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# **“BECAUSE WE HAVE CHOSEN A LIFE OF PEACE”: A QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE STUDY OF VEGAN FOOD NARRATIVES**

Silke H. Feltz

*Michigan Technological University, shfeltz@mtu.edu*

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“BECAUSE WE HAVE CHOSEN A LIFE OF PEACE”: A QUANTITATIVE AND  
QUALITATIVE STUDY OF VEGAN FOOD NARRATIVES

By

Silke H. Feltz

A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In Rhetoric, Theory and Culture

MICHIGAN TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

2019

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This dissertation has been approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY in Rhetoric, Theory and Culture.

Department of Humanities

Dissertation Advisor: *Dr. L. Syd M. Johnson*

Committee Member: *Dr. Marika Seigel*

Committee Member: *Dr. Diane Shoos*

Committee Member: *Dr. Mylan Engel*

Department Chair: *Dr. Ron Strickland*

For Mandy.

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## Abstract

Restaurants, grocery stores, fast food chains, and companies all over the United States introduce the consumer to more vegan products, dishes, and services than ever before. The rise of veganism therefore offers a rhetorical platform that should be studied. This dissertation discusses the rhetoric of veganism by analyzing food narratives of vegans through a critical intersectional lens and consists of three research stages. The first research stage investigates the narratology of Glenn Scott Lacey's documentary, *Vegan: Everyday Stories* (2016). In particular, this rhetorical analysis focuses on the evaluative belief system of vegan storytelling by applying narrative and ideological criticism. The second research stage considers quantitative data collected from an online survey that combined questions on food and attitudes about social justice engagement. The results of a path analysis illustrate the multi-layered nature of veganism and what motivates vegans to challenge their food habits. The third and last research stage shares qualitative data derived from Skype interviews conducted with vegans who took the previously mentioned survey. These interviews offer qualitative data that illustrate how the shared value of knowledge/education plays a vital role in becoming vegan, and how an intersectional lens can, when employed critically, enrich veganism as a social justice movement through a storied activism. Finally, the project comments on how the studying of food narratives can refine the vegan movement since storied activism can lead to a better understanding of overlapping oppressions.

# 1 Introduction – Becoming Vegan: A Personal Food Narrative

I have always loved food. And I have always been convinced that I loved animals. Growing up in a tiny village in Bavaria, I saw farm animals on a daily basis and accepted the slaughter, the processing of the animal into meat, and the consumption of animal products. I remember standing up against animal cruelty once when I found out a nearby farmer beat his dog so badly that the dog, who would always greet me on my way home from elementary school, could not leave the barn and instead only winced when I called her name. I also remember how impatient my mom got on school days while waiting for me with a hot lunch when I came home over an hour late because I snuck into barns and courtyards all over the village to pet animals I had befriended. “Wash your hands with soap,” was the first thing she would say to me when I was about to sit at the dining table.

But as much as I connected with dogs, cats, turtles, koi fish, and horses, I did not make the link that the animals I ate every day were sentient beings who yearn to live a life free of cruelty inflicted upon them by humans. We would buy our sausages and meat cuts from the village butcher or from the butcher in a small town about five miles away. We would get excited when a farmer “donated” a pig’s life to celebrate St. Jacob, the saint of Elbersberg’s church, and the whole village would come together and eat *Spanferkel* in a beer tent. Killing farmed animals and eating them was not wrong. The only time I would get scolded about food was when I wasted food or when I played with food. Those were the only food-related maxims I lived by as I grew up.

By the time I graduated from high school, I moved away for college and also studied abroad in the United States. Living in bigger cities exposed me to lower quality food because I lived on a student budget and spent my money on going out with my friends rather than on grass-fed beef or organically grown vegetables. I did not change the way I ate until after I got married and my husband announced, the day before Thanksgiving, that he would be vegetarian from now on.

My initial reaction was stubbornness. I would still eat my meat cuts, my chicken strips on salad, and my steak at restaurants. My husband's nutritional change of heart was due to being the teaching assistant of Dr. Mylan Engel. Mylan was a philosopher and he was the first vegan I ever met. At that point I had so many doubts about living a healthy life while being vegan that I did not seriously consider changing my food habits. I remember asking Mylan what he could even eat, and he offered to take me grocery shopping. Back then, I did not take him up on his offer.

As time went on, my husband's vegetarianism had an effect on me. I stopped buying and preparing my own meat dishes and only ate meat at restaurants. It felt natural to eat less and less meat until I would only eat a *Schnitzel* or a *Bratwurst* when visiting Germany. I became a geographical vegetarian. After these months-long breaks, though, I realized how my body reacted differently to meat and after I got pretty sick a few times, I decided to go vegetarian completely. Doing the ethical thing was a nice side-effect of my vegetarianism. But: the dominant reasons for my vegetarianism originally were rather practical. In that sense, I was a practical vegetarian and not so much an ethical vegetarian.

About five years into my vegetarianism, I started graduate school at Michigan Technological University and took a class on bioethical research with Dr. Syd Johnson. That class became a safe space for me, especially when we covered animal ethics. I asked questions about factory farming and about animal cognition without feeling judged. I also did not feel anyone was on some sort of an ethical agenda and wanted to recruit me in any way. Maybe I needed the educational setting, a classroom that allowed and fostered honest exchange, to seriously question my choices and to understand the effects my choices have. The following semester, I asked Syd to guide me through more material on food ethics and overlapping oppressions in an independent study, and I also met Mylan—after thirteen years— at a conference where he presented an argument against eating fish in his keynote. This was the semester I decided I wanted to learn more about the vegan lifestyle and I wanted to try to change my food habits. Now, the combination of my love for food, my love for animals, and my academic interest in learning more about animal ethics and food ethics culminated in me striving to become an ethical vegan.

It has been a mind-opening transition since then. I have been questioning not only what I eat but also what I wear and how I feed the dogs who live with me. My perception has changed concerning what is on my plate, but also how I feel about zoos, food traditions, my own family values, wild animals, and the planet. This perception shift has changed my core beliefs about how life is less about me and my desires and more about giving back and helping those who are in need of help or those who don't have a voice.

Being vegan is not always easy for me. Traveling can be challenging. Parties can be difficult. Some friends had a difficult time accepting my veganism and stubbornly

surprised me with my favorite meat dishes when I visited. Others tried to spoon feed me because they were convinced that, deep inside, I wanted to eat that melted cheese or that well-cooked slice of beef. I had to learn how to navigate in social circles that disagree with me. Learning more about invitational rhetoric in Dr. Marika Seigel's class at Michigan Tech was exciting because invitational rhetoric is a non-threatening way to respond to my family and friends. I remember getting quite emotional when I read the Foss & Griffin article because I felt understood, and I learnt how to communicate my veganism in a way that complemented my personality.

I then took Dr. Diane Shoos' class on visual theory and presented on Adams' *Sexual Politics of Meat* which inspired me to bring Adams to the Michigan Tech campus and to discuss food ethics with an intersectional feminist in person. Diane also sent me an email with a link to a book I should read. It was Kemmerer's *Sister Species*. I devoured the narratives of the feminist vegans in *Sister Species* and slowly started to connect the dots between intersectionality, ethical veganism, and narratology. This marked the very beginning of my interest in studying vegan narratives.

My personal veganism soon also became more than about food alone. I started to make connections between the oppression of animals and the oppression of marginalized humans. In particular, I started to see my own lived experiences as an immigrant in the United States in a new light. I am keenly aware of how I am usually welcomed with open arms because I earned a Masters degree in Germany, I am fluent in English, and I immigrated legally by marrying an American citizen. Yet, my accent gives away my Otherness as soon as I start speaking and I am automatically put into a box. My

Germanness is often compared to nostalgic memories of a Europe trip or to time spent abroad while serving in the armed forces. My Germanness quickly equals an idyllic life in the Alps with me wearing a *Dirndl* serving beer at a fest. And sometimes, my Germanness evokes questions about why I am not blue-eyed and blonde, what I think of Jews, and whether I consider myself a Nazi. Even though I mostly encounter extremely positive and kind reactions when my cultural heritage is discussed, these reactions almost never capture who I actually am, how I grew up, and what I value. Cultural framing is typically the case when getting to know a person. However, I find myself defending my actual lived experiences against stereotypes on a regular basis. I don't drink coffee and I dislike the taste of most beers. I have never smoked. I have not worn a *Dirndl* since I was a toddler, and I do not eat *Schnitzel* anymore.

We tend to put people in stereotyped boxes, maybe because it simplifies our world somehow. Germans love sausages. Americans are obese. Latin American immigrants are illegals. And we similarly design stereotyped boxes for other species. Pigs are there to be eaten. Cats are there to be petted. Cows are there to be milked. My German identity and cultural background cannot and should not be directly compared to the oppression of farmed animals or the oppression other immigrants experience. I realize that being stereotyped as a German (or a vegan) is a very different kind of harm than being slaughtered or exploited for food and it is also different than the kind of oppression immigrants from other countries experience. I really might only be starting to see how oppressions overlap, but I do know that my veganism is not only an ethical statement but also a political statement. If I strive for a society that is truly inclusive, I carry a

responsibility to live by example and to include marginalized groups on my moral radar as well.

My veganism has become extremely personal and directly linked to my experiences, which triggered my interest in the food narratives of other vegans and what they can contribute to the rhetoric of veganism. This dissertation can be split up into three research prongs: the rhetorical analysis of a vegan documentary, the analysis of quantitative data derived from an online survey, and the qualitative data analysis of vegan food narratives.

The following chapters consist of the literature review (Chapter 2), the methods and methodology section (Chapter 3), the rhetorical analysis of a vegan documentary (Chapter 4), the analysis of a food and social justice survey (Chapter 5), the analysis of food narratives of some of the survey participants (Chapter 6), and a discussion of the results and future research directions (Chapter 7). The literature review of my dissertation focuses not only on philosophy but also on vital contributions from feminist rhetoric and visual theory. The methodological framework – intersectionality— complements the interdisciplinary nature of my research. The rhetorical analysis of the documentary can be understood as the starting point of this research project because I analyze an existing artifact that can be understood as a visual narrative. The second stage of my research was designing and sharing an online survey on food choices and social justice attitudes. The third and last research stage involved semi-structured interviews of survey participants that focused on their own food narratives, on the lived experiences of vegans, and on their paths to becoming vegan.



My own food narrative is not at its end, and this dissertation does not represent the end of a discussion of the rhetoric of veganism. But my food narrative— and those of other vegans— foster better understanding of what veganism is and can be, and how storytelling can inspire us to become more thoughtful human animals through our everyday choices and interactions.

## 2 Literature Review

Aristotle (1999) said that our study of any phenomenon should reflect the complexity of the thing studied. Veganism is no exception. Veganism, and food choice generally, is a complex phenomenon. Hence, any study of that phenomenon should likewise be complex. To date, veganism has been studied by approaches ranging from philosophy and feminism to visual theory and rhetoric. Each approach has unique and important contributions to make to understanding veganism. This literature review attempts to illustrate the complexity of veganism while at the same time suggesting that any single approach to veganism would run afoul of Aristotle's recommendation.

Given the complexity of approaches to veganism, I will review scholarship relevant to veganism in a variety of fields, namely feminist rhetoric, ecofeminism and ethics, visual theory, and the philosophy and ethics of veganism. Reviewing each of these approaches will contribute to one guiding principle of this dissertation—*intersectionality*. Moreover, I will discuss how animals should be included more in theoretical frameworks in that they represent nonverbal rhetors whose own way of communicating should be acknowledged.

Approaching bias not as an isolated issue but rather through an intersectional lens, swift judgments about veganism can be addressed and debunked, thereby helping to overcome the stereotypes that situate vegans in often negative and mistaken ways. Crenshaw (1991) originally introduced the term, *intersectionality*, to describe the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, which create overlapping and interdependent

systems of discrimination or disadvantage. Intersectionality helps reveal the different lived experiences of, for example, women of color and white women. While a white woman may face discrimination based on her sex at the workplace, a black woman may face discrimination based on her sex and race at her workplace. Several scholars have expanded the notion of intersectionality to illustrate its relevance to the animal ethics discourse by understanding animal oppression not as a separate issue but as part of social justice issues that address systemic oppression at large.

Staying true to the complexity of the subject is my north star in this dissertation. I argue that it is important to approach a vegan lifestyle with the same complexity as attends analyzing it. Through scholarship in feminist rhetoric, ecofeminism, narrative theory, philosophy, ethics, and visual theory, the rhetoric of veganism offers a platform that discusses veganism as a lifestyle choice that is inclusive towards all forms of systemic oppression. Moreover, a mixed-methods approach will complement my analyses in offering a more well-rounded discussion of my quantitative and qualitative data sets.

## **2.1 Feminist Rhetoric**

The theoretical focus of this dissertation finds its roots in feminist rhetoric. While the goal of traditional rhetoric is to persuade an audience, scholarship in feminist rhetoric has shown how the rhetorical situation, audience, the concept of agency, and the rhetor can be re-envisioned. These new frameworks challenge the traditional rhetorical situation and are more inclusive towards marginalized populations. One major goal of feminist

rhetoric is to listen more carefully to members of oppressed groups and to make sure they have a voice in our discourses. Feminist scholarship in rhetorical theory goes beyond the traditionally expected goal of winning an argument and offers a theoretical framework that emphasizes inclusivity, empathy, understanding, and mutual listening. In this way, feminist rhetoric has helped reshape traditional rhetorical devices, for example by interrogating the notion of who can be considered a rhetor. Traditional rhetoric would not acknowledge an image of a rhetor who seeks openness and understanding from his/her audience by offering the same qualities. Instead of arguing in order to win, a rhetor now can engage in active listening. A rhetor is not only a representative of the dominating class, gender, or race. Rhetors used to be white men of a respectable family who were highly educated. Feminist rhetoric challenges these traditional definitions. With these reconceptualizations, theorists have elaborated new strategies to deal with gender bias and societal tensions that were not available in more traditional rhetorical approaches. (Walters, 1983; Mao, 2005; Royster & Kirsch, 2012; Campbell, 2014).

Two feminist rhetoricians, Foss and Griffin, developed the paradigm of invitational rhetoric as a way to approach especially polarizing issues through an inclusive and open framework. Foss and Griffin (1995) use an example of a feminist animal rights activist arguing with a hunter. After the first rather aggressive clashing of two opposing ideologies only resulted in anger and frustration, the hunter and activist went on to engage in active listening and speaking in a more empathetic dialogue. This approach turned out to be more effective. At a minimum, both sides walked away understanding one another which did not happen in the original aggressive, confrontational exchange. Understanding is a key element leading to change. By reaching

a Buber-esque I-Thou<sup>1</sup> moment with a person or group that represents the other side of an argument, a connection can be made in a more humane and respectful way through the framework of invitational rhetoric.

Invitational rhetoric can be found in connection with animal rights activism. For example, take Walters' (2014) notion of the rhetorical touch. Activists like Baur (2015) and his Farm Sanctuary project take advantage of the rhetorical touch by exposing the public to intimate interactions with farm animals on his sanctuaries. Here, people get to visit and play with pigs, goats, and cows and "are moved by touch, by feeling the wool on a sheep's back [...]. And when a cow rambles over to you and asks with her big brown eyes to be petted, it's like no other experience in the world" (p. x). Emotional reactions of this kind can lead to the remapping of our moral horizon and touch can reach people when rational arguments or other traditional persuasive techniques do not. This remapping may or may not go into effect. Invitational rhetoric does not stress persuasion as the major goal. It can, however, be an outcome.

The rhetorical touch can be discussed in documentaries like *Vegan: Everyday Stories* (2016). Seeing people interact with farmed animals by touching them with the same respect and love you would touch an animal companion can lead to challenging one's choices when it comes to food and reevaluating one's nutritional habits because the farmed animal can now more likely be seen as a person and less likely as a commodified object. Touching makes "an available means of persuasion, a potential rhetoric for

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Buber discusses the importance of a relational ethics in his book, *I And Thou*, and makes an argument for experiencing the world through connecting with people and objects around us.

valuing a wider range of bodies, and for exploring the range of rhetorical bodies that make and share meanings” (Walters, 2014, p. 20).

But touching animals is not the only way that non-traditional rhetorical approaches are used by feminist rhetoric. For example, Walters discusses the interactions between Johnson and Singer. Johnson, a lawyer born with severe disability, interacted with Singer, father of the animal liberation movement, throughout the course of several years. Johnson quickly became a spokesperson for the disability rights movement when confronting Singer with his position on infanticide. By offering the ethicist her hand when meeting him, Johnson recalls, “I give Singer the three fingers of my right hand that still work,” and thus identified herself as a person (p. 161). Walters (2014) continues to illustrate how Johnson’s tactile rhetorical encounter with Singer became a strategy she employed when trying to identify herself to him in future encounters. A second encounter with Singer offers Johnson another opportunity for touch. By asking Singer to help her move her hand during a dinner where both sit next to each other, Singer again gets to identify with her through touch. Johnson related this anecdote to several different audiences, such as students and her family members, but typically, her audience has trouble grasping her encounter with Singer as an encounter that encourages the rhetorical intimacy invitational rhetoric tries to achieve between disagreeing parties.

The fact that Johnson gets interrupted and that she has a difficult time retelling her interaction with Singer exemplifies how rhetorical touch can, under certain conditions and in some instances, contribute to better rhetorical engagement than words. Our ability to engage in symbolic action, our ability to use words about words, is powerful and of great importance. But if we allow an expansion of our rhetorical horizon by accepting

nonverbal strategies like silence and touch (Glenn, 2002; Walters, 2004), we create a space for new rhetorical practices that reach out to marginalized populations, like women and animals, in particular. Emotional reactions evoked by rhetorical touch can lead to the remapping of our moral horizon and touch can be so much more powerful than written or spoken word.

Glenn (2002) also reaches beyond traditional rhetoric by emphasizing that those of us trained in historical rhetoric have most likely learned the history of aristocratic, agonistic, and most of all, eloquent males (p. 282). This has changed through the efforts of feminist rhetoric and previously silenced voices now are being heard. The distinction between historical and cultural rhetoric moreover allows for an in-depth exploration of the question, “Who is a rhetor?”.

By including everybody on to the rhetorical landscape, feminist rhetoric becomes an advocate for disadvantaged, oppressed groups who have not been considered with enough respect and seriousness. Rhetoric, just like any other field, changes and adapts to new circumstances and social surroundings. Through feminist rhetoric, the animal discourse will be able to benefit greatly from the openness and creativity feminist rhetoric has to offer.

Feminist rhetoric offers valuable approaches to studying the rhetoric of veganism because feminist rhetoricians develop frameworks that aim to include rather than exclude. By challenging traditional thoughts of what rhetoric is and what a rhetor should be and look like, feminist rhetoric invites new approaches that give those a voice who have not

had a voice before. For example, invitational rhetoric stresses the voice of the listener and distances itself from only focusing on the speaker/rhetor. This way, the listener becomes rhetor as well.

Feminist rhetoric has been starting to show this inclusiveness across species as well lately which can be seen in Hawhee's *Rhetoric in Tooth and Claw: Animals, Language, Sensation* (2017). Hawhee (2017) argues that animals have been playing a vital role in rhetorical theory since Aristotle. She contends that instead of silencing them, they should be more visible in their crucial role in rhetoric which leads to animals being considered rhetors as well.

That said, it should also be noted that feminist rhetoric still discusses the animal through a human perspective. For example, Walter's (2004) scholarship of the rhetorical touch is framed as a way for humans to speak *for* animals, and not as a way that animals can speak *for themselves* and *be heard*. This distinction is an important one to make. There is a difference between listening to and valuing animal lives in their own right to being persuaded by a human via rational argument. Feminist rhetoric is not ready to take that next step quite yet and the rhetoric of veganism may illustrate how vegans in fact view animals as rhetorical, holistic beings and how vegans listen to animals speak as rhetors not through a human perspective but through a nonhuman one.

Considering the animal as a nonverbal rhetor who does not need the interpretation or assistance of manmade arguments will have dramatic effects on how we in turn speak about, how we look at, and how we treat animals, both in our households but also in the wild and in laboratories. Studying the rhetoric of veganism can shed some light on the question if the animal can be considered a rhetor. Are vegans more likely to allow



animals to function as rhetors? And what can vegans teach non-vegans when it comes to being more inclusive across species? These are fundamental questions this dissertation tries to address.

## 2.2 Ecofeminism

In ecofeminism, two opposing camps have emerged regarding animals as food. On the one hand, ecofeminists like Adams (2015) call for a feminist-vegetarian<sup>2</sup> diet since the oppression of animals can be directly compared to the oppression of women. However, some ecofeminists also tend to be meat-apologists who claim that the consumption of animals may very well be both compatible with and a necessity for feminists.

Let's look at some examples from meat-eating apologists first. Heldke (2012) argues that consuming animals should be endorsed by feminists and she goes on to say that eating animals is necessary. Heldke considers consuming animals a natural way of life and discusses veganism by focusing on the purity aspect of veganism. She argues that nobody can truly be 100% vegan and one should consider other forms of oppression, like child labor or the exploitation of migrant workers, when choosing what to eat. By rejecting the strict abolitionist viewpoint, Heldke (2012) focuses more on the relationship between women, nature, and animals, in a framework that looks at foods as loci of relations. According to this framework, ending factory farming might save billions of

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<sup>2</sup> Adams uses the terms, vegetarian and vegan, interchangeably in *The Sexual Politics of Meat*.

animal lives, but tens of thousands of people who have been employed in these factory farms would lose their jobs and not be able to bring home a paycheck anymore.

