work around that goal. Three of the publicly active vegans in this sample also highlighted how non-human animals are unable to advocate for themselves, which provides an impetus for them to advocate on the animals’ behalf.

While publicly active vegans promote veganism to strangers in public, it is also the case that they might impact those within their social networks, such as Simon claimed to have done by convincing his family to go vegan. At the same time, publicly active vegans, who feel very strongly about their moral rationale for pursuing veganism, might absent themselves from social gatherings where meat is served. This is manifest through “exclusion as protest.”

While it makes sense that publicly active vegans feel a strong desire to promote veganism, it should not be discounted that less publicly active vegans, or those who do not take part in public vegan advocacy, also think it is important to promote veganism. Those who do not

take part in public advocacy but seek to promote veganism within their social networks cite reasons such as *lack of knowledge* about the meat industry, as well as a desire to spread truth as reasons for seeking to promote veganism.

Some vegans might also seek to promote less meat-eating among friends, or educate others about the health benefits associated with a vegan diet, as well as raise awareness about food issues in general. Often times, those who do promote veganism in these ways are aware of not coming across as pushy in their efforts, largely due to the perception that individuals do not like having beliefs forced upon them, or being told how to behave.

In order to educate others about veganism, vegans, both publicly active and less so, can serve as resources and guides for those interested in veganism. This will be discussed in the following section with a focus on *R4: What information do vegans think is important to pass on in order to educate others about veganism?* and *R5: What methods do vegans use for disseminating this knowledge, online and offline?*

Section 3: Educating About Food

When it comes to informing others about veganism, food is one of the main areas respondents noted others need guidance, especially since shopping for, and preparing, vegan food can seem daunting to new vegans or those interested in veganism. Since this is the case, vegans might aim to inform others about the viability of buying, and preparing, vegan food, and in the process seek to normalize vegan food.

3.1 Food Guides

One subject in particular, John, discussed how he sought to break down a stereotype of vegan food as being “shitty and rubbery.” To do this, he explained how he would make sure to have vegan food available when he spent time with friends, since showing people that vegan food can taste good can open them up to eating vegetarian and vegan food. Additionally, he discussed his willingness to guide people who are interested in veganism in how to cook and bake, and where to source food.

John spoke about how he had taken a vegetarian acquaintance, who was interested in becoming vegan, shopping for food and in doing so sought to break down two other “misconceptions” about veganism: that it is difficult to be vegan and that it is expensive to eat a vegan diet. Likewise, Faith, a publicly active vegan, sought to do something similar through offering cooking classes.

“So, I guess, if I was to talk about my ‘vegan activism’ it would be much more in getting people to be open to eating vegetarian and vegan foods, rather than necessarily converting whole hog. If people happen to be interested in veganism, like I just met my friend’s girlfriend two months ago, and she’s vegetarian and is interested in going vegan but has no idea how... So I’ve been cooking with her and we’ve gone food shopping. So when someone comes to me with that I’m very, very happy to be like ‘it’s really not hard; it’s really not any more expensive.’ Those are two of the biggest misconceptions about going vegan” [John].

“But at this point, I just feel like I’m in this privileged position to have some effect in a way that I think needs being done. The stuff is available. Tofu, like you said: I mean you can go out and get the stuff around here but a lot of people don’t know what to do with it. They don’t know what to do. I always tell people I threw out, you know, I threw out I don’t know how much tofu before I actually cooked it. You know, I’d buy it, bring it home, and say ‘I’m going to cook it, I’m going to cook it,’ and I didn’t know what to do with it. So, what I want to do is make people comfortable with, you know, using it. So, in a class, a hands-on class, where we actually have hands on, make a few things...” [Faith].

In the process of guiding others in vegan cooking and shopping, vegans will also share recipes. Generally, these recipes are framed as easy to prepare, which ties into the way that vegans may seek to break down misconceptions others may hold about vegan food being difficult to source and prepare. This will be discussed in the following section.

3.2 Sharing Recipes

Since food is one of the prime cultural sites where vegan change takes place for individuals, it is not surprising that vegans might seek to promote veganism through sharing recipes with those within their social networks.

As discussed in the literature review, it has been found that vegans seek to normalize the vegan diet in online forums (Sneijder and Molder 2006). In a similar fashion, providing others with vegan recipes can engender a familiarity with preparing vegan food, as well as frame vegan food as easy to prepare, thus making it seem less out of the ordinary. In line with this notion, most of the respondents who discussed sharing recipes with friends and family (n = 6) described the recipes as easy to prepare.

“When I’m providing people with information I try to make it so they realize how easy it is – that it’s not difficult to get things. I’ll print out a bunch of recipes for my friends. When I’m cooking for my friends, potlucks or anything, everybody always wants the recipes. And I try to make stuff that’s real simple so they realize it’s not that hard” [Robin].

“The recipes [Rose passes onto friends through books] are very quick to do and wonderful. They taste incredible so I figure if I can get somebody to read some of these, and then start using the books from Tess [author] for cooking, I mean what better way to start than having recipes that are very quick, very easy, and taste absolutely wonderful, to get you to go ‘well this isn’t so bad maybe I’ll keep doing it’” [Rose].

“So I’ll send them [non-vegan friends invited to a vegan potluck at Megan’s house] recipes, or recipe ideas, and try to encourage them to make something vegan and come to the house and try a bunch of good vegan food...” [Megan].

Sharing recipes is one way to introduce non-vegans to vegan food and potentially break down the stereotype of vegan food as “shitty and rubbery,” as John put it. But it also emerged that food was used in other ways by both publicly active and less publicly active vegans. The following section will take a more in-depth look at the role of food in the promotion of veganism and focus on the potential food has for being a tool in making the vegan diet seem somewhat less unusual.

3.3 Food as a Tool

As John points out, there appears to be a stereotype about vegan food being bland. In support of this notion, some respondents (n = 3) relayed stories of how they would prepare vegan food for friends or work colleagues, and then reveal that the food was vegan after people had eaten it, since they expected there would be resistance to the food if those eating it knew it was vegan prior.

“Well, especially when I was in college ‘cause there were so few vegetarians on campus. I would cook stuff and I wouldn’t necessarily tell people it was vegan and they would eat it and be like ‘it’s great.’ I’d give them the recipe and mention, ‘oh by the way it’s vegan,’ which, you know, sounds a little weird. And they’d be like, ‘oh, no, no, I’d love to make it’” [John].

“I would bake stuff and bring it in [to the office]. For a while I was sort of ‘secretly vegan,’ but then I, eventually, was like ‘yeah, all this is vegan. Everything you’ve been eating is vegan’” [Ashley]⁹.

“Well, I learned that I have to tell them [work colleagues] it’s vegan after they eat it ‘cause otherwise they’re like ‘nah, it’s cool’” [Sarah].

In a similar way, but less surreptitiously, vegans might seek to normalize their food choices by providing vegan food for friends and others within their social networks. It might be

⁹ At this point, Ashley was working for a company that sells food products largely consisting of chicken, which she felt made it even more difficult to publicize that the food she prepared was vegan.

the case that a non-vegan's experience with the vegan food is relayed to others in his or her social network, which might indirectly serve to educate about vegan food.

“A friend of mine, he came over for New Year's eve and I made a meal that was vegan and he has told multiple people that, you know, I forgot she was vegan until I got there and I thought it was going to be gross but it was really good. Now, everyone is like [Bianca] cooks interesting and tasty vegan food that non-vegans like” [Bianca].

Megan married two methods when using food as tool. She described hosting potlucks at her house, mainly attended by non-vegans, where she would send recipes to those attending and “try to encourage them to make something vegan.” In this way vegan food is not only normalized through its consumption at a social gathering (potluck) but non-vegans are prompted to engage with vegan food at a personal level by preparing it, which can also serve to break down stereotypes about what vegans eat.