Viewing foods as loci of relations encompasses relations among humans as well. Heldke's (2012) "An alternative ontology of food" emphasizes the relational status of interdependent concepts rather than focusing on autonomy and individualism. Her celebration of the relational bond between animals, nature, and women in particular can be found in the writings of other ecofeminists (see Rudy, 2012; Haraway, 2008; Plumwood, 2000). According to this relational paradigm, becoming an active member of the food chain in fact brings feminists even closer to nature.

Heldke (2012), who draws heavily on Oliver's (2009) *Animal Lessons*, argues that not eating meat might still entail the killing of animals who are used for the production of meat-free products. So, simply abstaining from meat does not necessarily equal living a cruelty-free life. The fact that we typically don't engage in research thoroughly enough to trace back every supermarket product we buy creates a contradiction to the vegan, purist, lifestyle (Heldke, 2012). The consequence Heldke points us to is that by not directly harming animals we might very well harm humans or other animals involved in the production of the meat substitute we pick, disrupt the economic system, and support economies that promote horrible, inhumane working conditions for employees.

But being vegan does not entail being on some sort of moral higher ground or living as a purist. Additionally, the amount of animal suffering is likely to be much smaller with a plant-based diet than a diet that intentionally and directly causes harm to animals. By reducing veganism to a common stereotype, Heldke uses straw arguments

against some of the main ethical arguments for veganism. Her argument is therefore based on common biases and stereotypes many omnivores have about veganism, including that vegans are unconcerned with the impact of their food choices on other humans.

Pro-meat-eating feminist approaches have met with substantial criticism from animal ethics scholars like Francione and Grillo. Francione (2015) debunks many of the counter-arguments and biases that support meat eating in his recent publication, *Eat Like You Care: An Examination of the Morality of Eating Animals*, and extrapolates that we can very well follow a vegan diet while fighting for equal rights for women, battling world hunger, or protesting after a presidential election. Grillo (2016) moreover examines how the consumer culture is based on fictions and unchallenged biases. Grillo's discussion of foundational fictions such as anthropomorphism, (human) superiority, objectification, and consent, aims to debunk myths people commonly believe when it comes to their food choices and nicely complements Francione's argument. The fact that scholars keep on debunking vegan myths shows the stubbornness surrounding misconceptions on veganism.

With *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Adams lays the important foundational groundwork for a theoretical paradigm that calls for an ethical veganism seen through an intersectional lens. Adams (2010) elaborates on the patriarchal nature of eating meat by looking at historical, political, and literary examples. Men, who have often been encouraged to consume animals in order to be or feel strong, powerful, or dominant, oppress women and animals alike by eating animals who often are female, by making animal references when talking to women, and by allowing the media and advertisements

to make the consumer think it is morally right to engage in these behavior patterns. The lived experiences of a woman can thus be directly compared to animals because the female body, like the animal body, is objectified, often sexualized, and used for pleasure. Women are referred to as animals in negative ways (MacKinnon, 2005). By calling a woman a *bitch*, a *pussy*, or a *stupid cow*, this male dominance can even reach the most powerful political spheres like the White House. Breaking these historically entrenched ideologies is necessary for a society to accept women as equals. Abstaining from meat therefore can be seen as abstaining from oppressive behavior towards women who are, like nonhuman animals, still a marginalized population in today's society. Adams' feminist-vegetarian theory thus becomes a feminist basis for ecofeminists to build on and to allow nonhuman animals to become more visible on their moral horizon. By not eating animal products, Adams and fellow ecofeminists like Kemmerer (2011) believe men and women alike set an example of equality and fight gender and species oppression at the same time.

It is exciting to see how ecofeminism begins to ask the tough questions about food ethics. Ecofeminism has offered guiding scholarship that allows animals to be heard more clearly. Eating animals silences them and denies them the opportunity to be heard as rhetors. Looking at meat and consuming meat, for example, creates the distance between animals and us because we don't see the whole animal and the processed animal creates an absent referent. But we also silence animals literally and figuratively because we tend to not treat them as rhetors who can stand by themselves. Ecofeminist literature offers frameworks that attempt to close that distance between us and animals so we can start seeing them as rhetors. If we close that gap, we can start to listen to animals as persons

who communicate. Studying the rhetoric of veganism this way can help support ecofeminist endeavors of reconnecting with animals as whole beings by seeing them as rhetors.

## **2.3 Ethics**

Every dominant contemporary ethical theory has the resources to address the ethics of eating animals. According to the consequentialist approach, eating animals in many contexts leads to overall worse consequences than not eating meat (Singer, 1975, 1989, 1990). The detrimental effect that factory farming has on the environment, for instance, is a well-known negative consequence. Of course, the enormous suffering of most animals used as food outweighs the pleasure humans receive by consuming animal food products in most circumstances. Singer (1989) and utilitarians emphasize that the right action is the one that produces the most good, out of all alternative actions, for all that are affected by the action. In this case, animals are also affected by the action of eating animals, and as such, we must give equal consideration to the interests of nonhuman animals. Animals suffer unimaginable torture, abuse, and the infliction of physical and emotional pain as they are being impregnated against their will, as they are slaughtered, and as milk cows are separated from their calves. On the consequentialist calculus, since eating animals does not produce the most good out of all alternatives for all affected, eating animals is morally wrong (Jones, 2015). Singer's focus on animal sentience is the core of his argument. Since animals are sentient beings, their interests should be considered morally. Engel (2015) discusses Carruthers' criticism of the utilitarian view of animal rights.

Carruthers believes it to be morally unacceptable to save 100 dogs over one human. However, since Singer denies that the killing of a human is equal to the killing of a sentient being (only that animals' interests are considered as equal), Carruthers' criticism loses its force (p. 7).

Theorists who adopt deontological approaches, like Regan (2004), Francione (2005), and Wyckoff (2016), have also concluded that eating animals is wrong. For example, Regan (2004) argues that many animals are experiencing subjects of a life. An experiencing subject of a life is an entity that has some conception about how their lives are going for them. Humans have this capacity, but so do many non-human animals. Any entity that is an experiencing subject of a life thus deserves some basic rights, like the right against being killed for no good reason. Regan rejects the utilitarian view "on the grounds that it sanctions sacrificing individuals for trivial gains in utility" (Engel, 2015, p. 5-6). Consequently, Regan argues that animals who are experiencing subjects of a life should not be killed for food. Jones (2015) elaborates on how Regan argues for animal rights based on "the capacity to be the subject of experiences that matter to oneself. Possessing certain physiological, emotional, psychological, and cognitive capacities, over-and-above mere sentience, makes one a subject-of-a-life" (p. 471). The idea of being an experiencing subject-of-a-life suffices here for animals to be morally considerable. Of course, both the consequentialist and deontological approaches to animal ethics are debated (see Engel, 2015). The main point is that all contemporary ethical theories at least have the capacity to deal with and justify ethical approaches that are inclusive of animals.

These ethical approaches for discussing the importance of legal justice for animals introduced a political turn in the animal liberation movement (Jones, 2015; Garner, 2013; Cochrane, Garner & O’Sullivan, 2016). Nonhuman animals have not automatically been included in the political philosophy arena mostly because animals have been discussed as commodities or as having a property status in society (Jones, 2015). Hence, according to these traditional views, the animals have no rights but the owners of those animals do have rights, largely to dispose of them the way the owners see fit.

Some animal rights activists and some social justice activists share the common goal of fighting systemic domination and oppression. According to Jones (2014), one foundational principle of social justice movements is the idea that all humans are equal in critical moral respects. If this principle of equality is understood like Singer’s argument for animal rights, we come to the conclusion that human and nonhuman animals are equal because they are experiential, sentient beings. This may entail that these animals should be considered morally—like the right not to be killed for no good reason.

Wyckoff also thinks that animals ought to have legal rights. Instead of borrowing from utilitarian or deontological frameworks, Wyckoff borrows the concept of intersectionality from feminist studies and builds on Young’s (1990) approach to systemic oppression to shape an interdisciplinary theory that allows us to view animals not just in the way we use them but more holistically as beings with their own desires and needs. Wyckoff (2015) claims that our public animal discourse is limiting since we impose moral boundaries when talking about animals. These terms in a very real way shape our relations with non-human creatures. In this view, then, by pressuring traditional

and perhaps unjustified linguistic norms, new, and better ideologies can emerge. This ideological critique is necessary in order to restructure current mainstream dialogue and through a narrative approach, the vegan ideology can be seen more clearly as a counter-discourse to an omnivorous ideology. Wyckoff (2015) claims that if we examine our linguistic practices more carefully, we can start analyzing language and human-animal relations by utilizing the discourse more effectively in our everyday interactions with animals. One likely result of changing the discourse in this way will be that it will no longer seem foreign, or unjustified, for non-human animals to have rights.

In recent years, exciting scholarship emerged that focuses on the overlap of oppressive systems and the lived experiences of human oppression. This inclusion of marginalized voices in the discussion of animal ethics provides the animal rights movement with new opportunities to learn and expand on how oppression, power, and the interplay of human and nonhuman oppression work. Several recent publications show the scholarly interest in an intersectional approach to food ethics and connect the oppression of animals with systemic oppression in general. For instance, Harper's (Ed., 2010) *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society* focuses on the intersections between black women and animals. The contributors to this anthology offer insights into the lives of women of color who question mainstream food habits and understand the connections between animals and marginalized populations. The authors argue that our food choices are influenced by class, gender, and race and that we can only fully understand veganism as an ethical lifestyle if we seriously consider aspects of oppression that are not directly linked to the oppression of nonhuman animals but rather to marginalization at large.



Taylor (2017) calls for the inclusion of all species by making analogies to people with bodily differences. By connecting the oppression disabled people experience with the oppression animals experience, Taylor becomes a voice for other marginalized populations that traditionally have not been heard clearly enough. By listening more carefully to the needs of the oppressed, their voices become louder and we approach the way we have been treating oppressed groups more critically and holistically. Taylor discusses the fact that farm animals are often mutilated in order to create a bigger profit and draws parallels to the way disabled human animals are viewed by society as silenced voices. Taylor calls for the discussion of an animal liberation through an intersectional lens.

Third, Aph Ko and her sister Syl Ko's publication, *Aphro-ism: Essays on Pop Culture, Feminism, and Black Veganism from Two Sisters* (2017), discusses how a decompartmentalizing of feminism, race, or animal activism will allow social movements to advance. Through the identification with a marginalized population—black women—the authors define their food choices—being vegan (p. 53). Veganism becomes a personalized lifestyle that reflects animal ethics on the one hand but also reflects the lived experiences or oppression and domination of humans.

## **2.4 Visual Theory**

An in-depth analysis of food ethics calls for engagement with visual theory and practices. A discussion of the gaze and the commodification of animals in particular

becomes relevant when analyzing food narratives of individuals who share their vegan journey both in documentary and in interviews. Sturken and Cartwright (2009) explain how Foucault understands subjects as never autonomous but rather as intertwined in power relations (p. 100). These relations of power can be explained through a discussion of the gaze.

The first scholar who developed the gaze in relationship to sexual difference in classical Hollywood cinema is Mulvey (2010). Her scholarship on the male gaze enabled discussions on oppressed and marginalized groups that need to be heard because power relations become more visible due to an awareness of the gaze. Furthermore, Lutz and Collins (1991) extrapolate on the multiplicity of the gaze by engaging with the notion of the photographer's gaze, the magazine's gaze, or the Western gaze. hooks (2010) develops the power in looking by developing the idea of the oppositional gaze as a result of the discrimination African-Americans have been enduring. By drawing on Hall's idea of identity being created through representations, hooks (2010) points out how cinematic representations that don't allow a more *inclusive gaze* reinforce gender and race biases in society since representations constitute who we are and how we see ourselves.

Mulvey's notion of the male gaze in classical Hollywood cinema opened up the possibilities to expand the gaze in ways that includes marginalized and oppressed groups. Mulvey (2010) emphasizes:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded

for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. (p. 60)

The dominant male gaze has been challenged to a certain degree by recent visual theory and practice. The camera now does not only focus on the man's perspective during erotic scenes and female actresses challenge the sexism and ageism displayed in Hollywood and the Academy.

This scholarship on the gaze, moreover, allows discussions on other oppressed and marginalized groups that need to be heard better. For instance, Lutz and Collins (1991) nicely extrapolate a variety of gazes used in *National Geographic* photography by distinguishing between the photographer's gaze, the institutional gaze, the reader's gaze, the non-Western subject's gaze, or the academic gaze. These different takes on the gaze show how versatile the gaze is in visual theory and how important it is to expand the gaze in ways that include marginalized groups more effectively in representations. Since one of the most popular and mainstream visual representations of our times is film, it is worth taking a closer look at the gaze typically or historically displayed in movies. The writings on the male gaze and on the oppositional gaze allow for more inclusive and elaborate applications of the gaze.

By expanding on Mulvey's male gaze, Malamud (2012) offers a new and exciting visual framework for nonhuman animals. He connects his discussion of the gaze to both Foucault and Mulvey (2012) because he discusses how the human gaze anthropomorphizes animals and therefore silences and oppresses them. Malamud furthermore focuses on how we view animals and how we want to see them. When we view animals through the human gaze, the way we want to see them, we tend to oppress

them. We make excuses for our own behavior if we depict cartoons of happy barbecue pigs in a restaurant or if we show playful zoo animals who seem happy while being locked up. But the nonhuman gaze can help the viewer see how an animal really feels, not how we want the animal to feel. The human gaze still permeates the relations of power between animals and humans. The nonhuman gaze, on the contrary, tries to break through these relations of power.

This new visual framework for nonhuman animals is discussed in Malamud's *Introduction to Animals in Visual Culture*: "The gaze directed at animals in visual culture keenly parallels Mulvey's formulation of the male gaze. Call it, instead of the male gaze, the *human gaze*, and replace woman with animal" (p. 74). The human gaze frames our representations of animals. By having caricatures of pigs and cows sell animal products and by posting images of happy-looking caged animals on the media, animals are oppressed by the human gaze, which reinforces behavior that hurts them over and over again.

Malamud (2012) refers to photographs by Berlin artist, Jaschinski, when illustrating how images that do not artificially frame animals are powerful in regards to animal ethics. Jaschinski's photographs of zoo animals distance themselves from the human gaze that anthropomorphizes and seeks to entertain or sell. Instead, her artifacts display the *nonhuman gaze* by focusing on the sadness, confusion, and isolation animals suffer while being forcefully enclosed. Alternatives to meat consumption are abundant, but visual representations of animals utilizing the human gaze make us believe that there is nothing wrong with eating meat, just like Davis (2011) reiterates, "I never thought then that I was eating sentient beings" (p. 130). In order to close the gap between the animal

and our attitude towards the animal, we can follow Jaschinski's example of creating and acknowledging more visual representations of animals that depict the nonhuman gaze.

Vegans appear to be more sensitive to the nonhuman gaze because they refuse to view animals as commodified objects. This commodification of animals can be clearly illustrated in the food industry (Sturken & Cartwright, 2009). By handling animals not as sentient beings but rather as pieces of meat, their commodification becomes possible and supports a meat culture that benefits from the overproduction and overconsumption of meat despite environmental threats and health risks. Commodification enables distance between human and nonhuman animals. This distance between the commodified animal and a person has an enormous impact on the mass production and consumption of animal products.

Adams (2010) shows how the consumption and representation of animals rather turns animals into absent referents which makes them invisible. Animals are forcefully transformed from sentient beings into food. In order to become food, an animal is slaughtered, dismembered, processed, and then packaged and labeled. This transformation from a cow to a hamburger, for instance, transforms the animal from a living being into an absent referent. The cow is no longer visible or present and thus it's easier to grill and eat the animal.

The commodification of animals through visual practices can lead to a strong identification with the product and therefore create a commodity self in the eyes of the consumer. By consuming animal products, an image of the self is constructed by associating the animal product with certain desired qualities. For example, an expensive steak can be a sign of luxury and power. During this process, a commodified animal

becomes fetishized. Sturken and Cartwright (2009) describe how the commodity self contributes to the creation of identities of people. The proverb, “You are what you eat,” can be applied to the notion of the commodity self; we make political statements with our food choices.

Communicating the visual distance towards animals and the commodification of animals via visual theory and visual practices is a crucial step towards closing this psychological gap. Through artifacts like vegan documentaries analyzed in the course of this project, awareness of the suffering and oppression of animals becomes possible. Thus, activist approaches to animal and food ethics contribute to exploring the visual theory of nonhuman animals in positive ways and question current and still dominant visual and cultural practices.

Visual theorists offer exciting contributions to understanding animals better as holistic beings. The Animal Museum in Los Angeles, for instance, focuses on exhibitions that help understand animals and treat animals better. Looking at animals through the nonhuman gaze rather than the human gaze is of extreme importance in giving animals a voice as a rhetor because this voice is not going to be the human voice but the nonhuman voice.

## **2.5 Narrative Criticism**

Since this dissertation will analyze both the documentary, *Vegan: Everyday Stories*, and food narratives of individual vegans, this literature review considers important strands and explorations of narrative criticism. Narrative criticism, with its

roots in literary criticism, illustrates how the power of storytelling can be understood rhetorically. There are a variety of theoretical approaches to narrative criticism ranging from the rather confined and conservative literary lens towards an attempt to merge different modes of communication when presenting a story. Multimodality or the nonverbal image represent narrative strands of rhetorical scholarship that deserve more attention and that can lay the groundwork for an invitational rhetoric.

Foss (2009) offers an introduction to narrative criticism that follows the original literary model in which a narrative has to fulfill the four criteria: (1) It should consist of at least two events that follow a time order and that are connected causally; (2) a narrative focuses on a theme and does not wildly jump from one event to another without developing a string of connections; (3) a narrative must contain some sort of causal relationship; and (4) a narrative must place a unified subject into the center of attention (p. 308). Foss' approach can be helpful when a starting point for an analysis is needed, but it quickly confines an analysis because it does not consider multimodal texts. Instead of only focusing on the literary features of a narrative, Foss' definition of a narrative should be expanded since it limits the rhetorician to analyze only a textual artifact and does not allow much space for interpretive flexibility.

After defining an artifact as a narrative and after deciding what the artifact's possible objective might be, Foss' (2009) analysis focuses mainly on literary features such as setting, narrator, events, character(s) and audience. But, this rudimentary strand to narrative scholarship does not consider nonverbal narratives and images as much as they need to be considered today. Only the last part of her overview of narrative criticism offers insight into the rhetorical situation that surrounds the artifact. Foss' generic

approach illustrates how the emphasis on narrative criticism lies in basic literary interpretation techniques and less in rhetorical analysis. But shouldn't rhetorical aspects and methodologies be especially important in a rhetorical analysis of an artifact? If we allow methodologies to merge more with one another, we can view a rhetorical artifact through in a more holistic way when it comes to analyzing narratives.

Glenn (2002) notes how a rhetoric of silence, for example, can be of benefit in court for female victims of sexual harassment. Silence may be executed intentionally, in order to reach a needed reaction or in order to wait for the right moment. Silence, when dealing with a narrative of abuse, can indeed be helpful in acting within the *kairos* of the rhetorical situation. Moreover, silence as a rhetorical tool can create a moment of understanding that helps one understand the other in an open-minded fashion. Towards the end of her discussion of a rhetoric of silence, Glenn distances herself from the patriarchal nature of traditional rhetoric and opens the door towards an invitational rhetoric

which asks only that a listener listen and in response the rhetor listens (both sides taking turns at being productively silent) [then] transforms the rhetorical discipline from one of persuasion, control, and discipline (on the part of the rhetor) to a moment of inherent worth, equality, and empowered action for (rhetor and audience alike). (p. 284)

Foss and Griffin (1995) first asked for invitational rhetoric to be included into the standard canon of rhetorical criticism. Invitational rhetoric is based on "principles of equality, immanent value, and self-determination" and allows both rhetor and the audience to reevaluate personal beliefs and values through listening and reflection (p. 4). This way, invitational rhetoric becomes an alternative to argument and control as some of the traditional goals of rhetoric can be considered a powerful rhetorical tool when



exchanging ideas manifested in personal values, religion or politics. Polarized topics can thus be discussed in a more civil manner and through the understanding of the other and invitational rhetoric can become a way to get closer to a consensus of understanding since a complete and quick change of mind regarding topics a person very strongly believes in is a rather idealistic notion.

Invitational rhetoric, through its emphasis on equality and respect, is less hierarchical than other rhetorical approaches. The rhetor is not the all-knowing instance. The rhetor becomes part of the audience through listening instead of convincing which recalls the idea of the fluid sense of authorship in today's narratives. Again, who the author is becomes less important than what the author wants to share. Everybody can become an author and share a narrative on a blog, on YouTube or social media. Therefore, everyone might also be able to become the rhetor through listening and introspection. Foss discusses the parallel between invitational rhetoric and narrative further by acknowledging how the narrative, just like invitational rhetoric, can be seen as a rhetorical tool that offers the audience insight into the rhetor's personal life and thus may open a fruitful discourse based on listening and speaking without the traditional hierarchy of listener and speaker. The narrative can thus be seen as a rhetorical tool that reinforces invitational rhetoric. Consequently, narrative criticism can now be used as a complimentary methodology to invitational rhetoric.

Instead of analyzing an artifact through the narrow and limiting literary strand alone, narrative criticism should rather be viewed as a way to combine literary elements of an analysis with other, existing rhetorical methodologies. While rhetorical methodologies in general might work well together with narrative criticism, Pellico and

Chinn (2015) in particular developed an elaborate methodology by merging narrative analysis with aesthetic criticism. The authors thus broaden the basic idea of narrative criticism and don't squeeze a narrative into a restrictive definition like Foss.

An emphasis on structure and form allows Pellico and Chinn's (2015) approach to narrative analysis to go beyond basic literary concepts and focuses more on aesthetic knowledge. Structure is defined by the author's choice of form to communicate her ideas while meaning is defined as the author's "interpretation of what has happened" (p. 59). The *why* and *how* now enrich Foss' *who* and *what*. The form as the medium of communication now shows no limitations. A narrative can consist as a piece of music or art, it can be verbal or nonverbal, transformative or static. The task of the critic is to use the merged method of narrative criticism to analyze the object. By integrating aesthetic criticism, a deeper understanding of an artifact can be obtained and the culture under study is recognized in a meaningful way. This approach allows the critic to unfold a narrative layer by layer as someone who is an analyst on the one hand and someone who appreciates art, a connoisseur, on the other hand. Thus, two complementary approaches are combined to form a more effective methodology.

Pellico and Chinn strive for a well-rounded analysis that is not just confined by the text. They, like Rodden (2008) in his article, "How do stories convince us? Notes towards a rhetoric of narrative," caution when focusing only on the linguistic elements of a text or a transcription. According to Rodden, data analysis, in order to enrich and determine the effect and organization of a narrative, should reach beyond the classical lines of word forms or grammar:

A grammatically based narrative theory can identify narrative from non-narrative, yet it does little to illuminate what and how a story means and argues. In considering questions other than marking narrative and categorizing its modes or operation (e.g., pause, scene, summary, ellipsis), we enter the spheres of logic and rhetoric. We are still concerned here with grammatical issues insofar as syntax (or “correctness”) affects meaning and logic. But functional issues such as identification and syntactic markers now give way to “higher-order” questions of meaning [...]. (p. 150)

Pellico and Chinn (2015) argue that an analysis based on narrative features, instead, should allow the critic freedom and fluidity in his or her analysis. This way, narrative criticism gains a wider, more open and critical strand and becomes more fluid. Pellico and Chinn’s layer of aesthetic criticism, furthermore, allows the rhetorician to focus on the meaning that has evolved by analyzing the structure of an artifact. A structural interplay of the text, visual rhetoric and other nonverbal layers combined with the aesthetic effect of an artifact create a more meaningful analysis. Now, the art form in itself may be the focus of the analysis and comparative descriptions allow for more thorough interpretations. Also, historical and cultural perspectives surrounding the text should be considered. By allowing an artifact to be analyzed in a more freedom-granting way, rather diverse interpretations and more individualized perspectives will come to life which complements the framework of invitational rhetoric. Indeed, one can even go so far and say how this strand of narrative scholarship allows an artifact to be interpreted differently by everybody who analyzes it: “Ultimately, narrative criticism is open to multiple translations by different readers; thus the adoption of set procedures and a connoisseur’s approach is of paramount importance” (Pellico & Chinn, 2015, p. 63). This does not mean that fundamental aspects of a narrative and narrative strands within a story

cannot be neglected or denied. The idea of creating individualistic interpretations lies more in the way a narrative is arranged or language is used and thus has a certain effect on the listener. Also, the authors' definition of narrative criticism can very well be applied to art and artifacts.

If the narrative consists of written or spoken text, this text should be typed and used as a transcription for data analysis. The data analysis can focus on other rhetorical methodologies, such as ideological criticism that takes into consideration people's belief system and values in particular. Other rhetorical methodologies thus nicely become an active part of narrative criticism. This type of analysis ensures rigor, individuality and freedom alike which allows the critic to approach an artifact with the personalized flexibility narratives need and deserve.

Pellico and Chinn (2015); and Coryell, Clark and Pomerantz (2010) illustrate this more holistic approach when analyzing narratives producing analyses beyond a literary foundation. Literary analyses focus more on the structure of a narrative by analyzing aspects like plot, character development, or setting. Rhetorical analyses that embrace narrative criticism as a method focus more on the content of a story and how this content becomes part of a larger, public discourse. Instead, the literary foundation can be applied automatically while other methodologies enrich an analysis. When it comes to food narratives, ideological criticism could become a second layer to a narrative criticism as ideological criticism focuses on values and beliefs of individuals, how they are formed, and how they change.

After explaining how narrative criticism should not be viewed in the limiting ways of basic literary criticism that focuses more on structure and less on a rhetorical

contribution, and after showing how narrative criticism can and should be merged with other rhetorical methodologies, it is also in the interest of the rhetorician to look at narrative criticism from the perspectives of various communicative modes. For instance, narratives comprise, according to Nanay (2009), “a perceptual activity that organizes data into a special pattern which represents and explains experience” (p. 120). This definition can be applied to digital stories and narrative pictures in general, even just one image by itself. According to Nanay’s (2009) understanding of narrative, an image can still be viewed as a narrative because it represents a connection between several events that happened before the image or that caused the image as a result of it. Indeed, the mere engagement between the viewer and the image can be understood as events that create connections. The question of what constitutes a narrative now becomes much more inclusive of individual, nonverbal approaches to storytelling that can tell the stories of nonhuman animals, focus on images, and consider the gaze.

Nanay (2009) continues to argue that a rigid definition, such as Foss’, can be expanded from different viewpoints. Even action in itself does not automatically have to be part of a narrative since paintings that depict still lifes, for instance, evoke action and added on events in our minds as we continue to gaze at and engage with an image. This way, narratives that might depict only one event or image may also gain the status as artifacts noteworthy of rhetorical analysis. The author hence develops different degrees of narratives and allows each one to speak for itself. Any criticism based on narrative criticism should take these layers of narrative into consideration in order to aim for a more holistic analysis.

The image—the visual layer of the narrative— plays a central role in today’s technology. A narrative represents the starting point for an experience within the viewer, reader or audience in general. By pointing out that there is no strict line between narrative and non-narrative, that “some instances of narrative engagement with a picture may be more or less appropriate” and that these more or less intense reactions are legitimate and don’t necessarily disqualify an image from being a narrative, Nanay nicely broadens the discussion of the narrative into the paradigm of nonverbal artifacts and images that can be found all over social media and the Internet (Nanay 2009, p. 128). As Pellico and Chinn emphasize, Nanay’s narrative scholarship does not focus on literary narratives alone, opening possibilities to a plethora of new, different and personalized interpretations and analyses.

al-Musawi (2005) offers a nice example of this new approach of analyzing nonverbal narratives. The author admits to the fact that not much work has been done in that area so far and focuses on nonverbal narrative properties, such as “icons, images, codes, paintings, magic and food” (p. 338). This study concludes how a parallel can be drawn between nonverbal narratives and verbal systems:

Both develop a concept of a multi-modal, multi-voiced, and multi-sensory narrative that should draw our attention to the reasons behind the perennial and everlasting appeal of this storytelling. The vogue of this art is reason enough to believe in its success and richness, and should direct our attention to the limitations and prospects of theoretical and formal studies of narrative, and spur the effort to develop a more comprehensive view of narratology. (p. 362)

al-Musawi’s approach shows how fluid the term narrative has become and how today’s narrative scholarship supports new perspectives, theories and analyses. This

comprehensive view of narratology is needed in order to establish theories that envelop narratives that use a different medium than the written text *per se*. But even an analysis of a written narrative should not neglect nonverbal features since they offer insight into the various means of storytelling that liberate an analysis from a theme- or character-driven approach.

Rigney (2010) calls this change in the way we view narratives a *Gestalt-switch* due to newly emerging media. New media ecologies allow narratology to be studied on an interdisciplinary level. The traditional narrative sets the stage for an author as a separate entity, creating a “split between the expert and the public” (p. 104). This split has become much smaller and everyone can now be an author—reliable or not—on social media, YouTube, or blogs. Authorship has thus become more interactive and less elitist. Narratives now allow studies to go “beyond the realm of the semiotic [and] into the social” (p. 105). Rigney’s contribution to the discussion of the narrative illustrates how cultural studies should not be underestimated in analyzing an artifact.

These narrative ecologies are fruitful in a variety of disciplines. The appropriation of the narrative shows again its versatile character and how it should be used in a multi-faceted manner. By applying narrative criticism in a multi- and interdisciplinary manner, stories of people can highlight patterns and rhetorical ecologies in a way that opens the reader or viewer to new perspectives and to reevaluate his or her own life, values and choices.

Understanding the narrative approach becomes an opportunity for introspection and gaining power to choose a less confrontational route in an argument which naturally leads towards an invitational rhetoric. King (2017) takes advantage of the narrative by

making it a catalyst for her argument to reduce the consumption of animal products. Her reader easily connects with her reductarian framework because she immerses her audience in relevant and personal stories of her own life and the lives of farm animals. King this way reaches an audience that fundamentally disagrees with her regarding eating animals. The narrative here functions as a buffer that gives farm animals the voice they need to be heard more.

Narrative criticism should change and adapt to new shapes of narratives. Discussing the scholarship on narratives has turned into a rather complicated and complex endeavor among both literary scholars and rhetoricians. Narrative criticism tries to explicate the importance of expanding Foss' rather restricting definition of narrative criticism, and it also should be merged with other, complementary methodologies. It allows media and technology to introduce new narrative strands subgenres, and it acknowledges invitational rhetoric in particular as an effective way of analyzing and presenting a message. By acknowledging the openness of the narrative, an open mindset regarding narrative criticism can help analyze an artifact on a multi-faceted and holistic level that goes beyond tradition and embraces change as modern narrative scholarship develops.

The narrative is the backbone of this dissertation because this project focuses on an analysis of vegan food narratives and how they contribute to seeing animals differently. Stories help us connect with the Other and help us understand how oppressed groups feel. Listening to stories with a rhetorical sensitivity is crucial in being an active participant when a story is shared which can support the claim to view animals as a rhetor.



## 2.6 Conclusion: Combining Forces

The discussed approaches have one thing in common: Only recently has there been making an effort to engage with the animal on a more meaningful level. Studying the animal through an intersectional or rhetorical lens is rather new. Also, focusing on the nonhuman gaze as a practice of looking can enrich today's theoretical frameworks. Looking at the most recent scholarship in rhetoric, ecofeminism, and visual theory, a clear trend towards inclusion becomes more visible which is exciting and long overdue at the same time. My work attempts to complement this recent scholarship in tying the various theoretical strands together in an interdisciplinary approach.

After exploring the contributions of philosophy, ecofeminism, feminist rhetoric, visual theory, and narrative criticism, it becomes clear that an inclusive approach to food ethics will offer the holistic theoretical framework for an in-depth discussion of veganism through an intersectional lens. By combining these interdisciplinary forces, this dissertation attempts to make a viable contribution to the current food ethics discourse and to shed light on the complexity of veganism as a lifestyle choice that reaches beyond the mere abstinence from animal products, and allows a discourse on the advancement of social movements in general. Learning from the intellectual contributions from a variety of disciplines is a foundational building block for an interdisciplinary and intersectional platform. Intersectionality can serve as a bridging concept that can explore the interconnectedness of different kinds of oppression and offers a fruitful niche for animal ethics.

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### 3 Methodology and Methods

The major theoretical approach in this dissertation is feminist rhetoric. However, there are many different feminist rhetorical frameworks that one could apply to veganism. I have selected two feminist frameworks to help illuminate feminist rhetorical approaches to veganism: Invitational rhetoric and rhetorical listening. The methods employed in analyzing my artifacts, i.e., narrative and ideological criticism, will help us understand the multiple layers of values and beliefs that lead an individual to live a vegan lifestyle. In particular, this dissertation looks at intersectionality as a concept that can help vegans, non-vegans, and allies to the movement show how veganism can also be considered a social justice issue. The methodology of this dissertation encompasses three major research stages and three analyses that mutually support each other. The following table (Table 3.1.) summarizes the structure and the artifacts used in each stage:

*Table 3.1: Methodological Umbrella: Feminist Rhetoric*

Stage I Analysis #1: Documentary Invitational Rhetoric, Rhetorical Listening, and Narrative / Ideological Criticism
Stage II Analysis #2: Survey Quantitative Data Analysis

Stage III  
Analysis #3: Interviews  
Qualitative Data Analysis

In section one of this chapter, I will review the fundamental theoretical framework for the dissertation by discussing rhetorical feminist practices: invitational rhetoric and rhetorical listening. In section two, I will explain how the narrative and ideological criticism can efficiently and effectively explore veganism in the context of invitational rhetoric and rhetorical listening. Sections 3-5 detail how I will execute the analytic methods. The context of the analysis will include a rhetorical analysis of a documentary, the exploration of veganism through a survey, and finally an analysis of veganism through personal interviews. The interplay of these three contexts provides converging evidence that invitational rhetoric and rhetorical listening offer unique ways to understand intersectional veganism and have the potential to illuminate avenues for vegan activism.

### **3.1 Theoretical Approach: Invitational Rhetoric and Rhetorical Listening**

The inspiration for the theoretical approaches of this dissertation is feminist rhetorical practices. Feminist rhetoricians have been developing theoretical frameworks that seek to be more inclusive towards marginalized groups. For this project, I concentrate on invitational rhetoric and rhetorical listening. Glenn (1995), Foss (1995), and Griffin (1995) have offered valuable insights into recent rhetorical theories that advance the way we discuss veganism. By pointing out the emphasis on pushing the



margins of traditional rhetorical practices such as aiming to win an argument, and by including marginalized voices in discourse, feminist rhetoric encourages new frameworks for a more valuable and progressive discourse that aims to include rather than exclude. Through the scholarship of feminist rhetoricians, the traditional rhetor shifts from being an individual who aims to persuade an audience through skilled argumentation to an individual who acknowledges everyone in the rhetorical situation as equally important in exploring the issue at hand. Ede, Glenn, and Lunsford (1995) point out that

The figure of the rhetor has been assumed to be masculine, unified, stable, autonomous, and capable of acting rationally on the world through language. Those who did not fit this pattern—women, people of color, poorly educated workers, those judged to be overly emotional or unstable—those people stood outside of the rhetorical situation, for they were considered neither capable of nor in need of remembering and inventing arguments. (p. 412)

Ede, Glenn, & Lunsford (2016) in “Border crossings: Intersections of rhetoric and feminism” emphasize how a traditional rhetor had to fulfill criteria that stem from the traditional rhetoric of persuasion. Anyone outside of this paradigm would not be considered a rhetor. Feminist scholarship in rhetoric created frameworks that include formerly invisible groups in rhetorical theory, analysis, and practice. These new rhetorical strategies aim to deal with gender bias, societal tensions, and being heard as a traditionally unheard voice (Walters, 1983; Mao, 2005; Royster & Kirsch, 2012; Campbell, 2014). By including new voices into the rhetorical situation, feminist rhetoricians have been exploring new issues, the way these issues are discussed by different publics, and shedding light on new perspectives regarding who can be considered the rhetor.

Foss and Griffin (1995) developed the framework of invitational rhetoric in “Beyond persuasion: A proposal for an invitational rhetoric.” The authors contextualize invitational rhetoric as a theory that attempts to engage in discourses in a non-patriarchal way. The goal is to gain a deeper understanding of an issue first before changing an opinion about it by exposing oneself to the issue without any judgment or bias. Invitational rhetoric aims to find ways of communicating open-mindedly and without the aggressive pursuit of persuading (Foss & Griffin, 1995). Through mutual understanding, disagreeing groups can more easily find a common foundation that can eventually lead to change while change is not the necessary outcome of invitational rhetoric. By highlighting alternative values in rhetorical theory, such as empathy and listening, Foss and Griffin (1995) pay attention to new ways of communicating particularly controversial issues (Elshtain, 1982; Foss & Foss, 1991; Foss & Griffin, 1992; Gearhart, 1979; Griffin, 1993).

By separating invitational rhetoric from the act of persuasion, Foss and Griffin (1995) focus on the underlying values that invitational rhetoric shares with feminism. The authors define invitational rhetoric as “an invitation to understanding as a means to create a relationship rooted in equality, immanent value, and self-determination” (Foss & Griffin, 1995, p. 5). The idea of creating a relationship is more important than convincing the Other or even the prospect of winning an argument. Through relationships, a society is more likely to prosper, challenge current ideals, and ultimately change. Invitational rhetoric thus offers new perspectives and constructive dialogue by enabling the foundation and external conditions for change.

A nuanced example of invitational rhetoric and how it can be used for activism is PETA's clip, *Year of Vegan* (2016). The less than two-minute-long video tells the story of a young woman who engages with vegan values of empathy and equality in the course of a year. Encounters with vegans, animals, and her family and friends contribute to her challenging her existing belief system and slowly changing her lifestyle. Throughout this video, PETA focuses on veganism as a process without judging or pressuring the protagonist to follow a purist lifestyle that excludes all animal products and by-products from one day to the other. *Year of Vegan* affects the audience in a similar way, and the viewer of the clip experiences veganism as an ethical mindset that evolves slowly through conversations and experiences rather than through one moral epiphany. PETA has been known for its aggressive outreach approaches that used to build much more on guilt, shame, sex, and disgust (PETA, *Persia White* ad). Shifting from an aggressive, persuasive framework to a more invitational approach illustrates how PETA has been experimenting with different rhetorical approaches. *Year of Vegan* is a multimodal text that highlights how a realistic path towards veganism can take time and communicates to the audience that core values may change slowly. While this clip presents the story of a person who becomes vegan in an invitational manner, it should not be forgotten that it clearly has an activist agenda. Since PETA created the clip, it does not surprise the viewer that this short video tries to persuade by telling a story. This way, the clip becomes a nuanced form of invitational rhetoric because the most well-known animal rights organization shares it on social media to reach as many people as possible.

There are three dimensions necessary for invitational rhetoric to be possible. Foss and Griffin (1995) call these dimensions the external conditions necessary for invitational rhetoric. Trust, safety, and value can be considered this rhetorical platform. These three conditions need to be met for invitational rhetoric and its outcome of mutual understanding. Foss and Griffin (1995) point out that

[t]he condition of safety involves the creation of a feeling of security and freedom from danger for the audience. Rhetoric contributes to a feeling of safety when it conveys to audience members that the ideas and feelings they share with the rhetor will be received with respect and care [...]. Audience members trust the rhetor and feel the rhetor is working with and not against them. (p. 9-10)

When sharing personal stories, both the speaker and the listener need to feel safe in order to be open and honest while telling the story and in order to receive the story through careful listening. Therefore, this external condition of invitational rhetoric can and should be applied to storytelling. Next, Foss and Griffin (1995) describe how

[t]he condition of value is the acknowledgment that audience members have intrinsic or immanent worth [...]. Value is created when rhetors approach audience members as “unrepeatable individuals” and eschew “distancing, depersonalizing, or paternalistic attitudes” (Walker, 2008, pp. 22, 23). As a result, audience members feel their identities are not forced upon or chosen for them by rhetors. (p. 10)

Again, a narrative approach to a controversial issue like veganism fosters the external condition of value because sharing a personal story focuses on one’s own introspection and reflection rather than on the listener. Storytelling naturally is invitational and tries to exclude paternalistic attitudes. The listener has the choice to believe the story or not, to engage with its outcome or not.

The last external condition of invitational rhetoric is *freedom*, “the power to choose or decide” (Foss & Griffin, 1995, p. 11). By not granting the rhetor’s ideas special privilege but by rather engaging in unbiased listening, participants of invitational rhetoric can here choose what topic should be discussed in more length. The authors point out that no topic should be off limits and refer to Benhabib’s (1992) “principle of egalitarian reciprocity” (p. 29). The give and take should be balanced in invitational rhetoric which allows for a mutual exchange that keeps a distance from hierarchy, bias, and persuasion. Even though a documentary that focuses on vegan narratives can be understood as an example of vegan activism, vegan storytelling in itself, in the way it is structured and presented, allows the audience to walk away from the story without having changed their mind. Storytelling here becomes a gentler form of activism that tries to offer a different opinion.

After discussing the three external principles of invitational rhetoric—safety, value, and freedom— it becomes clear that the narrative can be used as a rhetorical strategy that first educates by presenting a new perspective to an audience. The second step, however, would be to engage in the kind of listening that leads to change. Ratcliffe’s (2005) framework of rhetorical listening captures this kind of listening well.