While vegans might work to normalize vegan food, directly and indirectly, for those within their social networks, publicly active vegans also see value in using vegan food in public advocacy efforts. The core site where food was used in public advocacy was during events, or situations, where vegans tabled. This typically involved setting up a table, from which advocates hand out vegan food samples and vegan literature. Based on the experiences of those involved in tabling, it emerged that: a) tabling was seen as more effective than leafleting (which involves a vegan advocate approaching people in public with a pro-vegan leaflet), since it requires people to come up to the table of their own accord, and b) offering people vegan food at tables was perceived to make it more likely they would take a brochure or leaflet. The role of food in public advocacy is captured in the following quotes:

“Food is almost always tied to my advocacy. It's very disarming for people to have something to eat, something tasty, while you're talking to them about, you

know, non-human animals, or speciesism¹⁰ [Zach].

“Baked goods are a great way to peoples’ hearts and if people are eating a cupcake they’re more likely to listen, or pick up a piece of literature you have sitting on a table” [Megan].

“I love tabling. I’ve tabled at many events... People can approach you, you know, you’re not coming after them. You can offer something to eat; you can offer cookbooks, brochures, whatever” [Faith].

“It’s nice to give them [some] good vegan food, just so they can taste and hopefully dispel some myth. But the main thing is to get literature in their hands. The combination of both: I like it better than just leafleting because [with] people coming over to you, they tend to...they feel obligated to take something” [Margaret].

With regards to the type of information that could be coupled with food to effectively communicate a vegan message in this type of scenario, Margaret emphasized that, in line with her view that concern over animal welfare is the “most compelling reason to become completely vegan and stay vegan,” information that makes people think about what animals go through in order to become food is vital. She also made clear that this information should shed light on all types of farming practices, including free-range farming, since so-called “humane farming” is still “horrific.” In a similar way that such literature can serve to advance the frame *animals are maltreated in the food production system*, as well as oppose the ability of others to be in a state of *denial* about how animals are treated in the process of becoming food, other texts including movies and books can do this too. The ways in which vegans use movies and books to spread vegan knowledge will be addressed in the following section.

¹⁰ The term “speciesism” refers to how humans tend to discriminate against animals due to “morally irrelevant physical differences” (Ryder 2005). As Francione (2000, xxix) explains: “species alone is not a morally relevant criterion for excluding animals from the moral community any more than race is a justification for human slavery or sex a justification for making women the property of their husbands.”

Section 4: Sharing Texts

As discussed in the literature review, vegetarians and vegans cite movies and books that detail the *maltreatment of animals in the food production system* as playing a role in their conversion to vegetarianism or veganism (Jabs, Devine, and Sobal 1998; McDonald 2000). At the same time, it has been found that vegans commonly disseminate “literature on animal cruelty” in order to educate others about veganism (McDonald 2000, 14).

In order to answer *R4: What information do vegans think is important to pass on in order to educate others about veganism?* this section outlines the type of information vegans might disseminate through recommending films and books to others, both within and outside of their social networks.

4.1 a) Movies and Sharing Within Social Networks

Films like *Earthlings* (2005), which is touted as a “vegan maker” by its producers (Nation Earth online, N.D.), and other films that depict slaughterhouse scenes, as well as scenes from the fur trade, medical laboratories, and other industries that use animals, can be particularly harrowing to watch, but some respondents (n = 6) saw value in sharing films that show what happens to animals at human hands.

Two respondents who had been touched by films exposing conditions at factory farms in their own vegan learning, noted that although they do not watch explicit films highlighting violence against animals anymore, they thought it was important for others to see this type of footage. Another respondent noted that people need to be ready to witness such footage. He emphasized that if someone is ready such a film might prompt him/her to give up more animal products or pursue a stricter adherence to veganism.

“You know, I don’t watch that shit anymore because I’m so fucking traumatized by what I saw, and it’s, you know, I don’t need to see it. But I think it’s important for people to see” [Amy].

“...after I decided to go vegan I stopped watching any of those documentaries because I felt like they had already reached me and it wasn’t worth, like, torturing myself you know. But then I wanted my friends and family to see them, so then it was hard to be like, ‘go watch this thing even though I haven’t seen it and I don’t want to watch it’” [Megan].

“They need to be ready, I think, to really want to change. And then, um, I don’t know...if they are ready I think seeing slaughterhouse images is actually really positive. Like *Peaceable Kingdom*¹¹ or *Earthlings*...and it’s very intense. But I think when people see that they could make a connection. But I think they have to have some readiness, or some understanding before...My ex-girlfriend she was wearing leather and being vegan, like in her diet, but she was still holding onto leather. But after watching *Earthlings* she got rid of all her leather. She donated it all – everything. So that’s powerful” [Daniel].

At the same time, some subjects voiced concerns about how films that depict graphic violence perpetrated against animals have the potential to fetishize violence without actually portraying a vegan message. Also, some subjects noted that due to the explicit nature of some films people might choose not to watch them at all, or simply be attracted to the violent aspects of the films.

“So, *Earthlings* is, and other films like that, it’s kind of weird because it’s like entrancing, in a weird Hollywood-influenced way. It’s almost, ‘it’s disgusting but I don’t want to turn away.’ And for the people who are affected by *Earthlings*, and who are affected by the violence and want to make a change, um, those people we can reach by other means, probably, anyway. So, uh, I don’t think that the gory videos are necessary. If somebody wants to use ‘em I just urge them to precede and follow it by a clear unequivocal message [that veganism is the least we owe non-human animals and we should be vegan for the same reason we’re not cannibals]” [Zach].

¹¹ *Peaceable Kingdom* (film). 2010. Directed by Jenny Stein. Ithaca, NY: Tribe of Heart.

“You know, I post [on Facebook] some of the aggressive ones [films], because I think people are enticed about that. In our society, um, people like the shock factor, you know. They like the gloom. So, if you put that out there on Facebook, I think more people are attracted to that thing, to want to click on it, and look at it. Now, the absorption factor is the key. When it comes to looking at that video, are they immediately turned off and turn off the video? Or are they intrigued and want to watch the video to educate themselves? And I think at first people are more intrigued about the gore factor and the shock, and you have a certain percentage who, you know, gravitate towards ‘hey this is educational, I want to learn from this,’ and other people just want to watch the bloody massacre, and go about eating their chickens. You know what I’m saying?” [Andrew].

Regarding the types of films that might educate others about veganism, two respondents cited films that do not promote veganism directly, and have little or no focus on the frame *animals are maltreated in the food production system*. These include *Forks Over Knives* (2011) and *Food Inc.* (2008).

“When people just get more knowledge... Like I said, I have two whole families that I’ve converted to vegetarianism and I’m working on veganism with them...and one grew up on a farm...they’re not my blood sisters, but two of my sisters, yeah, and their families...I just have them watch *Forks Over Knives*, watch *Food Inc.*, that helps too” [Robin].

“I try to encourage people; I try to encourage people to...if I know somebody will never watch *Earthlings* then I would definitely tell them ‘oh, you should watch *Forks Over Knives*.’ It’s so much more palatable – it’s very palatable for somebody totally mainstream” [Karen].

What emerges from the perspectives of vegans who might share films with people within their social networks is that they hold different views on the effectiveness of documentary films, as well as the content of the films in educating others about veganism. While graphic footage of animal abuse, such as that depicted in *Earthlings*, can be perceived as important for people to see, it might also be the case that such films do not actually prompt people to pursue veganism. However, as McDonald (2000) notes, such films might “orient” people to learn more about vegetarianism or veganism.

At the same time, people might simply not watch harrowing films and therefore fail to be exposed to the frame *animals are maltreated in the food production system*. Individual vegans are aware of this, and, like Robin and Karen, may recommend films that focus more on the health benefits of following a plant-based diet, such as *Forks Over Knives* (2011), which could serve to attract people to a plant-based diet based on concerns about their own wellbeing, as opposed to broader philosophical and moral concerns.