While invitational rhetoric focuses on the genre exposure of *Other* without judgment, agenda, or goal, rhetorical listening is a complimentary rhetorical framework that can lead to change. Rhetorical listening therefore becomes a core practice of invitational rhetoric. Through attentive and active listening, a better understanding between two disagreeing parties can be reached. Ratcliffe (2005) emphasizes how an

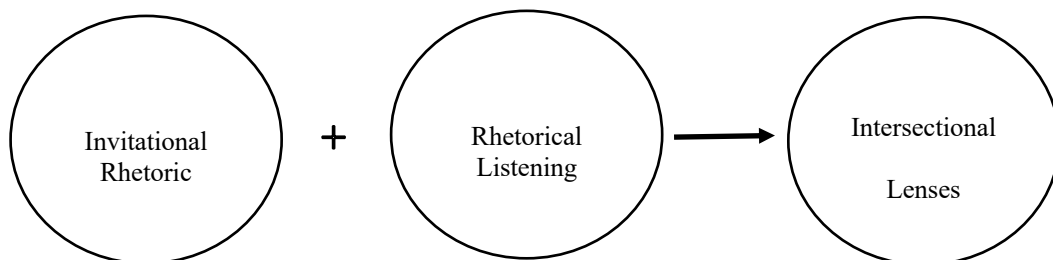
openness to other cultures leads to rhetorical listening which she defines as “a trope for interpretive invention and more particularly as a code of cross-cultural conduct” (17). By exposing ourselves to other cultures and by listening to them without judging, we can begin to understand the Other better and through understanding and an open mind, different cultures and groups can become more connected. Storytelling, in this rhetorical paradigm of offering and receiving, enables the conditions for invitational rhetoric.

Foss & Griffin (1995) share an example of rhetorical listening in their article on invitational rhetoric when they tell the story of a vegetarian and a hunter who happen to meet at the gate of an airport before boarding the same plane. As they initially engage in conversation on food ethics, they merely accuse each other of wrongdoing and try to convince each other that only their way is the right way. However, the two of them end up sitting next to each other on the plane and this time attempted to engage in a more rhetorically effective way by listening to each other actively and by trying to not judge each other’s value system. This second attempt of rhetorical engagement offers a more invitational approach because now agents of a rhetorical situation listen to each other’s stories, core values, and the motivations behind their actions, which leads to a powerful moment of mutual understanding and respect.

Invitational rhetoric and rhetorical listening predict that a discourse, especially a social or political discourse that has been ongoing and is not easily coming to an end or solution, can advance if both parties are open for a dialogue based on equality, value, and trust, and if both parties rhetorically listen to clashing perspectives. In this sense, invitational rhetoric provides the foundation for rhetorical listening and veganism as a

controversial discourse could benefit from this rhetorical framework. This connection between invitational rhetoric and rhetorical listening, particularly paired with the sharing of stories, can then bring intersectional lenses into practice. Through storytelling, the various layers of veganism can come to light. Veganism, understood through the lived experiences of individuals, this way can be less of an isolated lifestyle and more likely be understood as a lifestyle that connects the suffering of animals to the suffering of other marginalized groups. If the listener listens without bias or judgment and exposes him- or herself to an invitational setting, these intersectional lenses of veganism may be understood more clearly. Figure 3.1. illustrates the relationship between invitational rhetoric, rhetorical listening, and intersectional lenses.

*Figure 3.1.: The relationship between invitational rhetoric, rhetorical listening, and intersectional lenses*



### **3.2 The Merging of Narrative and Ideological Criticism**

It is important to distinguish here between narrative criticism and how it is used in literature and how narrative criticism is used in rhetoric. The original narrative criticism stems from the literary field and offers literary scholars ways of analyzing plot, setting, and characters mainly. This does not mean that rhetoric does not look into characters or the setting when engaged with a narrative approach to a rhetorical analysis. However, the

setting or the plot or the language used by characters/speakers become more important as they can be understood as vital parts of the rhetorical situation and how this rhetorical situation contributes to understanding in society. While many literary analyses may be applied to a rhetorical situation that exists in reality, not all have to fulfill this criterion. Another foundational distinction between rhetorical and literary narrative analyses is that a rhetorical approach to storytelling commonly borrows another method to create a richer analysis. Since ideological criticism looks into the belief system of individuals and analyzes how these beliefs create, support, or break an ideology, it becomes a complementary method to narrative criticism that by itself looks at the same aspects that literary criticism engages and it commonly borrows a second method to allow for a richer analysis. Finally, rhetoric finds narratives in many more artifacts than merely in literary works. Stories can be found in architecture, in conversations, or in dreams (Foss, 2009). In this way, rhetoric defines the narrative more broadly than literature does.

Storytelling naturally connects with invitational rhetoric and rhetorical listening since a narrative approach to a public issue allows the storyteller to share intimate thought processes and values, while the listener need not necessarily agree with everything, but is rather merely exposed to new ideas and a lived experience that differs from their own. The listener's responsibility is to critically engage with a story in order to understand its underlying motivations and the decisions that lead to a certain behavior or outcome. A person can be understood as "essentially a story-telling animal" who tries to make sense of their social surroundings by telling and retelling narratives based on their lived experiences (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 216). Narrative criticism analyzes these personal



connections and links in a story by looking at its purpose, its recurring features, and by assessing its importance in relation to a public discourse (Foss, 2009).

While the narrative plays less of a crucial role in discussing food ethics in analytical philosophy, stories have lately earned more prominent recognition in rhetoric when it comes to exploring veganism. Personal storytelling is used more frequently in order to raise awareness of factory farming. For instance, in *Eating Animals*, Foer (2010) uses several stories ranging from his childhood to being a parent that illustrate how key moments, religion, and the way he was raised shaped his core values about food. By intertwining his philosophical and journalistic results with his own narratives, he reaches his audience on a personal and ethical level. For example, Foer (2009) describes the value of finishing his whole plate by telling the food narrative of his grandmother who, as a Jewish woman, survived the war in Germany by fleeing to the United States. Experiencing and overcoming hunger causes a person to value food as a means of survival and less as a dietary or ethical preference. When his toddler son asks him why we eat a pig but not a dog, Foer (2009) decides to look more deeply into the matter of meat and starts conducting research on factory farming because he was not able to provide his son with a straightforward answer. Sharing these mini narratives and weaving them into his research helps the reader follow Foer's thoughts more easily and stay interested and connected with the author. But these food narratives also illustrate how closely related personal experience and research can be. Connecting an argument with a story helps not only the reader to stay interested, it also shows how our experiences shape

our research and vice versa. It therefore makes sense to make the narratives a vital part of one's research.

Authors like Aph Ko and Syl Ko (2017) also use narrative frameworks to make a case for black veganism in *Aphro-ism: Essays on Pop Culture, Feminism, and Black Veganism from Two Sisters*. Aph Ko and Syl Ko (2017) explain how the oppression of animals is relevant to human racial oppression and how “the ideology in which the animal situation is articulated is embedded in black liberation ideology” (p. 121).

Taylor (2017) explores the intersections between nonhuman animals and disability in *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation*. By interweaving her personal stories into her theoretical framework and considering disability studies and critical animal studies as two mirrors for systemic oppression, Taylor (2017) shows how the narrative can be used in order to communicate new directions for the animal liberation movement.

Narrative criticism and invitational rhetoric thus complement one another and can be understood as an effective interplay of experience and emotions while teaching and learning occurs at the same time. They both represent two links that build off of one another and that provide the basis for one another. Together, they create a framework for rhetorical listening that can lead to social change. Narrative criticism assists in understanding the invitational nature of a dialogue because storytelling offers new perspectives without judging. Also, narrative criticism can illustrate how active listening

becomes a rhetorical strategy for empathy and understanding. This rhetorical foundation can lead to challenging one's own value system and to change without arguing. Narrative criticism has been used in conjunction with other rhetorical approaches. An ideological lens complements the analysis of narratives particularly for this project because a close look at individuals' ideologies helps reveal their motivations for being vegan better. Ideological criticism engages with belief systems and explores evaluative beliefs in depth. Evaluative beliefs are beliefs that can change over time and lived experiences contribute to a shift in those beliefs (Foss, 1995). Individual beliefs in action make up an ideology that can be understood more easily through storytelling and the sharing of a lived experience.

Lived experiences can be based on conversations with people who have a different attitude about a controversial topic like veganism or establishing a close relationship with an animal. Pellico and Chinn (2015) focus on merging methods by combining narrative criticism with aesthetic criticism or Burkean clusters. They argue that narrative criticism invites other methodologies for a richer analysis which offer the opportunity for this project to combine methods stemming from narrative criticism and ideological criticism (Pellico & Chinn, 2015).

### **3.3 The Foundation: Intersectionality**

In 1991, Crenshaw published the foundational piece on intersectionality, "Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color (1991)." In this article, Crenshaw (1991) argues that women experience violent

behavior differently depending on their race. Intersectionality is a concept that sheds light on how lived experiences vary greatly according to people's gender, race, or socioeconomic status. Her article put intersectionality on the map for feminism and remains a crucial source in current discourses about oppression and domination.

Crenshaw (1991) focuses on structural and political intersectionality and discusses the ways spaces -- both physical spaces and linguistic ones -- and politics enable the different treatment of women of color when it comes to violence. She shows how the lived experiences of women of color are dramatically different from the lived experiences of white women because women of color suffer from racial biases and discrimination, and therefore battle more forms of oppression beyond the violent act. By pointing out how police react to violent crimes against women of color and how the media discusses them, Crenshaw (1991) explains how an intersectional lens is crucial and how gender must be discussed in connection with other factors like race and socioeconomic background.

Moreover, Crenshaw (1991) emphasizes how women of color find themselves in a metaphorical intersection hit by different oppressions simultaneously, which amplifies injuries suffered by these impacts. While all women face oppression based on their gender, not all women are *similarly* oppressed. Able-bodied women are not oppressed by ableism; white women are not oppressed by racism. A disabled woman of color, though, faces multiple layers of oppression and lives in an intersection of oppressive systems every day.

Intersectionality as a theoretical framework has evolved in recent years and has been both embraced and critiqued by diverse scholars. Crenshaw (1991) describes the

way oppressions can intersect and amplify the harms for an individual. More recently, however, scholars<sup>3</sup> have engaged with intersectionality by pointing to different oppressions as similar systemic phenomena and by pointing out parallels among them. In this sense, intersectionality can be understood as a bridge concept that engages new discussions on systemic oppression through what I will refer to in this dissertation as critical intersectional lenses. An intersectional lens is a way of looking at relations among oppressive systems and institutions. Through understanding these relations and connections, a more fruitful discourse about oppression is possible. An intersectional lens can, if applied critically, point out common ground without ignoring differences. It is crucial to clarify that intersectional lenses need to be handled with great caution so that Crenshaw's important key insight, namely that not all women are oppressed in the same way or to the same extent, does not get lost. Cooper (2018) reminds us that intersectionality as a methodological framework should be handled with care because intersectionality should always be closely connected to dominant institutions (p. 404). These institutions can be socially based. Looking at oppressions through an intersectional lens can lead to a better understanding of oppressions by raising awareness and social sensitivity about oppressive systems, but it is very important to not over-generalize and in so doing erase the lived experiences of an oppressed or marginalized group. Intersectionality can point towards individual differences in the sense Crenshaw discussed it. But lately, intersectional scholarship has focused on similarities among

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<sup>3</sup> Some of the intersectional scholars who write about the intersection of animals and human oppression are Taylor, the Ko sisters, Kemmerer, and Harper.

oppressive systems, which can be very helpful in seeing connections more clearly, but which can also be dangerous because focusing on similarities too much can cause a blurring of the different aspects of oppressions. If intersectionality is used in the sense of looking at similarities critically, it becomes a concept that allows us to find some common ground without falling into the trap of generalizing too much. An awareness of critical intersectionality is crucial in using the concept in a productive way. The intersectional lens thus can detect how oppressions can overlap. By looking at oppression through an intersectional lens that focuses on similarities rather than on individual differences, but that also uses a critical framework that does not dismiss differences among oppressed groups, a more thoughtful analysis or a rhetorical artifact or the data analysis can take place.

### **3.4 Building on Intersectionality**

New scholarship from within the animal liberation movement has embraced both Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality and its adapted bridge concept of an intersectional lens. Intersectionality has become an important framework within animal rights discussions. When it comes to the animal rights movement, intersectionality has become not only a valuable concept for scholars of Human-Animal Studies, such as Adams (1991) or Kemmerer (2012) who are leading voices in the feminist-vegetarian movement, but also philosophers like Wyckoff (2015), who argue that food ethics can greatly benefit from the intersectional lens. These diverse scholars use intersectionality as a bridge concept to more clearly understand not only the similarity of oppressions when it comes to the human and the nonhuman experience, but also differences.

Taylor (2017) explains the historical and social similarities between ableism and the oppression of animals in *Beasts of Burden*, and she discusses how individuals with bodily differences have been depicted like animals. Individuals who live with a disability are still invisible to society in some ways. For example, society tends to not see disabled individuals as sexual beings (Taylor, 2017). Aph Ko and Syl Ko use a similar framework when discussing the parallels between people of color and animals in their essay collection, *Aphro-ism: Essays on Pop Culture, Feminism, and Veganism from Two Sisters* (2017). Aph Ko and Syl Ko explain: “Ironically, in our well-intentioned discussions about racism and ‘diversity,’ we continue the racist tradition of overlooking the perspectives of people who suffer from it. As a result, the focus is almost exclusively on bringing non-white, but especially black, populations into white spaces and on ‘growing’ their rights and equal status” (p. 64). Similarly, society discusses the treatment of animals too often without having the animal’s perspective, desires, and needs at heart. Most discussions surrounding animal welfare fit into this category.

Adams illustrates in *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990) how sexism and misogyny operate to oppress both woman and female animals, but also how “animalizing” women is used as a rhetorical device to effectively make women “disappear.” By illustrating how one form of oppression, speciesism, can be used against marginalized groups like the disabled or women or women of color to oppress them even further, this scholarship shows how other oppressions can attack an individual at an intersection.

Oppressions overlap and impact each other in social and political arenas. Looking at veganism as a social movement that embraces other social justice movements, and also embraces an ethical sensitivity and awareness for individualized experiences of oppressions among animals allows veganism to become part of a larger circle of movements. In this sense, intersectionality can be understood as a connector between the animal rights movement and other social justice movements like feminism. But this inclusive approach also comes with dangers. Many activists experience activism fatigue while fighting for their cause.

Viewing veganism as less of an isolated movement and more of an interconnected one allows for a deeper understanding of the rhetoric of veganism and opens up new possibilities for vegan activism. The vegan movement is not exclusively concerned with nonhuman animals alone but also with the justice struggles of human animals and interconnected, overlapping oppressions. What connects different oppressions is *dehumanization*. Dehumanizing rhetoric can be seen in all oppressions, including poverty. Poor white people are referred to as “white trash,” Indigenous people and people of color are described as “wild” or as “animals.” (Harris, 2009, p. 15). The term, “dehumanize,” is anthropocentric and assumes human supremacy and exceptionalism. Moreover, it uses the rhetoric and strategy of dehumanizing to oppress. Understanding veganism as a way to resist dehumanizing politics, as a way to show solidarity with marginalized voices, and as a way to oppose the systemic oppression of any group, creates possibilities for a species-overlapping resistance. Fundamentally, intersectionality is a theoretical framework that points to the differences and the similarities we experience



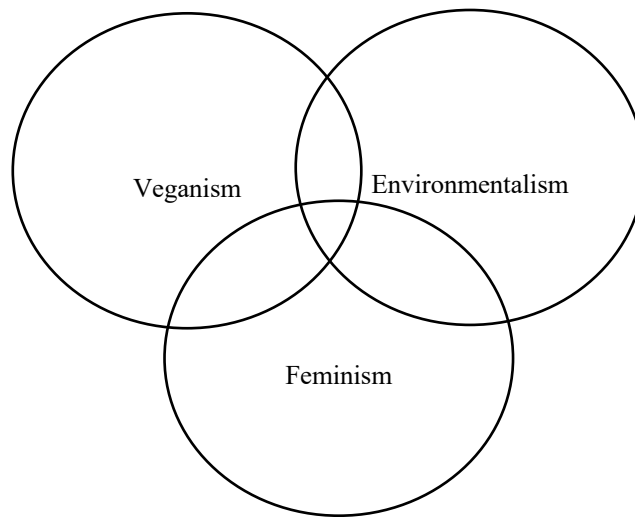
when it comes to facing oppression. While vegans typically look at intersectionality by pointing out the similarities of oppressive structures, Crenshaw (1989) emphasizes the individual experiences and differences within oppressive structures. These different lenses are important to keep distinct when discussing intersectionality because while one looks at similarities, the other one looks critically at anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism.

The framework of this dissertation looks at intersectionality by analyzing both of the above described intersectional lenses and the food narratives of vegans. If intersectional lenses indeed play a role when it comes to veganism, then activists can create more impactful interventions not only to protest the current treatment of food animals but also to resist oppression at large. The fundamental research premise of this project is to look at how the oppression of animals and the oppression of humans influence those who become vegans. Moreover, should humans who care about the oppression of humans also care about the oppression of animals? By wearing our intersectional lenses, we have the opportunity to see better how others are oppressed.

The intersectional lenses of oppression can be viewed in the following chart that mirrors the two sides of intersectionality. On the one hand, various forms of oppressions and social justice movements are connected and overlap. These overlaps help us see the commonalities but also the differences when it comes to systemic oppression. A vegan, for example, might also be sensitive to women's rights issues and identify with feminism because milk cows' bodies are abused and violated by being forcefully impregnated on dairy farms, and newborn calves are taken from their mothers. Here, commonalities in

two different forms of systemic oppression, i.e. the oppression of animals and the oppression of women and women's bodies, can raise an awareness and sensitivity when it comes to a form of oppression that does not directly affect ourselves. On the other hand, this interconnectedness of oppressive systems also emphasizes individual differences among the oppressed. The lived experiences of a white vegan woman differ from the lived experiences of a vegan woman of color, and these differences likely shape and inform their veganism. This intersectional lens is the lens Crenshaw emphasizes in her framework while the former intersectional lens is a rather recent way of discussing oppression in conjunction with social justice movements. Figure 3.2. visualizes how the vegan movement views Crenshaw's intersectional framework.

*Figure 3.2.: Intersectionality and Veganism*



One might argue that a general worldview that simply defines oppression as something negative that should be avoided might already be a solution in itself, and intersectional lenses are not necessarily needed. But I would like to emphasize how wearing our intersectional lenses might offer productive approaches to systemic oppression. Adams (2019) recently gave a talk at Harvard University about the #metoo movement and its importance for the animal rights movement (Harvard Animal Law and Policy Program). Lisa Kemmerer (2019) discusses the sexual harassment and exploitation of women by male animal rights leaders in her most recent scholarship. And PETA's sexist rhetorical strategies in promoting veganism have also been criticized with more clarity through intersectional lenses. It becomes clear that it is intersectional scholars who bring attention to this issue first and foremost. So, intersectional lenses can contribute to bringing attention to issues that are the outcome of deeply rooted sexist or racist belief systems. As women, as women of color, as women with disabilities, intersectional researchers provide valuable insights into the nuances of power and oppression that have not been openly discussed with enough insight and sensitivity before.

### **3.5 Research Stages**

This dissertation consists of three research stages: the rhetorical analysis of a visual narrative, the self-report survey, and skype interviews with vegans who took the survey and who gave their consent to be interviewed. Glenn Scott Lacey's documentary and visual narrative, *Vegan: Everyday Stories* (2016), is this project's first artifact and its rhetorical foundation. By analyzing the rhetoric of veganism as it is displayed in the food narratives of the four featured vegans in the documentary, Chapter 4 illustrates how

Lacey discusses veganism without using traditional means of argumentation against meat eating. The documentary emphasizes how individuals came to veganism and how it affects their lives without shaming omnivores. Through creating an atmosphere of openness and mutual trust, the viewer and the vegans of the documentary who share their intimate food stories both employ invitational rhetoric and rhetorical listening in order to reach a better understanding of veganism and its underlying beliefs and values.

The rhetorical analysis of this film uses narrative and ideological criticism as the dominant methods. Narrative criticism has been used in conjunction with other rhetorical approaches when it comes to rhetorical analyses. An ideological analysis with a focus on the belief system of vegans is a useful approach because it allows an analysis to dig deeper and uncover various narrative layers. Ideological criticism, with its emphasis on the changing belief system, complements narrative criticism because individual beliefs are visible throughout food stories. Individual beliefs in action make up an ideology that can be understood more easily through storytelling and the sharing of a lived experience. This film analysis represents the first stage of the data collection and analysis.

My analysis is set up in such a way that each part builds on the previous one, and all are mutually supportive of one another. *Vegan: Everyday Stories* illustrates the importance of the narrative as a genre for discussing personal food choices and the beliefs that lead to those decisions.

Intersectionality plays only an indirect role in the documentary. While the concept of overlapping oppressions was indirectly discussed in some scenes, it was not discussed

as a bridge concept that the vegan movement could benefit from. Thus, I decided to build a survey in a way that allows for a more direct and structured analysis of intersectionality. While the documentary illustrates a rationale for intersectional awareness, it is important to look more deeply into the value systems of vegans by highlighting their personal narratives and by comparing their evaluative beliefs before and after becoming vegan.

The methodological framework for this dissertation complements the methods used to synthesize the data. An intersectional approach invites a critical lens that analyzes data by looking at overlaps and disconnects. A mixed methods approach brings together both a quantitative perspective and a qualitative perspective and blends frameworks that traditionally have been perceived as separated methodological approaches. Proposing to analyze data quantitatively and qualitatively invited new perspectives that help understand complicated nuances of vegan narratives. This project's mix of methods thus encourage an intersectional analysis of the material.

Research Stage II then collects quantitative data and analyzes it statistically using R. The results of this quantitative data set is used as the foundation for Stage III, the interviews. The qualitative data derived from the interviews was analyzed by using the program, NVivo, and taking advantage of its visual representations of data and node analyses. The focus slightly changes for each research stage. While Stage I was mainly concerned with the storytelling aspect, Stage II looked at veganism and its connections with other social justice movements.

Last, Research Stage III tried to illustrate the outcomes of Stage II by discussing the intersectional nature of veganism when it comes to ten participants. All three research stages are connected and build on each other. The results of Stage I, for example, are utilized in Stage II and then in Stage III. This organization shows how the research process is scaffolded into three distinct yet connected parts. The next chapters will discuss the three research stages and their findings in detail.

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## 4 The Narratology of *Vegan: Everyday Stories*

In recent years, documentaries on food and ethical eating have become more popular, in part due to streaming services like Netflix or Amazon Prime where food documentaries that don't enter movie theaters found a home. The public has easy access to facts and arguments surrounding food ethics and the field has been growing due to growing consumer interest. Many consumers today care about what they eat, where their food comes from, and how it was processed. Alternatives to factory farming, like the farm-to-table concept or collaborating with a farmer so the consumer learns where the meat comes from and how it is processed, have become popular in recent years and discussions about food have reached mainstream media and public discourses.

Typical vegan documentaries either share hard-to-watch graphic details about animal slaughter or focus on making a strong argument as to why veganism should be considered a better lifestyle or both. Experts also weigh in on the environmental and health benefits of veganism and slaughterhouse footage became public educational material for vegan activism. Films like *Earthlings* (2005), *Our Daily Bread* (2005), and *Speciesism* (2013) focus on the suffering of farm animals and how animals used for food have become an essential part of a capitalist society.

In 2019, McCormick's impressive study on veganism was published on *VOMAD*. The study looked into the attitudes and beliefs of 12,814 vegan participants from 97 different countries (McCormick, 2019). Just like the online survey that has been discussed in this chapter, the Global Vegan Survey shows that by far more women tend to be vegan than men; 81.9% of the vegan participants were women (McCormick, 2019).

This number should be looked at a bit critically, however, because “the survey was shared almost exclusively through social media and women do appear to use all social media more than men. Secondly, of all the people on the internet, 83% of women and 75% of men use Facebook, which was the main platform this survey was shared on” (McCormick, 2019). McCormick (2019) further on continues to share that the most influential means of becoming vegan was a full-length documentary. This shows the important influence food documentaries have on the consumer:

The power of the documentary as a means to educate about food choices and the realities of consuming animal products illustrates how a film such as *Vegan: Everyday Stories* can have a strong impact on its audience. The impact of a documentary on an individual’s food choices shows the importance of a multimodal approach that reaches a person not only via logos and ethos but also pathos. Whereas a book can have a similar effect on a person, a documentary appears to outweigh all other means of persuasion and activism because it stimulates the senses more thoroughly by offering colors and sound. Seeing the gaze of an animal, listening to an animal being content in a meadow, adds rhetorical layers that a book can seldom achieve, especially when an artifact has an activist agenda. Movements can also be captured better in a film, which is as close as we can come to the rhetorical touch that Gene Baur offers on his Farm Sanctuary without actually visiting there.

Glenn Scott Lacey, the director and editor of *Vegan: Everyday Stories* (2016), is vegan himself and known for his television series, *Power Rangers*, *Transformers*, and *The Incredible Hulk*. Lacey became vegan after switching to a vegetarian diet in the

1980s which shows his personal investment in his documentary in which he merges personal narratives of individuals with food facts given by experts. In *Vegan: Everyday Stories*, vegan experts like Gene Baur and Neil Barnard and well-known vegan activists like Moby and David Carter share facts about nutrition and the effects of veganism in between the food narratives of four individuals (veganmovie.org).

*Vegan: Everyday Stories* is a food documentary that tries to reach out to individuals who might be interested in veganism but don't quite know yet what a vegan lifestyle looks like. The audience of the film focuses on people who find themselves in the initial stage of challenging their food narrative and seek a comprehensive introduction to veganism. By listening to vegans tell their stories, the viewer of the documentary can begin to understand how most people came from a place where they find themselves now and how veganism is a lifestyle that positively affects your ethical mindset, your health, and the planet. However, Lacey (2016) decided to share the stories of rather extraordinary vegans who are extremely active in their communities, who are inspirational athletes, and who have changed their lifestyle drastically after their vegan Aha-moment happened. The vegan Aha-moment can be understood as one defining moment, a moral signpost in a food narrative, that triggers a person to question their food habits and to challenge their current food ideology. The title, *Everyday Stories*, can therefore be a little bit misleading. The stories shared throughout the documentary are not ordinary or mundane in any way. Lacey (2016) carefully picked these vegans to make veganism approachable and even though the narratives in his film definitely motivate and

inspire, the featured vegans still appear a bit more like vegan rock stars rather than everyday vegans.<sup>4</sup>

The vegans featured throughout the documentary come from all walks of life. Reneé King-Sonnen is the wife of a Texas cattle rancher who remarkably turns her husband's farm into a farm animal sanctuary. Genesis Butler is a young African-American girl who becomes a vegan activist after learning where chicken nuggets really come from. Her story also highlights mindful parenting because her mother decides to tell her daughter the truth when she starts questioning the meat on her plate instead of sugarcoating where it comes from. Yassin Diboin is an ultra-marathoner who transformed his life after battling addiction and now proves how fit a person can be while on a vegan diet. And Jessi Hasley is the daughter of a farmer who grows up to understand how animals and humans share needs and desires like safety and motherhood and she impacts her community with her vegan food truck.

All of the vegans interviewed for this documentary either became activists in their communities or turned their professions into vegan-friendly projects that support the movement. These four vegans try to illustrate how individuals, no matter what financial means or how much social support they have, can turn their life around by changing their

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<sup>4</sup> The film is available on Amazon, iTunes, or YouTube. *Vegan: Everyday Stories* is a non-profit project and the film can be watched by anyone for free. The 501c(3) charity, *Northwest VEG*, funded the film which illustrates how it is the result of a community-based project ([veganmovie.org](http://veganmovie.org)).

diet, launching community projects, and by promoting veganism. While food experts weigh in on veganism and therefore add another rhetorical layer to the documentary, the food narratives of these four individuals are the primary focus of the film and speak to the audience the most. What these stories have in common is this Aha-moment regarding food animals. In some cases, this moment builds up for months or even years and sometimes it happens very fast, but no matter how long it takes, the vegans featured all share what moment, interaction, or thought process helped them see farmed animals differently. None of the featured vegans was born or raised vegan. In fact, both Reneé King-Sonnen and Jessi Hasley lived in an environment where food animals were used for profit because they lived on a cattle ranch and a farm, respectively.

This chapter rhetorically analyzes the stories presented in *Vegan: Everyday Stories* because this documentary's approach to veganism is unlike the mainstream vegan documentary and because this part of the dissertation represents the first research stage that looks at an already existing artifact. In his documentary, Lacey emphasizes the ethical signposts that lead to a vegan lifestyle by highlighting the before-after moments of individuals. By looking at the ethical shifts within belief systems of vegans, this rhetorical analysis attempts to show how small interactions with animals can lead to identifying and empathizing with other species that are easily overlooked as sentient beings. Also, this new ideological framework of the highlighted vegans hints to an intersectional framework that both the survey and interview results of this dissertation discuss in more detail.

The food narratives presented in *Vegan: Everyday Stories* demonstrate that in many cases a mindset shift happens to individuals when they decide to follow a vegan diet. Fundamental evaluative beliefs are beliefs that affect your way of thinking or your outlook on life. These beliefs directly affect the way a person lives and looks at various aspects of life, such as material goods, health, or food, as more or less valuable. When a fundamental belief is disrupted by a lived experience, the learning of facts, or exposure to alternative beliefs, a person's ideology can shift accordingly. For example, if I believe the physical house I purchase provides me with a sense of security, happiness, and status because I am used to being evaluated by my material goods rather than my philanthropy or values, then being a homeowner of a beautiful, big home becomes more meaningful to me than being community-oriented or being engaged with philanthropic projects. The lifestyle, then, becomes an embodiment for an ideology. In this example, having a big house represents the ideology of living up to a certain status in society which provides a sense of feeling safe and secure, and collecting things matters more than collecting experiences.

Looking at evaluative beliefs of vegans works similarly. Evaluative beliefs are malleable. Before abstaining from animal products, omnivores value certain foods because they are used to eating meat, family holidays focus on main dishes like a turkey at Thanksgiving, consuming animals makes people feel good, animal products evoke a certain sense of nostalgia like Grandma's recipe of Christmas cookies, or they culturally grew up learning to cook animals and using animal byproducts. Changing these pre-vegan beliefs has the consequence of changing one's outlook on social eating and feeding

your family which comprises a fundamental change in a person's everyday life choices. We eat several times a day, so changing a diet from a mainstream diet that is supported and fostered by the giants of the meat and dairy industry, by the media, by politicians, and by major restaurant scenes or gourmet chefs to a diet that opposes popular trends is definitely not easy because of cultural, societal, and interpersonal tensions that arise. But changing one's belief system allows vegans to make choices, several times a day, that are leading to a new food ideology that questions these fundamental beliefs most people grow up with. In this sense, vegans oppose what Stuart Hall (1988) refers to as a hegemonic ideology. A hegemonic ideology is created when it works as a map of life for a society (Hall, 1988). Believing that consuming animals for food is acceptable, even good, definitely falls under this definition of a hegemonic ideology that vegans challenge on a daily basis.

The transformations vegans go through have a common theme. All of the vegans featured in *Vegan: Everyday Stories* try to improve themselves and the world around them in some way. By opposing the slaughter of animals and by opposing the consumption of animal products overall, vegans distance themselves from the hegemonic ideology created by a neoliberal society. Moreover, it becomes clear how the mindset switch most vegans describe and experience is not exclusively grounded in rational thinking but is typically accompanied by an emotional response which can form an interdisciplinary outlook on veganism that goes beyond ethical concepts like utilitarianism and embraces the feminist idea of an ethics of care. In order to understand the complex nature of veganism and in order to discuss veganism as a lifestyle that



encompasses the oppression of animals alone, it is helpful to list and analyze the fundamental and evaluative beliefs that lead vegans to live a life that negates the consumption of animals and animal products.

#### **4.1 Invitational Rhetoric, Identification, and Rhetorical Listening**

A food documentary that focuses on food narratives can offer a fruitful framework for invitational rhetoric because the three external conditions necessary for invitational rhetoric— safety, value, and freedom— are provided (Foss & Griffin, 1995). *Vegan: Everyday Stories* creates an environment for a safe discourse through storytelling. Veganism is discussed peacefully, without the display of violence. This narrative approach therefore represents one of the core values of vegans, nonviolence. For instance, Dr. Sofia Pineda Ochoa, one of the expert voices of the film, recalls her experience of filming in a slaughterhouse. While sharing her narrative in great detail, she sits quietly outdoors and retells her inner struggle filming the slaughter of a cow whose gaze rested on her during the last minutes of her life. While the moment of slaughter represents a violent moment in which an animal fights, screams, and suffers, Dr. Pineda Ochoa chooses to emphasize the cow’s gaze and how this emotional and pleading gaze affected her emotionally. Scenes like this one help the audience engage with animal ethics without being confronted with graphic images or gory slaughter details. Instead of sharing images of blood and violence, *Vegan: Everyday Stories* uses storytelling to communicate the thought processes and morals behind veganism which might be more effective than scenes that evoke disgust, shame, or fear. The message, however, remains the same. Animals are killed, processed, and sold and Dr. Pineda Ochoa describes her

feelings of helplessness as she tries to raise awareness of factory farming while witnessing the slaughter of a cow she had just made a connection with the day before (Lacey, 2016). Sharing narratives instead of scientific facts or an ethical argument alone can create a sense of trust and openness between vegans and non-vegans (Foss & Griffin, 1995). Sharing stories allows for a sense of openness that helps both parties, the narrator and the listener, to interact with each other in a safe space which in itself inspires a meaningful engagement with a topic rather than judgment or persuasion at all cost.

The second external condition for invitational rhetoric is value. If an audience feels valued by the rhetor, the audience can more likely connect with him or her. Foss and Griffin (1995) state that the intrinsic worth of an audience must be acknowledged for invitational rhetoric to work. Again, Lacey (2016) grants his audience value by not overwhelming the viewer with upsetting details about factory farming or by only focusing on scientific evidence on why a plant-based diet is healthier than the diet of an omnivore. Scientific evidence is present throughout the documentary, but it is very much sprinkled throughout the narratives and discussed in between the stories so the viewer remains interested and willing to listen to the narratives first and foremost.

The narrators of the film portray their values and ideologies without accusing others. One example is Reneé King-Sonnen who turned her husband's Texas cattle ranch into an animal sanctuary. The fact that Lacey (2016) picked her as the first vegan portrayed in his documentary shows an awareness of his audience. After all, King-Sonnen herself not only consumed animal products for decades, her household income depended on raising and selling animals for food. Her inspirational story is used right at

the beginning of the film to illustrate to the viewer that anybody, even omnivores who work for the meat industry can change not only their food choices and lifestyle but their way of making a living as well. The audience of *Vegan: Everyday Stories* is comprised mostly of individuals who consume animals and who have started asking questions about food, where it comes from, and veganism. If someone had no interest in learning more about veganism, they simply would not watch a documentary about it. Therefore, the film attempts to persuade by sharing narratives of vegans who all ask these initial questions about food animals at one point in their life.

The last external condition for invitational rhetoric is freedom. According to Foss and Griffin, the freedom to agree or disagree with the rhetor is the basis for finding a common ground:

Freedom, the power to choose or decide, is a third condition whose presence in an environment is a prerequisite for the possibility of mutual understanding. In invitational rhetoric, rhetors do not place restrictions on an interaction. Participants can bring any and all matters to the interaction for consideration; no subject matter is off limits, and all presuppositions can be challenged. The rhetor's ideas also are not privileged over those of the audience in invitational rhetoric. (Foss & Griffin, 2002, p. 10).

This external condition of freedom can be applied to the film. The rhetors of the documentary—the vegans and the experts weighing in—are not talking to the audience in an all-knowing manner at all. Storytelling in itself does not automatically encourage persuasion. However, listening to a story in a safe environment, with a sense for openness to change and feeling free to make a decision afterwards, fosters a multi-layered rhetoric that persuades not with an emphasis on logos but rather with an emphasis on the sharing

of lived experience. The vegans showcased in the film understand how the viewer might react to them. Because most vegans were not raised on a vegan diet, they have valuable stories to share. Before changing their lifestyle, they used to consume animals without seeing the connections they are now aware of. So, exposing oneself to their food narratives can trigger the questioning and challenging of one's own food choices.

This interplay of the narrative and invitational rhetoric can be understood as a rhetorical foundation for a gentle sort of activism that can cause the viewer to change his or her lifestyle and become vegan. The narrative then serves as a lens that enables an introspective discussion with one's own food narrative. A documentary that focuses on the narrative approach as a rhetorical strategy might evoke questions, such as "Why do I eat what I eat?" or "Should I reconsider my food choices?" While the first layer of *Vegan: Everyday Stories* is based on invitational rhetoric, the second layer of the narrative allows for an engagement with one's personal food ideologies in a more persuasive manner. This engagement with one's personal value system may or may not turn into a long-lasting change and the film might or might not be understood as an example for gentle activism. But the narrative as a rhetorical framework allows a multi-layered approach to veganism that creates a platform for an invitational rhetoric and for the possibility to serve as an educational artifact.

Invitational rhetoric also becomes the foundation for the storytellers to be understood as individuals who have experienced a major ethical shift. This shift can be seen in how vegans redefine their ethical identity. All of the vegans in the film changed from being an omnivore to being vegan. And while they all had different motivations and

approaches to do so, they all took advantage of their rhetorical agency and challenged the way they were considering animals as commodities. Kenneth Burke illustrates his view on identification in *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (1973):

By “identification” I have in mind this sort of thing: one’s material and mental ways of placing oneself as a person in the groups and movements; one’s way of sharing vicariously in the role of leader or spokesman; formation and challenge of allegiance [...] one’s ways of seeing one’s reflection in the social mirror. (p. 227)

In *Language as Symbolic Action* (1966), Burke connects the concept of identification with unconscious persuasion. Identification is a vital part of rhetoric as one may, consciously or subconsciously, persuade others to engage in cultural practices. A documentary that illustrates the food narratives of vegans tries, underneath the initial layer of invitational rhetoric, to persuade the viewer into challenging his or her food choices. The film thus becomes a rhetorical artifact with an agenda, even though the persuasive strategy is invitational and less argumentative in the traditional sense. The social mirror Burke mentions is of interest for this artifact because storytelling can be compared to holding up a social mirror in front of the viewer’s eyes and thus the story becomes a means of persuasion in an invitational setting. This way, *Vegan: Everyday Stories* can be understood as a rhetorical artifact of a gentle vegan activism.

Burke (1973) furthermore emphasizes how identification is open to change because we are constantly exposed to new substances that have an effect on our identifications (p. 41). For Burke (1966), the interaction between first-nature substances (i.e. the material body) and second-nature substances (i.e. discourses, culture) make up a person’s malleable identity (p. 41-42). The vegans of the documentary all underwent new

exposures to new substances and challenged their pre-vegan identity. For example, Reneé King-Sonnen who, after taking care of an injured chicken on her ranch, realized that chickens are sentient beings. *Vegan: Everyday Stories* introduces Reneé King-Sonnen first. King-Sonnen's food narrative shows how drastically a person can change their food habits and lifestyle after changing beliefs about animals. The wife of a Texas cattle rancher, King-Sonnen, not only becomes vegan but also turns her husband's ranch into an animal sanctuary and now organizes community outreach events. She began questioning her behavior towards animals slowly and her awareness about animal suffering and animal cognition grew with time. At the beginning of the film, King-Sonnen brings up the example of nurturing a chicken back to health after an injury. Inserting a syringe into the chicken's body made her realize how she used to eat chicken legs without reflecting on where those chicken legs really came from. By looking at a chicken's leg differently, by seeing the leg not as a piece of meat but rather as an injured limb because it is inflamed, King-Sonnen confronts her food choices.

Lacey (2016) captures this moment fittingly by changing the camera perspective from farther away towards a close-up when King-Sonnen tells her intimate story:

Before I went vegan, I loved Chick-fil-A sandwiches, you know, I mean as much as anybody, and I would come home with a sandwich, a chicken sandwich, and I'd have my chickens at my feet. And, not everybody gets the tactile, you know, experience of living on a ranch like this going vegan. You know, I started having all these conflicts in my mind, in my soul that I would eat chicken and loving this one, you know, and we never ate our own animals. Even the cows—we would not slaughter our own cows. We would always buy the pretty, pink packages at the grocery store [aside to the chicken in her arms: She's going to sleep], and I remember vividly when I was working on her leg in the kitchen and had that little syringe with that seal. And I remember vividly that I was working on her and I got the gut feeling of how I

used to eat chicken legs while I was working on her leg and I just started crying at the sink. I mean, it was deep, guttural, horrifying. Just sobs because as I was working on her leg, I was realizing that, now, everybody eats them, [people] never even think a thing about it. (Lacey, 2016)

When King-Sonnen goes into detail about that moment when she handles the syringe and sees the chicken's leg differently for the first time, music starts to play and the viewer's gaze is directed at King-Sonnen because of the camera closing in on her. Lacey (2016) this way grabs the viewer's attention and emphasizes the moment that illustrates King-Sonnen's first step towards veganism. This moment can be understood as the beginning of a shift in her identification.

But according to Burke's scholarship in *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1969), identification automatically brings forth division. Division can this way be understood as the flipside of identification. Identification creates acts of division which results in veganism being in a social silo and separated from the mainstream consumer. This in turn results in less communication between vegans and non-vegans and many stereotypes both groups have of each other. For example, vegans might come to the rash assumption that omnivores don't care about animals or the environment whereas omnivores might believe vegans are too focused on animals alone.

Animal ethicists and ecofeminists have discussed the mental disconnect between the living animal and the processed animal product in depth. Carol Adams (2010) calls the notion of buying meat nicely packaged instead of hunting or slaughtering an animal herself an example of the *absent referent*. Not actively engaging in practices that entail cruelty towards animals makes it easier for people to eat animals with less guilt. Adams

(2010) shares her food narrative with her audience at the beginning of *The Sexual Politics of Meat*: Adams came to that realization when she bit into a burger after reflecting on the death of her horse. Melanie Joy (2011) builds on Adams' feminist-vegetarian theory and terms the absent referent the *missing link*. In this context, Joy describes how we love our pets and dote on them while eating other species. Animals are classified into distinct groups like pets, wild animals, feral animals, or farm animals. And each group receives a group-specific treatment. Abolitionist Gary Francione (2000, 2005) coined the term, *moral discrepancy*, when he discusses the way we treat some animals like friends while consuming others<sup>5</sup>. Moral discrepancy becomes clear when it comes to eating animals. On the one hand, a pet receives medical attention when needed while a farm animal gets slaughtered for consumption. King-Sonnen treats an injured chicken like a pet by nurturing her leg. By doing so, she comes to understand that there really is no difference in between that injured chicken and, for instance, a dog or a cat. Making this mental switch and seeing farm animals as animals and not merely as food products or commodities is the first realization in her and in her vegan journey.