4.1 b) Movies and Public Advocacy

In a similar way that publicly active vegans rely on vegan literature in their advocacy efforts, these vegans might also use films in their outreach. Two publicly active vegans discussed using films during public outreach, although the content of the films differed.

In one instance, Liz discussed using a film that depicts the maltreatment of circus animals at the hands of their trainers during a protest outside a circus. While this is not strictly vegan activism, but rather animal rights activism, more broadly, the example is included here because Liz engages in myriad forms of activism for animals which ties into her vegan identity. The goal of screening the film was to bring evidence into the public domain that might prompt people to think about what happens “behind the scenes” at the circus.

As she explained: “I don’t really want to upset children – that’s not something that is my goal to do, but I think kids really get it when they see things like that. And they don’t have a reason to think about what goes on behind the scenes. They think the animals look happy because the animals are happy; they don’t realize the animals wouldn’t be doing that if they weren’t abused somehow.”

Liz is a publicly active vegan who feels strongly about her role in raising awareness

about veganism. In a sense, through her advocacy work she functions to diminish others' *lack of knowledge* about animal abuse and, in publicly disseminating information about the abuse of animals at a circus, for instance, works to oppose others' ability to be in *denial of truth*, (both of which are discussed in *Section 1: Framing the Message*). Regarding the efficacy of screening such a film, she reported that people ("entire families") had left the circus after witnessing the protest.

Zach also made use of films in his public vegan advocacy. As addressed in the previous section, he was less convinced about the utility of violent films like *Earthlings* in promoting the idea of an Abolitionist Approach to vegan understanding. During screenings at a local university campus, he chose to show a short "non-graphic, non-violent" video about veganism, which he followed with a talk about veganism, speciesism and "what we owe other animals." Food was also provided at these screenings. In this instance, the film plays an informational role but does not rely on displaying animal cruelty and abuse to promote the vegan message.

As reported by the subjects, when sharing films within social networks, as well as screening films in public, it is not always the case that films focus on the frame *animals are maltreated in the food production system*, which is the frame chiefly linked to the potential to create a "moral shock" among an audience. In some cases, films highlight other frames associated with veganism. Such is the case with *Forks Over Knives*, which focuses on the frame *a vegan diet is healthy*, although this diet is actually termed a "whole foods, plant-based diet" in the film.

Likewise, *Food Inc.* does not advocate for veganism but rather exposes the role of multinational corporations in controlling the modern agricultural food system. It serves to prompt consumers to take a more active role in thinking about their food choices and food-

buying. Since such texts do not advocate directly for veganism they can be viewed as “gateway texts” that explore some of the themes associated with veganism.

In a similar way that vegans might share films with others, subjects reported sharing various books with people who were potentially interested in veganism. As with films, it is not always the case that these books advocate for full-blown veganism, as will be discussed in the following section.

4.2 Sharing Books

As discussed in *Section 1: Framing the Message*, there are various frames associated with veganism and individuals’ reasons for pursuing the lifestyle. Contemporary books that focus on veganism, or vegetarianism, might incorporate all or some of these frames. In recommending books to others, it appears vegan may make some type of judgment as to which frames might resonate with the person they are recommending the book to. This is something Megan and Rose discussed.

Megan spoke about how different books have the potential to connect with different people, while Rose, who focused largely on the health benefits associated with veganism during our discussion, explained how scientific evidence related to the health benefits of following a vegan diet could be more difficult for people to deny than accounts of *how animals are maltreated in the food production system*.

“Of course, a lot of people in Boulder are interested in personal health, um, and nutrition and stuff. So, you know, and staying fit – if I’m talking to somebody like that, you know, there are those books like *Skinny Bitch* that are really popular and talk mostly about personal health and, you know, staying fit and stuff. There’s a book called *Thrive*¹² that’s for vegan athletes that I recommend a lot. If people are

¹² Brazier, B. 2007. *Thrive: The Vegan Nutrition Guide to Optimal Performance in Sports and Life*. Canada: Penguin Press.

more into, like, storytelling and they usually read novels and stuff, then I recommend *Eating Animals*¹³ by Jonathan Safran Foer because I really enjoyed that one. I thought it was really, really, well written and not information dense like in a kind of statistical way. But, if people are more into that, then I'll recommend the *China Study*¹⁴, you know if they want to see graphs and data. I think there are books for everyone no matter where it seems that they're leaning" [Megan].

"Yeah, something like *Eating Animals*, which is a really great book too... there can still be such a resistance: 'well, he just went to the worst places, it's not really usually like that.' It's so easy to deny in so many ways, whereas I think *The China Study* is so hard to deny because it's decades of medical research that people are always wanting, and believe in, and it's a lot harder to push that aside and say 'no, no can't be,' I think" [Rose].

At the same time, vegans might recommend books that have had profound impacts on them, or most clearly convey the way in which they understand veganism. Such was the case for Amy and Jen. A longtime animal rights and vegan advocate, who sees veganism as the "ultimate social justice movement," Amy cited a book that frames veganism as an "imperative" (Tuttle 2005, 3737), and incorporates all the frames detailed in *Section 1: Framing the Message*, as a key text.

Likewise, Jen cited a book she said "spoke right to my soul when he [author John Robbins] talked about the animals and the abuse of the animals and the fact that vegetarianism is the conscious way to go and the best thing you can do for your planet."

"You absolutely have to get it [*The World Peace Diet*¹⁵]. It's the number one book I recommend for people, and this would give you a lot of insight into what you just brought up [how veganism can be considered to be about human responsibility]" [Amy].

"I gave my son \$100 to read John Robbins' book [*Diet for a New America*¹⁶]. I said, 'when you're done I'll write you a check for \$100.' He is 33...and he read it

¹³ Safran Foer, 2009. *Eating Animals*. New York: Little Brown and Company Hachette Book Group.

¹⁴ Campbell, T.C. and Campbell, II, T.M. 2004. *The China Study*. Dallas, TX: BenBella Books.

¹⁵ Tuttle, Will. 2005. *The World Peace Diet: Eating for Spiritual Health and Social Harmony*. New York: Lantern Books.

¹⁶ Robbins, John. 1987. *Diet for a New America*. Tiburon, CA: HJ Kramer Inc.

when he was 25. He is not totally off meat, but he totally looks at food differently now. And I'm so proud of him; he and his girlfriend eat so well. Once in a while they go out... he will never eat beef, but you know it worked for him. And I've given this book as gifts before, but you have to give it to the right person and they have to be – I think if they're an animal rights person and they really care about animals they will read it 'cause I think he has a real gentle approach to it, and I admire the way he wrote the book. And the fact that it's all footnoted in the back – it isn't like he's making up" [Jen].

In the context of communicating about veganism, what emerges from the insights given by Megan, Rose, Amy, and Jen is that in recommending books that highlight different aspects of veganism, individual vegans might seek to prompt a connection to veganism among readers that hinges on different individual concerns and understandings about what is right for animals, humans, or the planet. It also appears that there is a perception that some people might be more ready to accept certain types of knowledge associated with veganism than others, as well as an emphasis on the “factual” nature of material that makes a strong case for veganism.

Summary of Section 3: Educating About Food and Section 4: Sharing Texts

The preceding section highlighted the ways in which vegans might seek to promote veganism in public spaces, as well as in interpersonal communications with friends, family, and colleagues through using *food as a tool*, as well as disseminating vegan-related literature, books, and movies. It focused on the ways in which vegans disseminate vegan knowledge and information as well as the type of knowledge and information vegans typically pass onto others.

Since food is the prime site where vegans deviate from cultural norms, it is not surprising that vegans tend to communicate about and through food. In fact, vegans, both publicly active and less-publicly active, might use *food as a tool* in their communication efforts. Through interactions within their social networks, vegans can normalize vegan food through

preparing food for friends, family members, and work colleagues. At the same time, they might act as guides for those interested in veganism by taking people shopping for vegan food or sharing recipes. Typically, when gauging the efficacy of these efforts, vegans see it as important that these recipes are easy and produce food that tastes good. This serves to normalize the food as well as break down perceived stereotypes others may hold about vegan food being difficult to prepare and tasteless.