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<sup>5</sup> Francione's use of the term *Moral schizophrenia* quickly became provocative and stirred up controversy because the disability and mental health communities felt Francione might stigmatize individuals suffering from clinical schizophrenia, and imply they were automatically immoral. Francione rejects that view in a blog post (2010). However, Francione still uses the term *moral schizophrenia* regularly in his writings, illustrating how oppressive language can be. The animal rights movement could be more effective and inclusive if leaders in the movement showed more rhetorical sensitivity and linguistic awareness. Francione's word choice oppresses members with mental differences, which does not foster intersectional thinking.



In her interview, King-Sonnen also mentions the tactile aspects of working on a ranch. Even though she and her husband would sell animals for slaughter, they themselves never slaughtered them. Keeping the act of killing an animal at bay usually enables ranchers to keep the absent referent, the missing link, in their everyday interactions with animals. But, living so closely with farm animals nevertheless caused King-Sonnen to question her food ideology and for her, the tactile nature of living on a ranch caused her to look at her evaluative beliefs more critically.

Teun van Dijk explains the notion of evaluative beliefs in *Elite Discourse and Racism* (1993). He explains how evaluative beliefs comprise specific groups and their behaviors:

If belief schemata involve general evaluative beliefs (opinions), they explain the traditional notion of social attitudes. These schemata, such as group prejudices or stereotypes, may be represented as hierarchical structures of high-level opinions at the top (e.g., “We don’t like blacks”) and more detailed opinions toward the bottom (e.g., “Blacks are oversensitive about discrimination”). (p. 39)

Van Dijk’s paradigm on evaluative beliefs can be applied to food ideologies. High-level evaluative beliefs here could be, for example, the notion that it is permissible to slaughter and consume farmed animals while low-level evaluative beliefs could be the misinformed idea that farmed animals are less intelligent than our companion animals. These evaluative belief schemata can be challenged through storytelling. These evaluative belief schemata support and comprise an ideology. An evaluative belief is a belief that can be changed. One of the evaluative beliefs King-Sonnen had before going vegan was that as long as farm animals on her ranch were treated well, it was morally justifiable to send them off to slaughter. Foer (2010) goes into detail about how ranchers

often feel extremely close to their animals even though their goal is the death of the animal. It is extremely common for ranchers to respect farm animals and treat them well while raising them for food. The last connection, the forceful death of an animal, is either ignored or downplayed by the fact that this meat is “happy” or “grass fed” meat. Beliefs like this comprise the ideology that eating animals is not morally wrong. King-Sonnen was able to turn around her evaluative beliefs about food animals after she started treating one like a pet by giving a chicken medical attention and by allowing her to stay inside the house, a space reserved for people and pets. This way, King-Sonnen became aware of what Joy (2011) calls carnism, the idea that we treat certain animals differently than others and that consuming certain kinds of animals can be considered as normal, natural, and necessary.

King-Sonnen’s story fascinates because her narrative discusses more than the food on her plate. Her husband comes from a family of cattle ranchers in Texas. For generations, his family has been involved in raising and selling animals for food. The fact that the family has its own branding for cows is testimony of the importance of tradition and family expectations he faced growing up. His wife inspires him to question his own food ideology when it comes to both what he eats and how he earns his living. Veganism clearly challenges and affects his core values and family traditions.

Going vegan entails questioning traditions to a certain extent. Holiday dinners will never be the same because food needs to be reevaluated. Other traditions, like a simple birthday cake or Christmas cookies, have to be reinvented. But a rancher turning his cattle ranch, that his family ran for several generations, into an animal sanctuary adds

another layer of complexity to a vegan narrative. Lacey (2016) shares the rancher's story from his perspective:

When she started talking about a sanctuary, I didn't tell her, but I was thinking, 'I guess I am going to get a divorce because this is ridiculous. It's not going to work in Texas.' She wanted to try and Reneé is a very strong-willed person and you can't tell her not to do something. (Lacey, 2016)

King-Sonnen explains further how she has been serving as a catalyst for her husband to see new ways he had never considered before. She emphasizes how watching his wife change and receive support from the vegan community to start a sanctuary changed her husband to the point where he started questioning his own heritage in support of King-Sonnen's new ideology.

Visually, Lacey (2016) shows this fundamental ideological change by having Tommy, the rancher turned sanctuary owner, look in the same direction as his dog. The camera catches both species' look towards the horizon which shows how both are ready for a new beginning and how they now embrace change. Tommy leaves the tradition of four generations behind and starts a new legacy for himself and his family. By looking into the distance together, the human and nonhuman gaze symbolize how a new day is ahead for not only Tommy and his wife but also for the nonhuman animals on his ranch.

Lacey (2016) likely introduces King-Sonnen's vegan narrative at the beginning of his documentary because it sets a clear example for the possibility of change. The first reaction to veganism typically is, "I could never do that." Watching the wife of a cattle rancher in Texas succeed at not only changing her food choices but also turning her husband's ranch into an animal sanctuary could inspire the most skeptical viewer to at

least ask the questions that lead towards evaluative beliefs that can introduce a change, such as, “Why am I eating what I eat?” or “What’s the story behind the food on my plate?”.

Still, as inspirational as King-Sonnen’s narrative is, not every person takes up the risks that come with a change in profession. The scene of King-Sonnen’s community outreach event illustrates how much hard work is behind such little outcome. Not many people come to the ranch-turned-sanctuary and it will take King-Sonnen several years to establish the bustling sanctuary she is hoping to create. A willingness to take risks, monetary efforts and financial stability are a must for an endeavor of this kind.

The exposure to new second-nature substances like an environment that allows farm animals to be tended to inside a home or challenging ranching, a family tradition for generations, learning more about the sentience of animals, and talking to other vegans helped King-Sonnen to create a new identification and her ideologies and belief system changed drastically:

*Table 4.1.: Reneé King-Sonnen’s Evaluative Belief Schema*

Before:
I believe there is nothing wrong with using animals to make a living.
I believe farm animals don’t have the same needs as pets.
I believe slaughtering animals is a natural part of life.
After:
I believe I can make my husband’s ranch my calling and be an advocate for animals.
I believe a farm animal reacts to pain and is sentient.
I believe all animals should be sheltered and protected, not only species we grew up to value.

King-Sonnen’s story is inspiring and motivational which shows how the narrative can function as a rhetorical strategy to persuade even though the act of storytelling is

based on an invitational foundation. Rhetorical Listening, as a closely related framework of invitational rhetoric, is understood as a trope for cross-cultural conduct (Ratcliffe, 2005, p. 17). Krista Ratcliffe (2005) connects Burke's framework of identification with her theory of rhetorical listening when she discusses how one aspect of rhetorical listening embraces change. Invitational rhetoric does not necessarily invite social change, but rather allows every opinion to coexist without being persuasive. Rhetorical listening, on the other hand, embraces social change more and has a persuasive component. Ratcliffe points out how Burke's idea of agency within identification connects with rhetorical listening when she argues that "this agent of change both shapes and is shaped by identification, which is a site where the agent of change may transform him-or herself and/or others and/or cultural practices even as he or she is transformed by them. Such a concept of personal agency provides a place conducive to rhetorical listening" (p. 58). Rhetorical listening in this way overlaps with Burke's identification concept while invitational rhetoric can be understood as a prerequisite for rhetorical listening. Together, this rhetorical interplay allows for a rhetoric that fosters an openness to change by listening to lived experiences.

## **4.2 Teaching Empathy Through Storytelling**

In his foundational article, "All Animals Are Equal," ethicist Peter Singer (2007) calls for an expansion of the moral horizon in order to consider farm animals as sentient beings who deserve to live without being harmed by humans. Empathy becomes a core value when expanding a moral horizon because through empathy we can understand the suffering of farmed animals and the senselessness of mass slaughter. The youngest vegan

featured in *Vegan: Everyday Stories* is eight-year-old Genesis Butler. Her food narrative and Yassine Deboin's story of moving toward veganism illustrate how empathy can highly influence an individual's decision-making process, no matter how challenging the circumstances might be. Both stories share an emphasis on empathy and serve as strong examples that an expansion of our moral horizon is a crucial ethical signpost for a transition toward veganism.

Yassine Diboin's narrative shows a strong connection to building and expanding empathy towards nonhuman animals. Diboin, a vegan ultra-marathoner, turns his life and ethics around after a family intervention. While the camera depicts Diboin running, he tells the story of his childhood trauma caused by divorce and his following experiences with substance-abuse that started with alcohol and led to illegal drugs. This dark period of his life is full of blackouts, car accidents and drug overdoses that were all directly connected to his addiction. Diboin shares:

Plenty of times, I just acted very immorally and very recklessly. You know, I just didn't care. It was almost, like, it was a cry for help. I was just, like, 'Save me.' I called my brother, and I called him in the middle of the night, I was crying to him on the phone and I, apparently, I said I needed help. I still to this day don't recall that but that's what he said and I believe him. I love my brother to death, and so I went to go and visit and my sister was there, my brother was there. My sister-in-law was there, my mother was there and my little niece was there, [...] and we were talking and then, all of a sudden, the tone kind of changed a little bit and, and I think it was my mom who said, 'You know, the real reason we all wanted to get together today and talk to you is we wanted to talk to you about your problem that you have.' And so I was there with all my loved ones and they all went around the room and they told me how I have affected them which I didn't think I did. I thought I'm only affecting myself; this is my life. [...] So, I checked myself into a 28-day rehab. you know, they say a huge tree can grow from a tiny mustard seed and that's where I began. People want to ask me so many

questions about ultra running or being vegan or this and that. It's, like, really simple, you know? It's, it's about the love, really. And that's that's really the void that was filled. (Lacey, 2016)

Diboin's story from a drug addict who led a reckless life and who was only concerned about himself to a vegan ultra-marathoner shows how the love of his family helped him challenge self-destructive choices and an unhealthy lifestyle. Feeling this void that was created by trauma. It is love and empathy that enabled him to view the world differently and to align his food ideologies with his athletic lifestyle. Not caring about himself goes hand in hand with not caring for other human or nonhuman animals. A drug addiction took over his life and all he cared about was living from one hit to the next. His evaluative belief was formed around his addiction which resulted in an ideology that only centered around his needs and wants. Food was at that point not even on Diboin's radar besides being a means to an end.

The intervention marks the beginning of his change. Mastering the strength to enter rehab after realizing how much he hurt his family members who loved him helped Diboin understand how his actions go far beyond himself and reach others. This realization becomes the basis for his new belief, the belief that everything is connected and actions have far-reaching consequences. Our actions connect us not only to the people around us but also to other species and the planet. Our decisions affect others, not only the ones who are in our immediate surroundings. This change in a core belief causes Diboin to question and challenge his food choices. Understanding that his choices cause his family members to feel pain and suffering helps him understand how his food choices similarly cause suffering to nonhuman animals. After the absent referent becomes visible

to him, he starts to live a physically and mentally healthy life and abstains from consuming animal products.

Tom Regan (1985) argues that before changing their habits, people must first change their beliefs. Diboin's narrative illustrates how changing the assumption that forms an evaluative belief can transform an ideology. The assumption here is the idea that your actions and behavior are only your own concerns. As long as you don't intentionally harm others, you are not harming them. This assumption formed Diboin's evaluative belief that it is morally justifiable to consume drugs, to drive drunk, or to eat animals which formed his ideology of living a reckless, self-destructive life without being aware of it. After changing his assumption, Diboin's evaluative belief is directly affected and he changes the way he thinks he should act which results in him reframing his ethics and lifestyle.

During his interview, Diboin also raises awareness about the way animals have been treated by humans overall. By comparing pets to farmed animals, he tries to show how we need to overcome speciesism and view farmed animals also as "experiencing subjects of a life" (Regan, 1985). Diboin explains this in his own words:

To be a vegan, you realize more and more how animals have been used as commodities. We don't need to use them for money. I'm realizing that this animal has such feelings and such love. You think that dogs are just like that or other animals, too? Are cows like that or pigs like that? You know, that was quite a shift for me." (Lacey, 2016)

Acknowledging that farmed animals are sentient beings like pets helps Diboin change his evaluative belief about eating meat, and he embraces empathy towards animals used for food. Regan (1985) explains how subjectively aware beings who are



capable of experiencing pain care about being alive and thus should not be treated like commodities. By changing our beliefs, we can change the way we view animals and adopt what Malamud (2012) coined the nonhuman gaze. The human gaze dominates our representations of animals. Diboin understood that after changing his food ideology and, like most vegans, developed a new sort of sensitivity when it comes to the representation and treatment of animals. While the human gaze only sees the animal as a commodity, the nonhuman gaze focuses more on the way the animal experiences life in a commodified world. Malamud (2012) refers to photographs by Berlin artist, Britta Jaschinski, when illustrating how images that do not artificially frame animals are powerful. Jaschinski's photographs of zoo animals emphasizes the nonhuman gaze instead of the human gaze that anthropomorphizes and seeks to entertain or sell. While the anthropomorphization of animals on the one hand can evoke more moral consideration for the animal, it can on the other hand also create a distance between the consumer and the animal. A good example of this kind of anthropomorphization is the depiction of pigs on wallpaper in barbeque restaurants. Instead, Jaschinski's photographs display the nonhuman gaze by focusing on the sadness, confusion, and isolation animals suffer while being forcefully enclosed. If we applied the nonhuman gaze to a barbecue restaurant's mascot pig, would the consumer still choose to eat meat or would he or she opt for an alternative? Alternatives to meat consumption are abundant, but visual representations of animals utilizing the human gaze make us believe that there is nothing wrong with eating meat. In order to close the gap between animals and our attitudes towards animals, we can follow Jaschinski's example of creating and acknowledging more visual representations of animals that depict the nonhuman gaze.

Lacey (2016) depicts Diboin with his dog when he discusses the commodification of animals and speciesism. The viewer of the documentary sees Diboin running through the woods with his dog and sees him petting his dog while speaking. This visual attempts to illustrate the huge differences in how certain species are treated within society. Hearing about the sentience of farmed animals while watching a person being affectionate with a dog can help close the gap people typically feel between the beloved domesticated animal and the animal they consume. This scene could also be understood as a form of resistance to current power relations. With the gaze resting on Diboin sharing his views on farmed animals and their sentience while he is with his dog Lacey (2016) here might communicate how actions don't correlate with values and how the consumer should resist mainstream habits and truly question their way of treating animals.

Diboin's narrative inspires the viewer to become the best person one can be, physically and ethically. Being kind to oneself does not stop with one's own individual lived experience. A vegan lifestyle affects not only one's own health or way of thinking but also the well-being of one's immediate social surrounding, society in general, and all species. In this respect, Diboin conveys how veganism can be understood as a multi-layered lifestyle that does not only affect one aspect like health or the environment but a variety of issues that should be approached equally, such as the systemic oppression of humans and animals.

Diboin's beliefs changed from an overall me-centered perspective to a perspective that included not only his family and friends but society and animals at large. His new

lens allows for a stronger sense of empathy towards all beings and shows his awareness of the interconnectedness of us all and the oppressive intersections of the marginalized.

*Table 4.2: Yassine Diboin's Evaluative Belief Schema*

Before:
I believe my actions only affect me and nobody else. I believe in doing what's best for me because I come first. I believe what's best for me is what makes me feel good in the moment.
After:
I believe my actions have far-reaching consequences beyond my immediate social circle and even reach other species. I believe abstaining from animal products is a way to love myself and the world. I believe I can have a positive impact on others by advocating for a vegan lifestyle.

It takes much discipline and hard work, mentally and physically, to undergo Diboin's transformation. The viewer of the documentary might be a bit intimidated by seeing this ultra-success story and might actually be a bit turned off by Diboin's success because it seems out of reach for the average person. While Diboin's narrative definitely inspires, it can also create the opposite effect and make the viewer feel that they simply could never run so many miles, eat so well, and live such a clean life.

Another food narrative the film shares is the story of Genesis Butler. Genesis already is a spokesperson for *Mercy for Animals*, a non-profit organization that fights cruelty against farm animals. Genesis' insights are impactful because she is living proof that children don't need to eat animal products to thrive. The viewer gets to meet Genesis in action first. She is filmed delivering an animal rights speech and since she is still too short to stand behind the podium, she needs to step on a stool to reach the microphone.

But her size or age don't stop Genesis from sharing her message of the power of compassion which may result in her audience being curious and inspired to learn more about veganism.

But age alone is not the only attribute that makes Genesis extraordinary to her audience. She also represents members of vulnerable populations that suffer from systemic oppression similar to the oppression of farmed animals. The first thing one notices when looking at Genesis is that she is a child. Children are, similar to the elderly, often not taken seriously by society. They typically have to fulfill a certain role. Children are expected to play, be happy, and not worry about problems in the world. Genesis shows how children are capable of discussing difficult moral questions, though, and her mother employs a frank rhetoric when her daughter questions food. Genesis' mother explains how her daughter began her vegan story when she was only a toddler:

She wasn't even four years old, she always had chicken nuggets. They were her favorite meal at the time. So, I read all the parenting books in the world because she was my first child. And a lot of books said if that's all they want to eat and they are picky, just let them eat chicken nuggets or whatever it is all day and I just said, 'Okay.' I believed the commercials, the white meat and, you know, if you have milk with it or apples and the whole kid meals and all that, and I would give it to her because it would make her happy and, at least, I thought it made her happy because I believed the advertisements and it didn't make her happy and she just finally told me one day. She said, 'Hey, mom, where do we get our food from?' and I said, 'You know, we get it from the grocery store,' and she said, 'No, that's not where we get it from.' So, she, she knew and so at this moment I knew I had a tough decision to make. Do I tell her the truth or do I, you know, just keep playing it off and just my instincts kicked in and I said I'm going to tell her the truth because I always tell myself as a parent: If my child asked me something, I'm going to give them the straight truth because, you know, that's what's needed. I told her we kill animals for the food that she was eating and she was devastated and I didn't even know she knew what death meant at that age and she just knew deep down inside.

And she said, “We have to kill...what is it?” and I said, “Well, chickens and cows and I was explaining, you know, beef is from cows and the burger, that’s not beef, that’s a cow and, you know, the chicken is an actual animal, a little bird.” And she said, “You know what, I don’t ever want to eat this again.” (Lacey, 2016)

Genesis’ mother faces a difficult decision when her daughter asks where food comes from. Many parents would not go into much detail about animals being raised and processed for consumption which probably stems from a protective feeling towards the child because adults don’t want to burden a child with facts that might shake up their moral horizon. Also, parents might not be ready to discuss the truths behind factory farming because then they might have to question their own food choices. But Genesis’ mother decides to go with the uncensored truth which results in Genesis understanding the reality of factory farming at an extremely early age. Genesis then decides to become vegan. Being vegan when only four years old shows that Genesis, who was not raised vegan by her parents, is a child who has a determined ethical mindset and who has parents who support her in forming an ideology that is not mainstream for children her age.

Genesis’ story could impress the viewer of *Vegan: Everyday Stories* because she inspires others to follow her lead at such a young age. As a child activist, Genesis reaches out to her peers and at the same time inspires and motivates adults. Children her age might start questioning their parents on where the food on the plate is coming from and might try to follow Genesis’ example after listening to her. But Genesis also motivates adults. When a person of such a young age models veganism, the lifestyle looks almost effortless and easy. Often, individuals hesitate to change their food habits because they

feel it is difficult and complicated. If a child shares her food narrative, she becomes a powerful inspiration to adults. Children and adolescent activists have lately gained a political voice. In 2018, the Parkland shooting survivors recruited school children across the United States for the national March for our Lives to protest gun violence in schools, and children in Tokyo, Madrid, Berlin, and other cities across the world showed their support. (New York Times, 2018). Recently, many schoolchildren all over Germany decided to protest during school hours to raise awareness of climate change (Unterberg, 2019). Greta Thunberg is an example of a young activist who is taken seriously on an international stage. Genesis has also become a spokesperson and a public face for veganism and raises an awareness of unnecessary animal suffering.

But being a child alone is not the only reason why Genesis represents vulnerable populations. She is also female. Women have been facing oppression, sexual and non-sexual violence, sexism, misogyny, and culturally-based bias for centuries. Adams discusses the connections between the oppression of animals and the oppression of women by looking at advertisements of meat products (2010). Advertisements sexualize animals and animalize women, creating absent referents. In becoming an “animal,” the woman disappears, and in becoming a “sexually attractive being,” the animal disappears (Adams, 2010). Genesis therefore could be viewed as a spokesperson not only for animal rights but also for children and women who might be more likely to listen to her message because of their shared lived experiences. Lacey (2016) explores sexism in his documentary when Genesis talks to David Carter, a professional football player and vegan. They discuss how you can be strong, athletic, and healthy while following a vegan diet and how boys have tried to make fun of Genesis before they realized she could do

more push-ups than they could. Here, *Vegan: Everyday Stories* becomes more than a food documentary alone. Without directly mentioning the similarities among oppressive systems, Lacey (2016) shows how girls and women today still deal with sexism on a regular basis and how they need to prove themselves to boys and men.