While food plays an important role in communicating about veganism with those within vegans' social networks, publicly active vegans also make use of food in public advocacy efforts. This serves a dual role of introducing non-vegans to vegan food, and facilitating the dissemination of vegan literature and knowledge.

With respect to disseminating vegan knowledge, or advancing the frames associated with veganism (outlined in *Section 1: Framing the Message*), vegans may also share movies and books with those within their social networks. As discussed by respondents, there are varying opinions on the efficacy of films that explicitly document how *animals are maltreated in the food production system*. While some vegans see value in these films, and note that they have the potential to prompt people to give up more animal products, others caution that they have the capacity to fetishize violence and, in some cases, attract people due to their goriness without actually promoting veganism. At the same time, it is understood that others might not watch such films, specifically because they are put off by the violence.

In order to promote veganism through a different lens, vegans might suggest films that focus mostly on the frame *a vegan diet is healthy*, or that highlight other frames associated with veganism without promoting it specifically. In a similar fashion, vegans might disseminate books that emphasize all the frames detailed in *Section 1: Framing the Message*, or highlight

only some of them.

Continuing with an exploration of *R4: What information do vegans think is important to pass on in order to educate others about veganism?* and *R5: What methods do vegans use for disseminating this knowledge, online and offline?* the following section will address the ways in which vegans promote or share about veganism in their online interactions, and will also focus on the types of information that is shared online.

Section 5: Sharing and Informing Online

The internet and its associated platforms for rapidly sharing information online has engendered what Castells (2007, 248) refers to as an era of “mass self-communication.” This allows social movements and their actors to “confront the institutions of society in their own terms and around their own projects” (ibid.). Like other social movement actors, vegans make use of the internet to spread vegan information.

Since social networking tools like Facebook and Twitter allow for a wide arrangement of “friends” or “followers” it is not the case that vegans share vegan information solely with other vegans online. Instead, vegans share information that can be viewed by non-vegans in their online networks too. Since this is the case, it is useful to understand what type of vegan-related information vegans post online, as well as how they gauge the responses of non-vegans to this information. This will be addressed in the following sections.

5.1 Social Media and Information Sharing

When queried about whether they use social media tools to share vegan-related information, 15 of the subjects reported doing so. The level of activity and commitment to online

information sharing varied, with some respondents making more use of online platforms than others. The following section will address the type of information shared, as well as subjects' insights into the role of the internet in helping spread vegan-related information.

As might be anticipated, due its popularity, Facebook, which is used monthly by 845 million people worldwide (Facebook 2012 Fact Sheet), was seen as a valuable tool for those seeking to share information online. Amy and Zach, both of whom are involved in public vegan advocacy, view it as a powerful tool for advocacy, chiefly due to the scope of recipients their messages have the potential to reach.

“Facebook has been very useful because the amount of people we can reach is really quite extraordinary” [Zach].

“You know, an undercover video could go out to millions of people within minutes; we never had that kind of power before” [Amy].

As noted, Amy and Zach work to raise vegan awareness through public advocacy in the physical world. Both of them use Facebook to raise awareness about veganism online too, which is congruent with the role they assume as vegan advocates/activists¹⁷ offline. Essentially, their online advocacy is an extension of their offline work. Both of them take an active role in spreading vegan information through online channels. Amy maintains an email list service for local vegans, which keeps subscribers informed of local vegan social events, talks, conferences and opportunities for public outreach, as well other vegan related happenings. Zach, meanwhile, works as a moderator on various vegan forums, online, and creates vegan podcasts for broadcast. They both see the internet as invaluable to their work.

“That’s [tabling on the university campus] valuable, you know. Making the word vegan a part of the campus conversation. Um, but in terms of the amount of information that you can share and the speed with which you can share it: the internet, I mean it’s a very

¹⁷ Amy refers to herself as an activist, while Zach prefers the term advocate.

valuable resource. You know, you're not limited to a five-minute interaction at a table; you can post a link and then somebody can read an essay. Then they can read another one and another one. You know, you can share a video and then somebody goes back and watches the original website and sees all the information there. So, um, there's a more thorough educational opportunity online that I value, because I'm a writer and I'm not really a talker" [Zach].

"...I think social media is monumental for why there is an upswing in vegan awareness. And I was not even into Facebook until a year and a half ago when a client asked me to manage their Facebook page...I think it is incredible, and I think every activist should have a lot of, whether it's Facebook or Twitter or MySpace, whatever it is, all activists should have it...I have connections that, you know, friended me that are not vegan and they are bombarded by my posts...Not bombarded, I'm really good about it, I'm very strategic about how often I post. But I get people on a weekly, monthly, basis that are not vegan but 'all right, you know, I'm going to try it out for three weeks' – or 'I read your post, I can't deny it anymore.' It's just an incredible, it's like you're putting it out there but they get to read it, and it plants a seed. It's incredible. So, I'm all over social media" [Amy].

Other vegans in the sample, publicly active and less so, also use Facebook to disseminate vegan-related information. Those who reported using Facebook shared different types of information, ranging from links to videos about factory farming to recipes and pictures of food. While the nature of what vegans might post on their Facebook pages varied, Facebook was seen by some (n = 5) as a space to post material that could spread knowledge about how animals are *maltreated in the food production system*. The chief way this was done was to post links to videos about animal maltreatment, or photos of animal maltreatment at the hands of humans. While Facebook was seen as a valuable tool for disseminating this type of information, it emerged that those who engage in this sort of sharing are aware of how those within the poster's online social network might not be responsive to information that is too gory in nature.

"I try not to be too graphic although I think some people need to see very graphic things in order to change but I do want people to want to be around my page, and so I try not to be too graphic with it" [Liz].

"I do [post on Facebook]; I try not to get too intense about it because I think

people just start ignoring me, but I do” [Simon].

Due to the interactive nature of Facebook, it was also seen as a space to elicit reactions from those within the poster’s online social network to the material posted, or at least prompt them to engage with the material posted.

“I’m not totally obnoxious, but I try to post, like, provocative. So I posted a photo of a mama pig in a gestation crate, with all her babies nursing on her through bars, and I have a lot of friends that post about their favorite bacon dish. So I just said, I can’t remember for this one specifically, but something about this is where your bacon comes from” [Amy].

“You know, I post some of the aggressive ones [videos] because I think people are enticed by that. They like the gloom. So, if you put that out there on Facebook I think more people are attracted to that thing, to want to click on it, and look at it” [Andrew].

While Facebook was viewed as a site to disseminate knowledge that advances the frame *animals are maltreated in the food production system*, it was also used by two respondents to share information about the health aspects of veganism, which could serve to advance the frame *a vegan diet is healthy*. This was particularly the case where respondents chose to share links to articles written by medical professionals.

Such was the case with Simon, who discussed sharing links to some of Dr. Greger’s¹⁸ articles, which he sees value in because they are thoroughly researched, “so scientific,” and contain links to the facts cited in them. Simon also noted that the articles speak to health concerns, which he described as “selfish concerns.” This, he thought, made it more likely that people would care about them. Jen, meanwhile, explained that she uses her Facebook account to share articles that have “anything to do with food intake.” Jen did not share vegan-related

¹⁸ Greger is a physician who specializes in clinical nutrition. He is the director of Public Health and Animal Agriculture at the US Humane Society.

information exclusively, but since she is concerned about diet, nutrition, and food issues in general, chooses to spread information about genetically modified foods, organic foods, additives such as corn syrup, and the artificial sweetener aspartame. In this sense, her online sharing about veganism fits into a broader identity as someone who cares about food issues.

“I put up this article recently by Dr. Greger about dioxin in meat and, you know, it’s an industrial toxin and basically the government is trying to regulate dioxin levels, how much a person is able to actually, how much dioxin a person can actually take, and now the meat industry is freaking out because they think these regulations will make them unable to provide meat for people and stuff. That’s kind of a scary thing, you know, and I put something like that up and people listen, you know, people pay attention to it, kind of. I don’t know if they listen enough to actually change anything but they listen enough to share it with their friends or something like that” [Simon].

“[I’ll share] anything about buying organic, anything about GMOs. Um, anything that has to do with food intake. Sometimes I share something – it might come through the top 10 best foods you can have. I might share that, but I’ll say ‘are you kidding me? Do you know this has corn syrup in it?’ And I’ll put that as a question mark because it might be on AOL that they have these little snippets about the best foods you can consume that are high-energy or whatever. And it’s, like, you know if you read this article – I hope that you are also reading the ingredients of what’s in these foods. Because it’s pure crap and if you don’t know what it is – if you don’t know what that thing is that’s in your food, then you should not buy it” [Jen].

Of course, food issues are important to vegans, in general, since food, and eating, is the primary cultural site around which vegans’ differences are pronounced. As discussed in *Section 3.3: Food as a Tool* vegans may use *food as a tool* for breaking down stereotypes about what vegans eat and showing others that the food is tasty and not difficult to prepare. This happens online too. For instance, mirroring his role as a food guide offline, John spoke of offering advice through an online forum to new vegans on what ingredients to use in their cooking. Others discussed posting pictures of food they had prepared on their Facebook pages or blogs, although this was not always something they did frequently.

“I don’t post there as much [as in the past]. But usually, when there are new vegan

questions: every now and then I'll log on and be like 'oh you know these make really good egg replacers.' So, egg replacers are really, really hard to find. A lot of people use strange things for egg replacers, like they'll use a banana in something that you really shouldn't use a banana in. I'm very into the food science of things: egg replacers, dairy replacers, and there are some nut milks that work better than non-dairy milks for different baked goods and different egg replacers. So I'm very into providing information on that online" [John].

"I mean, I'll take pictures of a really nice meal I make up and post it, and I'll get a lot of response on that...when it's the response on like 'save the animals because of this' or 'eat this way because you're helping the environment, helping the animals,' I don't get that much response. But, when it's a nice looking presentation on some juicy looking meal, I get a lot of response on that. People are just like really impressed that, because they know they can go to the supermarket and get a steak and baked potato; come home, and that's easy...they don't know how to go get some quinoa and make up a really nice, healthy, nutritious salad and it would take just as much time and maybe give 'em even more protein than that hunk of meat - way more health benefits. But a lot of people just don't know that information" [Andrew].

"Like I said, it's as much therapy for me to just say [on a blog] 'wow, look what we made this morning; this was so easy...'" [Faith]

"A lot of the time you go on these things and people are posting every day. I don't have the commitment, time, to do it everyday. I do it here and there. Or I'll post a picture of something I made on a food blog or something..." [Bianca]

Only one respondent made use of micro-blogging tool Twitter to circulate vegan-related information online. While an isolated case, her efforts are detailed here since they provide an example of how an individual vegan can introduce those within a digital social network to veganism, even if they are not primarily connected to the vegan through a vegan network.

For Karen, Twitter offers a platform to share with vegans and non-vegans in a way that could get people interested in aspects of veganism they might be less connected to, or prompt non-vegans to learn something about veganism. She spoke about re-tweeting links to a blog that connects veganism to other social justice issues. This, she hoped, might resonate with vegans who are more interested in the health aspects of veganism and prompt them to explore the

philosophical underpinnings of veganism. Likewise, since it is not the case that all of those who follow her Twitter feed are vegans, Karen sees potential for her tweets to introduce non-vegans to vegan-related information. A poet and musician, she has followers who follow her Twitter feed due to their interest in poetry and music. Such followers are part of her online social network, and “extramovement network” but would be considered as outside of the vegan network. However, if they choose to follow a link they will be exposed to the vegan-related information she disseminates.

As she explained, “I like to get the message out to people; if I have people on there who are just interested in poetry or music, but they’ve never been introduced to vegans then it’s like ‘oh, vegans are caring about health and environmental stuff too.’”

While Karen uses Twitter to connect veganism with larger social justice issues and also to potentially introduce non-vegan followers to vegan concepts related to health and environmental issues, she also re-tweets tweets from hip-hop icon Russell Simmons, cofounder of record label Def Jam. Simmons is a vegan, and in 2011 was voted PeTA’s “Person of the Year” (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer* 2011). Re-tweeting or re-posting links to material disseminated by celebrity vegans is another strategy vegans might use to promote the lifestyle and ties into the concept of “social association” (Leary 1995), which can take place when people share links online to others who espouse similar beliefs and viewpoints, as Dominick (1999) suggests.

Summary of Section 5: Sharing and Informing Online

This section has outlined the type of information vegans choose to share online, through social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, as well as via blogs. According to two of the publicly active vegans in this sample, Facebook is valuable for spreading vegan information

largely due to the number of recipients it enables their messages to reach. They both saw the online environment, in general, as valuable in the same regard.

Vegans, publicly active and less so, who use Facebook to share vegan-related information tend to post an assortment of content. Sometimes this content advances the frame *animals are maltreated in the food production system*. Others reported sharing information associated with the frame *a vegan diet is healthy*. The word “associated” is used here, since both respondents who reported sharing this sort of information online posted material that had to do with food issues in general, as opposed to being strictly vegan-oriented.

In a similar way that vegans seek to promote and normalize vegan food offline, some respondents reported posting pictures of vegan food they had prepared on their Facebook pages, as well as on blogs. This, seemingly, also contributes to advertising a vegan identity online. Mirroring his role as a *food guide* offline, one respondent described how he would offer food-related advice to new vegans via online forums.

Just one respondent reported using micro-blogging tool Twitter to spread vegan information. However, her efforts are of interest since they provide an insight into how vegans might introduce those within an online social network to veganism, as well as how vegans can disseminate, or re-publish, the messages of “celebrity” vegans in order to promote veganism.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on the notion that individual vegans can play a role in introducing others to veganism, and disseminating knowledge that might prompt others to explore the lifestyle, this research project set out to understand whether vegans seek to promote veganism and how they go about doing so. This is useful if we conceive of veganism as a new social movement or cultural movement that measures its success largely in the form of “cultural and lifestyle changes” among adherents (Cherry 2006. 156). If individual vegans do play a role in promoting the lifestyle then they have the potential to recruit new members and increase the movement’s ranks.

This research could be of interest to scholars of other movements that focus on cultural, and individual, change as one of the determinants of their success since it addressed the ways in which movement members communicate about the movement with others outside the movement. However, veganism is somewhat different to other cultural movements particularly since vegans pronounce their identities and philosophies based largely on what they choose, and do not choose, to eat.

In studying movements such as the ethical vegetarian and ethical vegan movement, Malesh (2005, 47) maintains that scholars consider the “dialectic between individuals that takes place in less- or non-public arenas as movement activity.” Indeed, when it comes to researching veganism, this dialectic includes activities such as offering food-related advice to those interested in veganism, as well as guiding others in how to source and prepare vegan food. While such actions seem somewhat benign compared to the direct actions taken by some social

movements, they play a role in spreading veganism by normalizing what vegans eat and introducing others to a mode of eating that challenges cultural norms that pertain to food. At the same time, individual vegans can disseminate information, through texts such as movies and books, that can serve to advance some of the knowledge frames described in *Section 1: Framing the Message*. Additionally, disseminating vegan-related information can take place through online channels, as is the case with other social movements.

In order to understand how engaged vegans are in promoting the lifestyle, and how they seek to do so, this research project set out to answer five research questions. These include: *R1: How do vegans frame the knowledge that informs their reasons for being vegan? R2: Do vegans choose to promote veganism or share about the lifestyle with others? R3: Why, if so, do vegans think it is important to communicate about veganism? R4: What information do vegans think is important to pass on in order to educate others about veganism? R5: What methods do vegans use for disseminating this knowledge, online and offline?* The findings related to each of these research questions are discussed below.