Lastly, Genesis represents not only the vulnerable populations of children and women, but also African-American women. Crenshaw (1989) discusses black feminism and how lived experiences differ greatly between white women and women of color. She specifically looks at domestic abuse and violent crimes towards women and how the media and representatives of the law react differently to the same crime. Genesis is a black girl and therefore a member of another oppressed group in the United States. Again, Lacey does not discuss racism in his film directly, but choosing Genesis to be featured in *Vegan: Everyday Stories* might motivate members of oppressed groups in general, such as women, women of color, children, the elderly, or immigrants, to question their food ethics. Through Genesis's narrative, Lacey (2016) illustrates an important new layer of ethical veganism without explicitly spelling it out: *Intersectionality*. Incorporating intersectionality into the discourse of veganism shows that ethical veganism should be more in touch with larger contexts of human oppression instead of exclusively being concerned with animal rights. Finding common ground with those engaged in other social justice issues is a way for vulnerable groups to leave silos that are only concerned with one way of oppression, such as racism, sexism, ableism, or speciesism. An intersectional framework helps us understand the overlaps of systemic oppressions and therefore intersectionality can serve as a bridging concept that helps understand veganism less as an alienating lifestyle but rather as a lifestyle that supports

one fundamental, common cause— helping the oppressed and creating more justice in society.

Genesis's food narrative shows how she, just like René King-Sonnen, turned around her evaluative beliefs and the underlying assumptions that formed her ideology. Instead of simply assuming that chicken nuggets exist in the world without causing any harm, she bravely faced the truth. Chicken nuggets do not resemble at all the animal they actually come from. Adams' (2010) *absent referent* or Melanie Joy's (2011) *missing link* are powerfully represented in the chicken nuggets, which make eating an animal palatable for children who commonly display deep affection and empathy for animals. Genesis' mother breaks this cycle of ignorance by telling her daughter how chicken nuggets are made. By accepting a fact that adult omnivores commonly ignore in a rhetoric of denial, Genesis embraces the ethical consequences and abstains from animal products from that day on.

Many parents can likely connect with Genesis's story. In *Eating Animals*, philosopher and journalist Jonathan Safran Foer (2010) faces the same problem Genesis's mother faces when his son asks him why they eat meat but not their adopted dog. This innocent question becomes a trigger for Foer to investigate his own food ethics and the question of meat eating for society overall which eventually leads to him writing a book in which he takes advantage of invitational rhetoric. Reading Foer's food narrative combined with scientific knowledge and watching individuals like Genesis transform from a toddler who enjoys chicken nuggets to a vegan activist can become a starting point for the reader or audience to follow these examples and question the evaluative



beliefs that form their food ideologies. Storytelling offers the opportunity to understand individuals who make different choices. Through narratives, we can find the inspiration to challenge our way of thinking.<sup>6</sup>

Genesis’s evaluative beliefs changed quickly after being exposed to the truth behind factory farming. Like many other children her age, Genesis loves animals and after linking the food on her plate to animals, she makes a conscious decision and stops consuming animal products. Genesis’s story is impressive because of her consequential empathy and because she is so young. While she cannot buy groceries or cook for herself, she can make the decision to follow a vegan lifestyle and her family members become allies of the vegan movement because they support her decision. Genesis’s belief system when it comes to food could be listed as follows:

*Table 4.3.: Genesis Butler’s Evaluative Belief Schema*

Before:
I believe chicken nuggets and other animal products taste great and come from a happy place. I believe there is no injustice in the world.
After:
I believe it is not okay to eat chicken nuggets or any animal products because animals should not get harmed and killed so we can eat them. I believe everybody should stand up against injustice of any kind (human or nonhuman). I believe every animal (human or nonhuman) deserves to live a life without suffering.

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<sup>6</sup> Genesis has in the meantime continued her vegan activism by giving a TedEx talk and other speeches. Her TedEx (2017) talk emphasizes how a vegan diet helps heal the planet which shows how intersectionality goes beyond species and includes a sense of justice for the Earth as well. By abstaining from animal products, we can drastically reduce environmental pollution and thus ensure our planet keeps its ability to sustain life.

### 4.3 Bridging the Gap: Intersectionality

While Genesis's narrative hints at intersectionality visually but not verbally, Jessi Hasley's story in *Vegan: Everyday Stories* more clearly depicts the idea that systemic oppressions overlap and inform one another rather than coexist in separate silos. Jessi Hasley grew up on a farm in Kansas with a grandfather who was a butcher. Being around animals—and killing and eating them—was the natural way of life for her until she had an impactful encounter birthing a lamb in the middle of the night, alone. She recalls that watching this lamb grow,

You almost feel a connection like, like I would with a child of my own. You know, it changed me in my thoughts about food, especially to the—the day that, ehm, that she was killed I wasn't home by design. I knew she was going to be. Ehm, that was the plan from the beginning. That was our structure. That's what we did. And so, you know, it was tough, that day, but my background has always been, this is life. This is the way things are and this is—so my feelings were wrong. I needed to buck it up. I needed to, ehm, get with the program and stop being so emotional about it and, and feed my family. And that was kind of the attitude of things. And, so I cooked dinner a short time later using this baby. And cried for days. (Lacey, 2016)

By watching Hasley retell her experience of witnessing a birth of a farmed animal and how this experience becomes the first step of altering her viewpoint on eating animals, it is easy to see the emotional effect this birth had on Hasley. Seeing this mother tend to her newborn lamb in similar ways a human mother would, helped Hasley close the gap between species because she realizes we all have shared core desires and values, such as protecting our young and feeling safe. This realization can be considered an example of intersectional thinking that includes the oppression of other groups beyond

the oppression of animals. By making the parallel between her own species and another species, Hasley creates a bridge between herself and animals used for food.

Hasley's vegan narrative illustrates how closely connected she grew up with animals, from birth to death. Raising animals and processing for food played a vital role in her family and upbringing and changing her evaluative belief, "It is right to slaughter animals because it is natural to do so and this is how things have been," must not have been easy for her given the environment she grew up in. When everyone around you shares your ideology, it is easy to act accordingly. But if you are the first or only one who challenges an ideology, especially within the structure of a close-knit family, it becomes much more difficult to change. Hasley's experience of witnessing and assisting the lamb's mother at giving birth reminded her of her own experience of motherhood. She overcomes speciesism by connecting with an animal through sharing a life changing event. This night in the barn becomes a signpost in Hasley's food narrative and even though she still tried to fight her emotions and cooked the animal she helped come into this world, Hasley eventually decides to abstain from animal products and stay truthful to her core value of making a living on food.

Hasley owns a vegan food truck called "Seed on the Go" and tries to change the way people think of vegan food as being tasteless, limited, and overall uncreative. During her interview, she emphasizes how the reputation of vegan food needs to change because it is a common misconception of veganism that it just is not a satisfying lifestyle (Lacey, 2016). Hasley's vegan food truck not only attracts vegans but people in general who want to try good, vegan food. This is a very invitational approach to veganism.

According to Foss and Griffin (1995), one of the external conditions for invitational rhetoric is safety. By avoiding the feeling of being judged or threatened, both as a vegan or omnivore, Hasley creates a safe environment for her food truck customers. What matters first and foremost here is to consume good food, paired with good wine, and this atmosphere creates a platform for meaningful exchange. In this respect, Haley contributes to the prerequisite of invitational rhetoric. She lets the food speak for itself first and the arguments for a vegan diet can follow the culinary experience.

Apart from safety, Hasley also makes sure that every customer, no matter what relationship they might have with food or animals, feels valued. Foss and Griffin (1995) note how “the condition of value is the acknowledgment that audience members have intrinsic or immanent value” (10). Lacey (2016) interviews a customer who does not represent the typical vegan: A Vietnam War veteran was invited to the food truck by his daughter. He had never before tried vegan food and ends up enjoying his burger. Everybody is welcome at a vegan food truck, and nobody is excluded. A food truck easily enables the condition of value to be present because it is in public, amidst everyone’s everyday life. Even an older man who, according to his daughter, might not understand half of the items listed on the menu, gives it a try. Hasley therefore fulfills an important criterion of invitational rhetoric with her vegan food truck.

The last external condition for invitational rhetoric is freedom. Only when feeling at liberty to decide or choose can mutual understanding be achieved (Foss & Griffin, 1995). The war veteran can serve as an example here as well. His daughter originally suggested he should eat something at home so he would not have to make a food choice

he is not accustomed to at Hasley's food truck. But instead of following his daughter's advice, he chose to join her and order his lunch at the truck as well:

She [his daughter] was really worried today for me coming here, eh, about vegan, and told me to eat something at home. Well, I didn't. And I thought, you [Hasley] gotta have something. And I'm quite surprised, it was very good. It is very good, I will finish it. (Lacey, 2016)

This customer feels free to order or to not order food. If he accompanied his daughter to a restaurant, he would definitely feel more pressured to order food. The food truck allows potential customers to check everything out on their own terms. They can easily walk away without ordering and return on another day. So, this way freedom is also present here as the last external condition necessary for mutual understanding which happens when the Vietnam war veteran decides to eat vegan food and ends up enjoying his meal, to his own surprise.

By creating an environment that invites mutual understanding, Hasley is doing the groundwork for the vegan movement. She eliminates stereotypes, evokes curiosity, and changes the way vegan food is viewed by many individuals. She also considers re-branding her truck and calling her food plant-based rather than vegan because the well-advertised health benefits of a plant-based diet might draw more people to veganism (Lacey, 2016). The end goal would remain the same: More people would eat fewer animal products.

As Hasley is depicted playing with her pets at home, her husband goes into more detail about her food narrative. After going vegan, Hasley donated to more animal rights

organizations and only uses vegan products. Her husband's initial doubts and fears went away after a while and he now also eats a vegan meal without feeling he needs to add meat for protein or milk for calcium. This segment allows Lacey (2016) to lead into professionals explaining how a plant-based diet is healthy.

A vegan food truck becomes a representation for invitational rhetoric and a safe platform for mutual understanding. It also represents Hasley's expanding moral horizon after understanding the parallels between human and nonhuman core desires. Hasley's work is the initial rhetorical layer that can create an open mindedness to listen, try, and change evaluative beliefs that make up our food ideologies.

Still, Burke's notion of division needs to be discussed in connection with Hasley's food truck and also with King-Sonnen's animal sanctuary. Both community projects, the food truck and the sanctuary, show how these two vegans turned their lifestyle and activism into a profession. While doing so, they still exist within the context of a capitalist society. This sort of liberal capitalism creates a division from capitalism in general while still attempting to make profit. It resists a hegemonic ideology of food, but it still articulates other, potentially oppressive, systems.

Table 4.4.: Jessi Hasley’s Evaluative Belief Schema

Before:
I believe consuming animals is natural and normal I believe tradition is important. I believe lived experiences, such as motherhood, cannot be compared among different species.
After:
I believe consuming animals is wrong because animals are sentient. I believe I can be part of a new cultural movement while still keeping my family’s tradition of placing food in the center of my life. I believe farmed animals should not be slaughtered and processed for food because they experience life’s milestones, like motherhood, in a profound way.

From the beginning until the end of *Vegan: Everyday Stories*, one woman shares small insights about her food ideology. Salise Shuttlesworth’s story unfolds in two parts of the documentary, and the concept of intersectionality is stronger at the end of the film. Shuttlesworth shares her experiences with the King-Sonnen’s Texas ranch turned sanctuary and emphasizes first that every animal should matter, not only certain species (Lacey, 2016). Shuttlesworth’s perspective stresses that speciesism is a form of discrimination that should be taken seriously. She has a second appearance at the end of the documentary where she recalls her animal story:

The cage of chickens fell off a transport into Memorial Park and broke open and all of them but one were killed. One of them had one of her wings ripped off, was lying there mostly dead. So, I went and picked this chicken up and took it to the shelter, took it to a vet and she— we fostered her. We named her Isabel and got to know her. It became impossible to ignore that we had to take the next step. My partner and I had both had brushes with being vegan, we had been vegetarian for years. For us, Isabel’s face was on it. This isn’t a question about eggs. This is a question about Isabel. And that’s a really easy answer. (Lacey, 2016)

What is interesting during Shuttlesworth's narrative is the camera angle. While the camera focused mostly on her head during Shuttlesworth's initial introduction in the film, during her chicken narrative, the camera frames not only her head but also her upper body which reveals to the viewer that Shuttlesworth, just like Isabel the chicken, only has one arm. Shuttlesworth does not discuss her own disability while talking about fostering and adopting a disabled chicken; however, the parallel does not get lost on the viewer, especially because the camera makes this shift from Shuttlesworth's face to her upper body right when she talks about saving the one-winged chicken.

A woman with a bodily difference chooses to save a female farmed animal with a bodily difference and turns to veganism to end the oppression of another marginalized population. This intersectionality in action shows the importance of considering oppression in general when discussing veganism. Too often, veganism is discussed or researched within the silo of animal rights. Opening up possibilities to approach veganism from several perspectives of systemic oppression helps us understand the nature of intersectional veganism. In her call for the inclusion of the disabled body, Garland-Thomson (2002) explains how our cultural ideologies deny mortality in general but we tend to make an exception when it comes to the disabled body. Society expects people born with chronic diseases to pass earlier. Disability becomes the excuse for a shorter life and death is quietly accepted and even expected. Challenging these biases and ideologies by acknowledging that a disabled woman has a voice, is an important step towards a more inclusive environment for marginalized populations.



But Garland-Thompson (2002) does not focus on disability alone. She includes bodies of oppressed groups in general in her argument when she expands the bodily discrimination to “ethnic Others, gays and lesbians, and people of color” who “are variously the objects of infanticide, selective abortion, eugenic programs, hate crimes, mercy killing, assisted suicide, lynching, bride burning, honor killings, forced conversion, coercive rehabilitation, domestic violence, genocide, normalizing surgical procedures, racial profiling, and neglect” (p. 9). Lacey ends his film with a visual representation of intersectionality without discussing it directly with the viewer. Does the audience create the link between the one-winged chicken and Shuttlesworth who shares the same disability? It probably can be assumed that this connection can be made rather easily. However, how directly can the audience connect the systemic oppression the one-winged chicken experiences with the systemic oppression disabled humans experience? This last connection is definitely more complex, and Lacey might ask a bit much here from his viewer. Or, Lacey never intended to directly discuss veganism through an intersectional lens.

Recently, the narrative has been used as a rhetorical approach to understanding intersectionality. In *Sister Species*, for example, Lisa Kemmerer collects a series of female writers who share their food narratives and different approaches as animal activists. These powerful narratives elaborate on the intersections between two oppressed groups, women and animals. Miyun Park’s (2011) “Fighting ‘Other,’” for instance, describes how she, as a Korean immigrant child, faced discrimination and compares

how racial and cultural bias of the public still very much can be seen towards nonhuman animals:

The desire to differentiate— and alienate and subjugate— ‘other-ness’ is one of the greatest sins of our species, and for me personally, one of the most effective motivations for relentless activism to push for change. Why does it matter if we’re male or female, gay or ‘straight,’ religious or agnostic, blue collar or white collar, ‘yellow’ (as my birth certificate lists) or ‘white’ (as yours may read), or any other us-versus-them classification” Aside from the convenience of having neat, decisive demographic categories, these differences don’t and shouldn’t matter. Nor should it matter if we’re winged, finned, feathered, hoofed— or not— when it comes to the infliction of unnecessary pain and suffering. (Park, 2011, p. 79)

Park’s approach to improving the lives of nonhuman animals is holistic: “No one sector, whether it be animal advocates, scientists, consumers, legislators, corporate decision-makers, farmers, vegetarians, or vegans, can change the system alone” (p. 84). Ingrid E. Newkirk (2011), president and cofounder of PETA, focuses on cultural bias and argues that just as we should not limit our compassion to *only* those closest to us like our immediate family members or friends, we also shouldn’t limit our compassion to *only* “human beings—for then we will be mimicking the hierarchical, supremacist ideas that have caused the very problems we object to—but that we reject all classifications as much as we possibly can and demand to be part of something bigger, members of the community of all living beings” (p. 66). By including all species on our moral horizon, we create an open-mindedness regarding ourselves, as well. When we fight bias across species, we also fight biases we have against our own differences since we now oppose discrimination at large.

Listening to Shuttlesworth's narrative through the lens of structural intersectionality offers new possibilities for the vegan movement to be included as a social justice movement. Francione (2017) argued at the Asheville VeganFest that activists have a moral obligation to fight injustice wherever they see it. This does not diminish their work for animals but rather enriches the idea that everybody should be included in the moral community and that speciesism, racism, sexism, classism, etc exclude and discriminate against vulnerable populations.

Disabled animal activist, Taylor (2017), offers a strong argument both for the liberation of animals and the disabled in her important book, *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation*. She looks at similarities regarding the invisibility, treatment, and status in society when it comes to those two vulnerable groups and calls for them to be recognized as bodies and beings. Her scholarship shows how fighting speciesism and ableism at the same time enriches both the discourse in the animal community and in the disability community. In Taylor's framework, feminism, philosophy, disability studies, visual theory, and rhetoric merge with her personal stories and scientific outcomes. Combining the narrative with academic scholarship of a variety of fields, both from the humanities and the sciences, is a fruitful way to discuss a complex issue like veganism outside of its common silo and helps the public understand the importance of being part of a discourse that is more inclusive to all marginalized populations and not only to nonhuman animals.

#### 4.4 Intersectional Thinking Outside of Academia

The previously analyzed vegan narratives show how intersectionality is presented indirectly in some of the featured stories. Intersectionality as a bridge concept that can include veganism on the same spectrum with other social justice issues, though, is not discussed directly throughout the film.

In academic settings, intersectionality plays a more significant role when discussing veganism. For instance, Christopher-Sebastian McJetters discusses possible intersectional frameworks for veganism by arguing that a vegan diet combats race-based violence as well as the oppression of animals (Malhotra, 2018). McJetters points out that veganism “has an impact on environmental racism, it reduces our use of resources, it helps people who are living in poverty, it rejects the violence that happens in slaughterhouses, it helps people across the planet” (Malhotra, 2018). By allowing veganism to be understood through an intersectional lens, we can view a vegan lifestyle as a social justice movement in itself that opposes the oppression of marginalized groups. This way, veganism becomes less isolated and much more integrated as a vital contribution to the discourse on social justice.

The title of the documentary, *Vegan: Everyday Stories*, is mildly misleading. Everyday stories imply that the food narratives of the film are ordinary stories or stories that can happen any day. While these stories in fact did happen to ordinary individuals, not every vegan necessarily builds their whole life around their food narrative and has such a tremendous impact on their community. It makes sense to assume that Lacey carefully selected these storytellers in order to create a rhetorical artifact that represents a

gentle sort of activism. This gentle activism is more hidden than the more direct approaches; yet, we should not forget that each story told in the documentary is told for the reason of having an impact on the viewer. Ideally, the viewer will question his or her food choices and eat less or no animal products after watching.

Because the vegans in the film do not directly discuss the impact of intersectional thinking on them and because they are carefully selected by the producer, it makes sense to launch the next research phase of this dissertation and stress a more widespread, random data collection. This way, the survey and interview answers of truly everyday vegans can be analyzed and discussed in more detail, specifically through an intersectional lens. The following chapters of this dissertation will focus on quantitative and qualitative data analyses based on an online survey and follow-up skype interviews. This quantitative and qualitative data centers around the intersections of veganism and other social justice issues.

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## 5 A Quantitative Study of the Rhetoric of Veganism

There are advantages to conducting both quantitative and qualitative research. Because both types of research can show different aspects of the rhetoric of veganism, this dissertation takes advantage of a mixed methods approach. While quantitative data might not necessarily reveal the complex nuances of food narratives, it can show strands and connections between a variety of attitudes towards food, which in turn leads to a better understanding of qualitative data collection. After establishing a rhetorical foundation by analyzing and discussing the documentary *Vegan: Everyday Stories* (2016), it becomes clear that looking at the food narratives of vegans through an intersectional lens shows an awareness of overlapping oppressions. This chapter focuses on the data analyses retrieved from launching an online survey which represents the second research stage of this scaffolded project.

The research for this dissertation employs mixed methods in order to gain a more holistic understanding of veganism. Collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data creates a holistic approach to research. The data collection was divided into two parts. After an online survey was launched, individual skype interviews with vegans followed. This way, the quantitative data precedes the qualitative data which results in an analysis that tackles questions about food habits first and explores deeper, rhetorical layers of food narratives later.

## 5.1 Survey

The online survey was designed as a response to the outcomes and findings of the rhetorical analysis of the documentary (Chapter 4). By looking at social justice attitudes and beliefs towards social action in particular, intersectional strands among vegans can be discussed in a more targeted way than in *Vegan: Everyday Stories*. The documentary was created primarily as a multimodal form of vegan activism that encourages the consumer to question their food choices, beliefs, and ideologies. Intersectional thinking for the most part plays an indirect role in the film or, when it does become more prevalent, it is not discussed in depth. This is why an online survey on attitudes towards food might help illustrate what motivates vegans and if vegans show an awareness when it comes to other systems of oppression. Also, a survey might show how the underlying food beliefs can be grouped together and connected or how food beliefs differ from each other.

The survey was launched online and distributed via social media for two reasons. One reason for launching the survey online was because vegans typically find their community online. Social media, like Facebook or Instagram, in particular have shown how easily a person can connect with like-minded people all over the world. Veganism, even though it is becoming more popular in urban areas, still feels rather scattered and isolating in rural towns. Hence, data collecting took place using the snowball effect social media offers. In particular, the survey was posted on several Facebook groups such as, *Vegans United* and *Intersectional Vegans*. Moreover, the survey was posted on the Facebook walls of selected individuals who are interested in food and animal rights. Last, the survey link was shared via private message with activists and scholars of animal

rights. In that message, the activists and scholars were encouraged to share the link with individuals who might be interested in serving as a participant for the study. This approach helped target vegan groups and communities specifically. The data collection lasted one week.