R 1: How do vegans frame the knowledge that informs their reasons for being vegan?

As detailed in *Section 1: Framing the Message*, there are various frames vegans rely on when speaking about their reasons for being vegan. These include: *animals are maltreated in the food production system; a vegan diet is healthy; veganism offers a solution to other global issues*, including environmental degradation and violence in general; and *normative frames* about how *veganism is a moral baseline for human behavior* and a *predetermined way of being*.

However, it must not be assumed that all vegans associate with all of these frames. Some vegans may rely more heavily on certain frames than others when discussing their veganism,

which can be a function of the reasons the individual chose to become vegan, or is based on elements of veganism that are pertinent to other areas of the vegan's identity, such as a commitment to social justice issues or a certain religion, for instance. Particularly, the notion that veganism is a moral baseline for human behavior is typically associated with an Abolitionist Approach to veganism.

As illustrated in the findings presented here, and congruent with understandings of what veganism entails, the frame *animals are maltreated in the food production system* was referenced most often by respondents (n = 18). This was followed by *a vegan diet is healthy* (n = 15) and *animal agriculture's contribution to environmental degradation* (n = 11).

A smaller number of respondents (n = 5) made reference to veganism's *capacity to alleviate other social ills*. This frame was predominantly based on the premise that the violence humans perpetrate against animals in order to eat them translates to overall levels of human-to-human violence in the world.

With regards to framing veganism in normative terms, two respondents, both of whom are active in publicly promoting veganism, made claims about how veganism is essentially a *moral baseline for human behavior* that can be tied into a larger ethical framework of how people ought to behave. Incorporated with the normative framing of veganism, a small portion of respondents made claims about how *veganism is a predetermined way of being*, based on either spiritual (n = 1) or biological (n = 3) grounds.

What becomes evident is that vegans generally hold a pool of constructed knowledge, imbued with meaning, which is sometimes linked to beliefs about the way things ought to be, or the way in which humans should best treat non-human animals and each other. This knowledge is largely antithetical to the dominant cultural paradigm, which can be viewed as "carnist" in

nature, in which humans consume certain types of animals and the products they produce (Joy 2009).

As discussed in *Section 1.5: Perceived Resistance to Veganism*, some vegans perceive non-vegans as being resistant to veganism, chiefly due to a *lack of knowledge* about the way in which animals are maltreated in the food production system, as well as in entertainment industries, or the availability of vegan food. There is also a perception that non-vegans are in a state of *denial* about the machinations of the meat, dairy, and egg industries, because doing so allows them to eat what they are accustomed to eating without having to question the realities of the modern agricultural system.

At the same time, vegans may frame large agricultural industries, including the meat and dairy industries as having a hand in controlling what is considered “normal” in modern society, which includes the consumption of animals and the things they produce. This is congruent with what Snow and Benford (2000) refer to as “diagnostic framing,” which entails movement members defining a problem and apportioning blame to those deemed responsible for it.

R2: Do vegans choose to promote veganism or share about the lifestyle with others? and

R3: Why, if so, do vegans think it is important to communicate about veganism?

Since vegans may perceive others to be unaware of the *maltreatment of animals in the food production system* as well in *denial* of other aspects of animal agriculture, such as its contribution to environmental degradation, then it is valuable to understand if, and how, vegans might seek to disseminate information that educates others about the “truth” and promotes veganism as an alternative way of living and consuming.

As some respondents (n = 4) discussed, vegans might engage in self-censoring their own truths about the *maltreatment of animals in the food production system* in certain situations, largely due to an unwillingness to derail social events with non-vegans. Additionally, vegans may be aware of a perceived stereotype others hold about vegans. Namely, that they are “obnoxious and pushy,” as one respondent in this study referred to it. In line with this awareness, there is also a perception among some vegans that impinging on others’ personal boundaries by “forcing” vegan beliefs onto them is not conducive to promoting veganism, especially due to the way in which individualism and the idea of freedom of choice is prized in American culture.

Based on the findings in this study, it appears there is a range of comfort levels vegans have about how they advertise and promote their veganism. This is similar to Cherry’s (2003) findings about how some vegans tend to be more “militant” than others. Unlike Cherry’s research, this study did not focus on vegans who identify with a specific subculture, like punks. It did, however, incorporate subjects defined here as “publicly active vegans,” who take part in a range of public vegan advocacy efforts including demonstrations, public leafleting, tabling, giving talks about veganism to university students, volunteering for vegan student groups, and hosting vegan cooking classes.

In most cases these publicly active vegans feel a degree of responsibility to promote veganism. It is an important part of what they do with their lives. Some of them (n = 3) reported being driven to advocate for animals since animals are unable to advocate for themselves. This is congruent with the conception that those who campaign for the rights of others, such as vegans and animal rights activists, advocate for societal changes that do not benefit them directly. Instead, they aim to “realize a moral vision” (Jasper 1997, 9).

While those who engage in public advocacy efforts enact their moral protest through being present, whether tabling in public, leafleting at events, or giving talks at university campuses, others will also employ a tactic that is referred to as “exclusion as protest” in this study. This involves absenting one’s self from social events where meat is served, or disconnecting from non-vegans within a vegan’s interpersonal network, due to one’s vegan principles. Both the vegans who reported doing this were also publicly active vegans and strongly identified with the ethical impetus, and in one case spiritual impetus, to pursue veganism.

While it was expected that the publicly active vegans would emphasize the importance of promoting veganism, it was found that most of the sample (n = 18) expressed a degree of commitment to promoting veganism. However this commitment varied. The promotion of veganism was not always a direct tactic, such as leafleting in public, but could take a more nuanced, personal, and less confrontational form, such as cooking a vegan meal for friends, sharing vegan recipes online via Facebook, or discussing the viability of vegan food choices with friends.

The reasons less publicly active vegans provided for seeing an importance in promoting veganism tended to focus on guiding family members and others within their extramovement networks toward healthier ways of eating as well as showing “truth,” as one respondent referred to it. One respondent emphasized how he worked to ameliorate stereotypes others might have about vegans and vegan food.

While publicly active vegans seek to spread vegan information to those outside their extramovement networks (strangers in public spaces), as well as those within their extramovement networks (friends, acquaintances, and family members, including those within

online networks), less publicly active vegans, some of whom have not taken part in public advocacy actions at all, generally tend to share vegan information with people within their extramovement networks. Doing so may have the potential to recruit new vegans, based on the premise that people outside a social movement, but connected to a movement member, are more likely to be recruited to a movement than those “outside of members’ extramovement networks” (Snow, Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson 1980, 792). At the same time, it must be remembered that not every vegan seeks to recruit new members to the movement (Cherry 2003).

As subjects in this study indicated, some vegans would like to see friends and family members consuming less animal products as opposed to converting to veganism “whole hog,” as one respondent termed it. At the same time, vegans might also speak of converting friends and family to vegetarianism or veganism. Factors that may play into this include vegans sharing literature about how animals are *maltreated in the food production system* with friends and family, or introducing them to vegan food, as well as providing living examples of how veganism is a viable lifestyle choice.

According to one of the anecdotes relayed by a subject in this study, a conversion from vegetarianism to veganism may take place when someone within a vegan’s social network makes an animal-milk connection from witnessing something as seemingly unassuming as a vegan bumper sticker. This is congruent with the concept of “catalytic experiences” cited by vegans when discussing their conversions to veganism (McDonald 2000). However, since this is based on anecdotal evidence from a subject in this study, it is not possible to verify empirically.

What this research points to is that if we conceive of veganism as a new social movement or cultural movement then it is important to consider that not only publicly active vegans take part in promoting veganism. While publicly active vegans certainly act as what can be

considered the face of the movement, along with vegan organizations, such as Vegan Outreach and Vegan Action, less publicly active vegans, and those who opt not to advocate publicly for veganism, still play a role in spreading veganism, or at least some of the frames associated with veganism.

R4: What information do vegans think is important to pass on in order to educate others about veganism?

While previous research has focused on the role of books and movies about animal maltreatment in prompting individuals to take up vegetarianism, or veganism, or learn more about both, as well give up more animal products over time, there is less research into the role of individual vegans in circulating this type of information to those within and outside of their vegan networks.

McDonald (2000) notes that vegans typically make use of literature that exposes animal cruelty in seeking to educate others. However, in this study, informants also reported disseminating texts, including movies and books, which advance other frames associated with veganism. Such texts might incorporate all the frames highlighted in *Section 1: Framing the Message*, or only some of them. Some, like *The China Study* (Campbell and Campbell II 2004), focus specifically on the human health benefits related to consuming a plant-based diet.

In a similar way to which vegans might focus on certain aspects of veganism when discussing it with others (Cherry 2003), it appears that vegans will make some form of judgment with regards to what type of text will connect with the person they are sharing the information with. As one respondent in this study put it, “there are books for everybody no matter what way they’re leaning.”

Graphic images and video footage of animal maltreatment in factory farms, and other settings, can serve to induce what Jasper and Poulsen (1995, 498) term a “moral shock” among viewers. Certain vegans (n = 6) saw value in sharing films that show how animals are treated and killed to become food, while others (n = 2) raised concerns about how violent films have the propensity to fetishize violence without actually promoting veganism.

In order to reach those who might be unwilling to watch films that focus on *animal maltreatment in the food production system*, vegans might recommend films that focus on the human-health benefits of eating a plant-based diet, or shed light on the industrial food production system, as reported by two respondents in this study. These texts can be thought of as “gateway texts” since they do not promote veganism directly, but rather advance particular themes associated with veganism that seek to influence viewers’ understandings of food and the workings of the modern agricultural system. The steps an individual might take to pursuing full-blown veganism, if at all, after encountering such a “gateway text” remain to be studied.

R5: What methods do vegans use for disseminating vegan knowledge, online and offline?

While books and movies function as conduits of vegan knowledge, or at least advance some of the dominant frames associated with veganism, food also plays an important role in the promotion of veganism. Since food is a main area where the difference between vegans and non-vegans is pronounced, it is not surprising that vegans use *food as a tool* in their educational efforts.

The use of *food as a tool* is something that occurs in public advocacy situations as well as within vegans’ social networks. In both settings, one of the aims of sharing vegan food with others is to potentially break down the stereotype non-vegans may have of vegan food as being

dry and tasteless. Sharing vegan food with non-vegans can also serve to normalize vegan food and make it seem less unusual.

When sharing food among those with their social networks, vegans might prepare food for work colleagues, friends, and family members. They might also take friends shopping for food, and in doing so aim to break down two other misconceptions about veganism: that it is difficult to be vegan and that it is expensive to eat a vegan diet.

This behavior that takes place in the physical world is congruent with that which takes place online, as evidenced by the work of Sneijder and Molder (2006), who propose that vegans work online to normalize the vegan diet and frame vegan food as not out of the ordinary. Similarly, as one respondent in this study reported doing, vegans may invite non-vegans to prepare vegan food for social gatherings, which could serve to promote a familiarity with preparing vegan food that goes beyond the experience of simply consuming it.

The normalizing and sharing of vegan food can be considered one way in which vegans act to normalize the lifestyle in its entirety, in a way that is less confrontational than speaking truth about how *animals are maltreated in the food production system*, or providing information that challenges non-vegans ability to live *in denial* about the realities of the food production system. However, while food serves a valuable function in this regard, when used in isolation without information that promotes veganism as a philosophical undertaking it seemingly does little to promote veganism beyond a superficial level based on taste alone. Thus, in order to marry the potential food has to normalize veganism with the ability of information to create a “moral shock” among an audience, publicly active vegans will sometimes couple food with pro-vegan literature in their advocacy efforts.

As highlighted in the findings (*Section 3.3 Food as a Tool*), when tabling in public venues publicly active vegans see value in offering food to those who approach a table since it is perceived that this will make them more likely to take pro-vegan literature. The impacts of these public advocacy efforts were not the focus of this research, but could be worth investigating in future, especially if researchers are concerned with comparing how effective members of social movements are in recruiting strangers compared to friends, family, and associates.

The way in which both publicly active and less publicly active vegans use *food as a tool* is detailed in table 1., below.

Table 1.

Category	Audience	Behavior(s)	Potential Effect(s)
Less publicly active	Friends, family, work colleagues (within social networks)	Take food to work Host potlucks and ask non-vegans to bring vegan food Cook vegan food for friends	Normalize vegan food Break down stereotypes Promote familiarity with what vegans eat
Publicly Active	Strangers in public spaces (outside social networks)	Hand out vegan food samples along with pro-vegan literature	Make others more likely to take vegan literature Normalize vegan food

This research addresses vegan communication in the physical world but also seeks to gain an understanding of how individual vegans communicate about veganism online. It has been suggested that the era of “mass self-communication,” which the internet and its associated communicative platforms has engendered, allows social movements and their actors to “confront the institutions of society in their own terms and around their own projects” (Castells 2007, 248).

While veganism might not always be an affront to institutions, although it can be (see Rawls 2010), it can be seen as an affront to institutional wisdom that dictates what is considered normal, morally acceptable, and healthy to eat.

Indeed, vegans make use of online platforms to disseminate information that challenges cultural norms surrounding meat eating, which includes information that advances the frame *animals are maltreated in the food system*. Vegans are aware that such information might elicit responses from non-vegans, and in some cases actively seek to be provocative with what they post online. With an audience in mind, vegans might also post information linked to the negative health impacts of meat eating. As one respondent described, such information is based on “selfish concerns,” which he felt would make it more likely that people would share it with others within their social networks.

While vegans might post information that challenges carnist cultural norms online, they might also post more benign content, such as pictures of vegan food. In a similar way that preparing vegan food for others in the physical world can be seen as less confrontational than speaking truth about how *animals are maltreated in the food production system*, or providing information that challenges non-vegans ability to live *in denial* about the realities of the food production system, posting images of vegan food is also less so.

With regards to online information sharing, it has been proposed that the sharing of links to other online resources can play into a self-presentation strategy of “social association” whereby people “indirectly defin[e]” themselves via association with others (Dominick 1999, 655). When it comes to sharing links about so-called celebrity vegans, such as Russell Simmons, it is arguable that instead of trying to define themselves by association with others, individual vegans might seek to define veganism, more broadly, through association with public figures and

celebrities. This tactic has been used by advocacy groups like PeTA, notably for vegetarians. The organization has a webpage dedicated to “Veggie Testimonials,” which features personal accounts from prominent vegetarians including actress Alicia Silverstone and former Beatles member Paul McCartney (PeTA 2012). Assumedly, PeTA publicizes celebrity vegetarians and vegans in order to attract others toward the movement.

In considering veganism as a new social or cultural movement, this research project sought to focus on the role of individual vegans in promoting veganism as opposed to the efforts of vegan organizations. As has been described, publicly active vegans work to promote veganism in the public sphere, through offline and online methods. However, the role of less- or non-publicly active vegans in promoting veganism should not be discounted. Almost all the respondents in this study indicated a degree of commitment to promoting veganism.

Whereas publicly active vegans promote veganism to strangers and those within their social networks, less- and non-publicly active vegans are inclined to share about veganism chiefly with those within their social networks. This sharing may take a nuanced and personal form that is not confrontational, especially since some vegans are sensitive to not wanting to be perceived as pushy by non-vegans. To that end, vegans might prepare vegan food for friends, family, and work colleagues, or take those interested in learning more about veganism shopping for food, for instance. At the same time, they might share films and books about veganism, vegetarianism, and other food-related issues, as well as recipes for vegan food. In this way, and others, vegans can act as resources and guides for those interested in veganism, both online and offline.

Whether or not such actions can be considered movement activity is largely contingent upon what one considers the aims of the vegan movement to be. If, like Cherry (2006, 156), we

consider the success of the movement to be realized “in terms of cultural and lifestyle changes” then such actions go some way in helping others achieve these cultural and lifestyle changes. At the same time, if vegans seek to prompt others to simply cut back on their consumption of animals products, or do not consciously seek to affect any change in others’ dietary and lifestyle choices, then it is debatable as to whether they are actually taking part in movement activity. At the same time, it is arguable that simply ordering a vegan meal at a restaurant plays a role in promoting awareness about veganism. The minutiae regarding what can and cannot be considered movement activity for the vegan movement is something that deserves further research.

However, based on the findings of this study, it is evident that individual vegans do seek to play a role in educating those within and outside of their social networks about veganism. While some respondents in this study reported “converting” others to vegetarianism or veganism, a thorough assessment of the role vegans have played in prompting others to pursue the lifestyle would help clarify this relationship.

Study Limitations

While this study provides insights into the value vegans place on promoting veganism, and addresses the ways in which they do so, online and offline, it is limited in that the findings are based on a small sample of vegans ($n = 19$) living in a relatively limited geographical area. Future research might seek to incorporate a larger sample to see if similar trends emerge.

Additionally, this study did not seek to measure the degree of strictness subjects applied to their adherence to veganism, unless the subjects introduced it during the interviews. For instance, one subject discussed how she would sometimes not eat vegan food in situations where

she had no control over the menu. This subject also did not reference the frame *animals are maltreated in the food production system* when explaining her reasons for pursuing veganism and spoke of adopting veganism for “personal reasons.” However, the subject still spoke of promoting veganism when approached about it, and had taken part in a public tabling event too.

Another subject said that once in a while she would eat a piece of pizza, without meat but with dairy cheese, and “just let it go.” Also, four respondents said they still wear leather. Two of these respondents said they only wore leather that they had purchased before they became vegan, and did not buy new leather. Another said she had given away her old leather clothes, but found it difficult to source supportive shoes that were not leather. The other respondent had to use leather shoes due to a medical condition.

This is potentially problematic, namely because veganism is associated with lifestyle changes that, like the ethical vegetarian movement, are associated with “permanent personal transformation” (Malesh 2005, 17). If one chooses to not eat a vegan diet in certain social situations, or chooses to still wear animal products such as leather, then the lifestyle changes are seemingly not concrete for that individual. Malesh (2005, 31) raises the point that the term “vegetarianism” is now recognized by those outside the ethical vegetarian movement as “a dietary choice instead of an ideology of eating and living.” Indeed, the same can be said for veganism, especially when it comes to individuals who consume a plant-based diet for personal reasons, as opposed to what Tuttle (2005, 4226) describes as motives grounded in “compassion.”

While some vegan advocates describe veganism as not being about “personal purity” (Norris; Ball, Vegan Outreach, N.D.) the “focus” remains “on avoiding the products that obviously/reasonably lead to animal suffering, so that people will understand that it is not about personal purity but rather reducing suffering” (Norris, N.D.). The point where the consumption

habits of someone who identifies as vegan stop being “not about personal purity” and shift into the realm of not vegan since they cannot be said to be “reducing suffering” are debatable and, likely, open to subjective interpretation. However, if the success of veganism is measured in lifestyle changes among adherents then the continued consumption of animal products by those who identify as vegans is problematic.

At the same time, if those who consume a plant-based diet for personal, or health, reasons do promote that diet to others, who decide to adhere to it, this does go some way in reducing the net use of animals by humans. This opens up the potential for future research to address the role of those who pursue veganism due to health, or personal, concerns in contributing to the overall aims of the movement, if they can be considered to contribute to the movement at all.

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APPENDIX**A. PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT NOTICE****Looking For Vegans to Share Their Stories for University Study**

Hi all,

I'm looking for vegans to share their stories for research I'm doing for my master's thesis. This research will help me better understand why people decide to follow the vegan path and how important vegans think it is to share veganism with others. I'm also interested to know how active vegans are in promoting veganism and what methods they use to do so.

Vegans over 18 are invited to participate.

Since this research forms part of my graduate work, I am not in the position to pay you for your participation. However, you will be contributing to an important area of research.

A one-on-one interview will require an hour of your time. If you are willing to speak for longer, we might talk for up to two hours if you are comfortable with that. You are free to leave at any time and skip questions you do not want to answer.

All participation is entirely voluntary. Your answers will be confidential and you will not be identified by name in the research paper or subsequent articles.

Thank you for reading. If you would like to know more, please contact me and I will fill you in on the specifics.

Best,

Brendon Bosworth

Masters student, Journalism and Mass Communication Program

University of Colorado at Boulder

B. OUTLINE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How long have you been a vegan?
2. Why did you choose to become a vegan?
3. Are your reasons for being vegan now the same as the reasons you chose to become vegan in the first place?
4. Do you see veganism as an important part of your identity?
5. As a vegan, do you feel like you are part of a larger community of people who share your beliefs?
6. Do you think it's important for vegans to tell others about veganism?
 - Why?
 - Have you always felt this way?
7. Do you promote veganism to others?
 - 7.a (If yes)
 - How do you do this?
 - Have you always done this [behavior mentioned in 7.a] or have your ways of promoting

veganism changed over time?

- Do you use the internet to promote veganism?
- If yes, what methods, or channels, do you use for promoting veganism on the internet?
- What do you think is the most effective way of spreading the word about veganism?

7.b. (If no) Why not?

8. Do you think vegans have a responsibility to try convert others to veganism?

9. How do you think non-vegans react to vegans and the way they choose to live their lives?

10. Have you had any bad experiences when trying to tell others about veganism? If yes, could you describe these?

11. Are you part of any vegan groups or organizations?

11. a. (If yes) Which ones?

- How long have you been a member?
- Why did you join?
- What do you do as part of [group(s)/organization(s) mentioned]?
- How does being part of [group(s)/organization(s) mentioned] impact your life?
- Do you think it's important for vegans to be parts of group(s)/organizations(s) like that?

b. (If no) Why not?

12. Have you taken part in public protest for vegan causes before?

(If yes) Can you tell me about this?

- How often do you take part in this type of activity?
- Why did/do you take part?
- Do you think this type of action helps change public opinion about how society uses animals?
- What do you think it achieves?

13. Would you call yourself an activist?

14. (If yes to Q14) Are you active in promoting others causes?

- (If yes to Q15) Which ones?

15. What are your views on illegal activities that some vegan (and/or animal rights) activists engage in, like breaking into factory farms or animal testing laboratories and freeing animals, or setting farmers' property alight? Do you think this helps or hinders the vegan cause? How do you think this type of behavior affects public opinion of vegans?

16. To finish: do you think you will ever stop being a vegan?

C. DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY**Survey**

Please fill out this short survey. The information will help me describe the participants in this study and will not be used to identify you personally, in any way.

Instructions: For questions 1, 4, 5 and 6 please check the box next to the most suitable answer.

For questions 2 and 3 please write your answer in the space provided.

Thank you.

1) Are you:

Male

Female

2) What is your age? _____

3) Which of the following best describes your current employment status?

Employed full time

Employed part time

Unemployed and looking for work

Unemployed and not looking for work

Student

Homemaker

Retired

4) What is your occupation? _____

5) What is the highest level of school/college/university you have completed?

- Elementary school only
- Some high school but did not finish
- Less than high school
- High School/GED
- Some college
- 2-year college degree (Associates)
- 4-year college degree (BA/BS)
- Master's degree (MA/MS)
- Doctoral degree (pHd)
- Professional degree (MD/JD)

6) Which of the following categories best describes your personal annual income before taxes?

- Under \$10,000
- \$10,000 - \$19,999
- \$20,000 - \$29,999
- \$30,000 - \$39,999
- \$40,000 - \$49,999
- \$50,000 - \$59,999

\$60,000 - \$69,999

\$70,000 or more

7) What is your political affiliation, if any?

Republican

Democrat

Independent

None

Other (please specify) _____