## 5.2 Participants

Reaching out to vegans is best done online since vegans and vegetarians typically interact and discuss their food choices on social media. Vegans and vegetarians are a small part of the overall population (an estimated that 2 percent of American adults self-identify as vegetarian (Stahler, 2019)). The study's plan was to have a substantial number of vegetarians involved in the study. The author and her advisor know a number of vegetarians and vegans and asked them to take part in the survey and to share the survey within their vegan community. The survey questions were mainly posted as an online survey link on Facebook groups that focus on veganism, such as *Vegans United*. On these groups, survey takers were also encouraged to ask other people in their social circles to take the survey, resulting in snowball sampling. This increased the chances that more vegetarians and vegans would be involved in the study since vegetarians and vegans tend to know other vegetarians and vegans.

The snowball sampling technique was successful. The sample size was 152 participants. Sixty-one reported being vegetarian or vegan (40%) (2 people did not indicate dietary preference). So, a large number of vegans or vegetarians were included in the study.

A large percentage of the sample identified as female ( $N = 116$ , 76%, 5 people did not indicate sex). This effect was somewhat expected since the primary author is female and has more female friends (who are in turn likely to have more female friends) along with the general tendency for females to be more likely to be vegetarian than males. The average age was 40.96 ( $SD = 12.96$ ) ranging from 18-78. Sixty-percent of the sample ( $N = 91$ , 1 declined to respond) had a postgraduate degree, and 47% ( $N = 72$ , 16 declined to respond) had a household income of more than \$74,999 a year. There was also a higher than average number of atheists or agnostics in the survey, with 57% ( $N = 85$ , 12 declined to respond) reporting being either agnostic or atheistic. So, the average person in this sample was female, educated, less religious, and more affluent than the average person in the United States.

### **5.3 Materials**

The goal of the survey was to identify factors involved in people being vegetarian (or vegan) and the relations that would be indicative of having intersectional views. It was expected that demographics would likely play a role (e.g., sex, education). Other more cognitive factors would also play a role (e.g., attitudes towards activism, attitudes toward social justice, knowledge about the condition of animals).

After providing informed consent, participants were presented with the following measures. Each measure was presented on its own page and participants were not allowed to go back in the survey. Each of the survey instruments was based on already validated, existing measures.

***The Activism Orientation Scale*** (Corning & Myers, 2013). The Activism Orientation Scale is a general measure of one's attitudes towards activism. The 35-item scale consists of two subscales measuring conventional activism (e.g., whether one would be encouraging a friend to be an activist) and a high-risk activism subscale (e.g., whether one would engage in a physical confrontation at a rally). Each of the 35 items were rated on a Likert scale ranging from 0 (extremely unlikely) to 4 (extremely likely). Mean scores were calculated for each subscale. It was hypothesized that conventional activism would be positively correlated with an increased likelihood of being vegetarian.

***The Social Justice Scale*** (Torres-Harding, Siers, & Olson, 2012). The Social Justice Scale is a 24-item measure of people's attitudes toward social justice. The scale consists of 4 subscales that measure one's attitudes about social justice (e.g., "I believe that it is important to talk to others about societal systems of power, privilege, and oppression"), one's control concerning social justice issues (e.g., "I believe that it is important to allow others to have meaningful input into decisions affecting their lives"), what one views as norms that govern social justice (e.g., "Other people around me are supportive of efforts that promote social justice"), and finally, intentions concerning social justice issues (e.g., "In the future, I will do my best to ensure that all individuals and groups have a chance to speak and be heard"). Each of the 24 items were rated on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Mean scores were calculated for each subscale. It was hypothesized that the intentions and attitudes subscales of the Social Justice Scale would predict being a vegetarian. Higher scores on the scale would predict being vegetarian.

*The 4Ns* (Piazza, Loughton, Luong, Kulik, Watkins, & Seigerman (2015). The 4Ns is a measure of how Natural, Nice, Normal, and Necessary eating animals is (e.g., “Our human ancestors ate meat all the time”). The 4Ns consists of 16 Likert scale items rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly disagree). One total average score was calculated for responses to the 4Ns.

*The Knowledge of Animals as Food Scale* (Feltz & Feltz, in press). The Knowledge of Animals as Food Scale is a measure of objective knowledge about animals used as food (e.g., “Most chickens used for food and eggs live in open spaces”). Participants could respond that the statements were either true or false and a total number of correct responses were calculated. It was hypothesized the Knowledge of Animals as Food Scale would predict being a vegetarian. Greater knowledge when here would predict a higher likeliness of being vegetarian.

*The Ten Item Personality Inventory* (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swan, 2003). The Ten Item Personality Inventory is a brief measure of the Big Five Factor model of personality (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, openness to experience). Each of the Big Five personality traits are measured by rating agreement with 2 pairs of adjectives. Mean scores on the pairs of adjectives were calculated for each of the Big Five traits. It was hypothesized that those individuals who were more open to experience would be more likely to be vegetarian because being open to new experiences stands in contrast to being conventional.

After responding to these instruments that measure one's attitude towards meat and animals, one's knowledge about farmed animals, and one's beliefs regarding social justice and political involvement, the survey moved on to collect personality and demographic information about the participants.

The end of the survey serves as a bridge to the second part of the data collection and the transition from quantitative data analysis to a qualitative data analysis. Here, participants were asked to share their personal story when it comes to food. In an attempt to apply invitational rhetoric, participants were not given strict guidelines when it comes to sharing their food narrative. There was no length requirement and no list of questions participants had to answer. The second part of the prompt ("Who and what experiences shape your food choices?") helps guide participants through an understanding of what a food narrative is and to avoid unnecessary confusion. Apart from that, participants were left to make as much or as little out of this question as they felt comfortable sharing in an anonymous survey. These food narratives and the later question about the willingness to be interviewed via Skype then led to the Stage II of the data collection.

***Demographic Information.*** Finally, demographic information was collected. The survey here focused on age, sex, political orientation (1-7 scale, with 1= very liberal, 7 = very conservative), religious affiliation (coded as being religious (= 1) or not religious (= 0), education level (coded as having advanced degree or not), and income (greater than \$75,000 = 1, less than \$75,000 = 0). Collecting demographic information is standard practice in survey methods for a number of reasons. First, it is valuable having an overall, general picture of the kinds of people that are included in the survey. This picture can

give sense of how representative the sample is of various populations. Second, often demographic features are important determinants of behavior. Finally, for the present study, collecting demographic information was necessary to test some of the hypothesized about intersectionality (e.g., females are more likely to be vegetarian than males).

The self-report survey is structured in a way that attempts to look into the intersectional nature of the belief system of individuals, vegans in particular. Statistical analyses and the research program, R, helped determine correlations between social justice attitudes and vegans. Based on the correlations, I constructed two different kinds of models of the data. These models used the different variables gathered to predict who was likely to be an omnivore or a vegetarian. The first models were constructed using multiple linear regression techniques. These techniques allow us to determine which variables offer the most predictive power. The models also allow adding additional variables until the predictive power of the model is no longer improved.

Next, I used structural equation modeling to develop a path analysis of the relations between the dependent variables. Path analysis allows techniques to model not only direct relations between variables (e.g., correlations), but also indirect relations between variables. To take one example, we might find that in looking at correlations that variables are related to one another. However, when we use multiple linear regression, some variables are no longer related to the outcome variable given the presence of other variables. This suggests that some variables account for the relation or “mediate” the relation. To illustrate, supposed we find that the following three relations: (1) going to the bar Friday night and being sick Saturday morning; (2) Going to the bar Friday night and



drinking alcohol, and (3) Drinking alcohol and being sick Saturday morning. It is reasonable to think given these relations that going to the bar Friday night is not the most proximal cause of being sick Saturday morning. Rather, the proximal cause is drinking alcohol. That having been said, going to the bar could increase one's tendency to drink more alcohol. So, in this case, alcohol mediates (or accounts for) the relation between going to the bar and feeling sick Saturday morning. In this instance, if one were to perform a multiple linear regression, it is likely that the relation between going to the bar and feeling sick would not be found once the relation between drinking alcohol and feeling sick is accounted for.

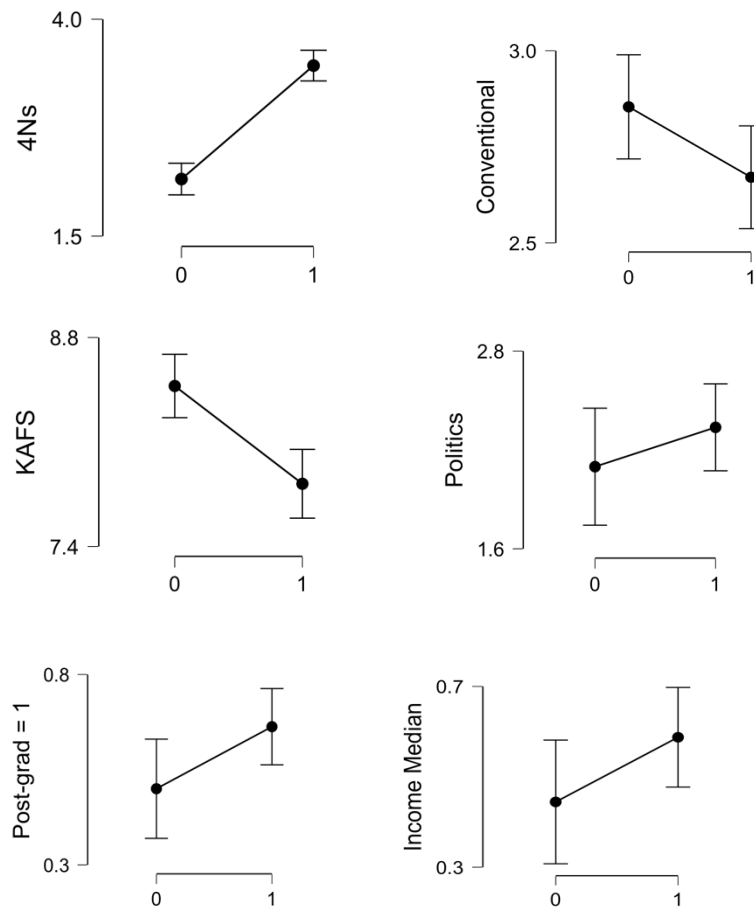
## **5.4 Results and Discussion**

Before looking at the data, there was a plan for this quantitative analysis (indicated in the hypotheses above). Planned analyses are important because they reduce the risk of detecting false positives. Because the author had *a priori* hypotheses about the direction of the relations between the variables, the author used 1-tailed tests to determine p-values (if one wants the results of a two-tailed test, simply double the p-value indicated in the table). Correlations are reported in Appendix A. There were not enough vegans in the sample to meaningfully analyze. So, I combined the results from vegans and vegetarians into a 'vegetarian' category.

Many of the hypotheses found support from the data whereas others did not find support in the data. There were significant positive correlations found between eating behaviors and conventional activism attitudes, the 4Ns, knowledge, political attitudes,

and one's education level and income. Contrary to predictions, there was no reliable relation with social justice attitudes or intentions, sex, or conscientiousness.

*Figure 5.1.: Line graphs plotting the mean differences between the predictor variables as a function of being an omnivore or vegetarian. Error bars represent 95% confidence interval of the mean value. Vegetarians or vegans were dummy coded as 0 and Omnivores were dummy coded as 1*



The lack of the predicted relations may be a function of the non-representative sampling that was used. This sampling procedure produced a sample that was substantially more female, educated, vegetarian, and affluent than a sample of average Americans would be. A look at the data suggests that in many instances, people were already at “ceilings” for the instruments, so the instruments would not likely be sensitive enough to find differences among people in this sample. For example, there was heavy skew for the two social justice factors of interest. The mean for Social Justice Attitudes was 6.49 (SD = 0.73) with skewness of -2.8, meaning that there is only a small amount of the scale that is being used to extract information. Similarly, for Social Justice Intentions, the mean was 5.8 (SD = 1.29) with skewness of -1.6. Given these heavy skews, it is unlikely that a relation between these two attitudes and eating behaviors would be found. Similarly, there were substantially more females than males in the sample making relations with sex difficult to find. Consequently, it is not surprising that such relations were not found.

Given these caveats, the correlations are suggestive that there are a number of factors that are involved in one’s consumption of animal products including knowledge, activism attitudes, attitudes towards animals, one’s socioeconomic status (i.e., income and education), and one’s politics. The statistical tests so far do not establish that approaches to vegetarianism are intersectional (i.e., one’s attitudes toward vegetarianism is dependent on a variety of factors that differentially contribute to one’s behaviors toward animals). One way to begin to show the intersectionality of these relations is to develop a model for the predictors.

Only looking at the correlations among the variables does not really give a sense for how inter-connected the variables are. For example, in the survey data, it becomes clear that vegetarianism is correlated with a number of different factors including the KAFs (positively) and the 4Ns (negatively). Also, the KAFs and the 4Ns are correlated negatively. Given the base, zero-order correlations, it cannot be determined what the structure of those relations are. It could be that KAFs and the 4Ns are independent predictors of vegetarianism. Or, it could be that the way that the KAFs predicts vegetarianism is by way of the 4Ns (or vice versa). In that case, the more one is knowledgeable about animals, the less likely one is to think that eating animals is nice, necessary, normal, and natural. However, once the predictive power of the 4Ns is taken into account, the KAFs may no longer predict the outcome variable. This is referred to as a mediating relation—the 4Ns mediates the relation between the KAFs and being a vegetarian. Looking at correlations can give a sense for these kinds of structures, but really are not the right kind of analyses to provide evidence for them. Consequently, additional statistical methods were used to explore those relations.

The first step in developing these models was to conduct a multiple linear regression using the predictor variables that were correlated with being a vegetarian. Simple linear regressions are like correlations—they estimate the relation of one predictor variable and the outcome variable. Multiple linear regressions are like simple linear regressions in that they estimate the strength of relations among predictor variables and an outcome variable. However, the main difference between a simple linear regression and a multiple linear regression is that the multiple linear regression includes

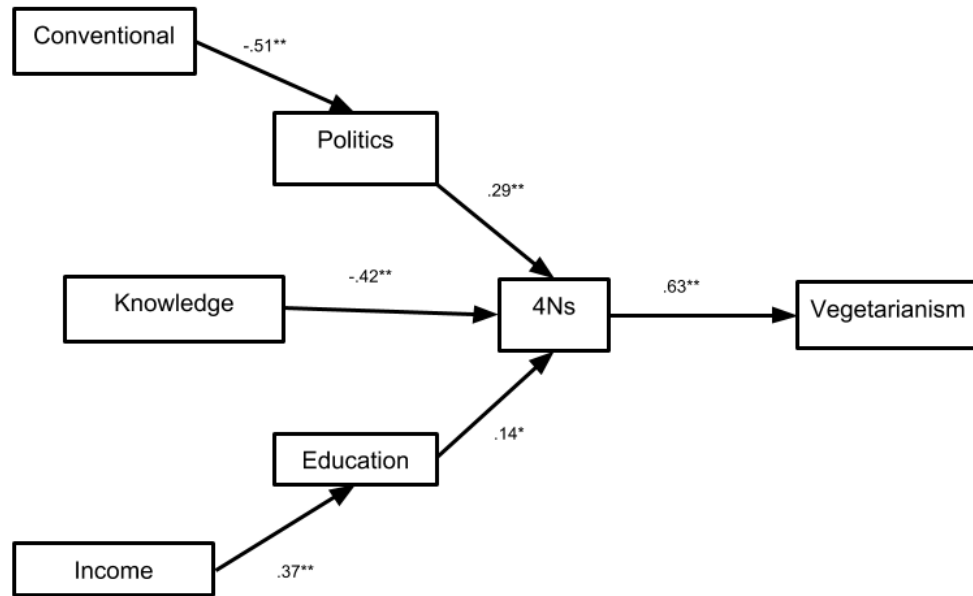
two or more predictor variables where the simple linear regression does not. The advantage of the multiple linear regression is that we can improve our predictive ability of the outcome variable. The intuitive notion is that with more predictor variables, we should be able to capture more of what is relevant to the outcome variable and thus be able to make better predictions. However, not all predictor variables increase predictive power. For example, imagine we are trying to predict a person's weight. Imagine that we have measured a person's shoe size and a person's height. Shoe size and height both predict weight, but the combination of the two does not increase predictions of weight. So, we do not need to use both to predict weight. Multiple linear regressions can estimate the contribution of each predictor variable into the overall degree of prediction of the outcome variable.

In this case, the data was used to look into predicting the outcome variable of being a vegetarian or not and estimating the degree to which each predictor variable helps improve prediction. To do so, a multiple linear regression entering all of the significant predictor variables into the regression at the same time (see Table 1) was used. The full model was a significant predictor of being a vegetarian,  $F(6, 126) = 14.56, p < .001, R^2 = 0.03$ . This analysis revealed that only the 4Ns was a significant predictor of being a vegetarian,  $t = 7.59, p, .001, \beta = 0.63$ . All other predictors were not significant in the multiple linear regression ( $ps > .22$ ). This means that once the degree of prediction the 4Ns accounts for is taken into consideration, no other variable added to the ability to predict vegetarianism. In other words, results of the linear regression suggest that the 4Ns is the only direct, unique predictor of vegetarianism in this sample.

While the 4Ns was the only direct, unique predictor of vegetarianism in this sample, there could be clusters of factors that are related to one's attitudes about animals (i.e., the 4Ns). The results of the correlation table and the multiple linear regression suggest that something like this is likely to be true. The results of the correlations table suggest that there are a number of predictors of vegetarianism. However, when the variance in vegetarianism that is attributed to the 4Ns is accounted for, there are no other unique predictors. Moreover, the other predictor variables (conventional activism, knowledge of animals as food, politics, graduate education, and income) were correlated with the 4Ns. This suggests that the 4Ns mediates the relations between the predictor variables and being a vegetarian.

Consistent with my intersectional approach to vegetarianism, a model of factors that are likely inter-related in one's vegetarianism was developed. The hypothesized model is represented in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2.: Path model of factors involved in vegetarianism. \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ . Path coefficients represent standardized coefficients.



The model represents theoretically derived causal relations among the variables. It should be noted that these causal paths are *hypothesized* and not *experimentally* demonstrated. The design of the experiment does not allow one to interpret causal relations. However, the path model can show if the observed pattern of data *is not* consistent with the casual paths represented in the model.

There are two different kinds of effects represented in the path model in Figure 5.2. The first are direct effects. These show the relations among the connected variables (i.e., correlations). The second are indirect effects. Indirect effects show relations among variables “through” another variable. For example, the effect of knowledge on vegetarianism is transmitted “through” the 4Ns. As can be seen in Figure 1, all of the relations to vegetarianism are indirect (except for the direct effect of the 4Ns).

For the path model, there are many ways to assess how well the observed data “fit” (i.e., are consistent with) the hypothetical model represented in Figure 1. The first is to observe the path values themselves. In this case, all the direct effects represented in the model were significant ( $p < .05$ ), so the hypothesized relations were observed in the data. This is not that surprising since the model was constructed after observing the correlations in Figure 5.1. Rather, what is more interesting is to see if the *structure* of the model fits the observed pattern of data, especially with respect to the indirect effects represented in the model. All of the indirect effects leading to vegetarianism were significant, suggesting that the relation of those variables went through the 4Ns. The indirect effects of conventional activism were significantly related to the 4Ns. However, the indirect effect of income was not conventionally significant going through education



( $p = .08$ ) but was marginally significant and in a larger sample would be significant (i.e., the statistical power of the test limited detecting smaller effects as being statistically significant).

Finally, other global model fit statistics can be estimated (for rules of thumb about appropriate values for the fit statistics, see Kline (2005)). These statistical tests provide evidence for whether the hypothesized relations in the model overall fits the observed data. The first major fit statistic is the  $\chi^2$  statistic. This statistic estimates whether the pattern of relations is significantly different than the pattern of relations that are observed in the data. For good fitting models, we do not want a significant  $\chi^2$  value because that would indicate that the hypothesized set of relations is not consistent with the set of relations observed in the data. For the model represented in Figure 1, there was not significant misfit between the hypothesized model and the observed data,  $\chi^2(12) = 13.44$ ,  $p = .34$ . This means that the hypothesized model in Figure 5.2. is consistent with the patterns present in the actual, observed data.

The major fit criterion is the  $\chi^2$  test. However, there are other model-fit indices that can be used to estimate the degree the model fits the data. Here, I list the fit indices (but for more information, see Kline (2005)). The RMSEA = 0.03, 90% confidence interval = 0 - .096. The rule of thumb for RMSEA values is that the value should be  $< .06$  and the 90% confidence interval should be less than .1 and include 0. The CFI was .99 and the TLI was .99, above recommended thresholds. Hence, there is good reason to think that the hypothesized model in Figure 1 fits the observed data. These statistical tests offer different ways of testing overall model fit and offering converging evidence in

addition to the  $\chi^2$  test that the hypothesized model is consistent with the observed data. All of the fit criteria suggest that the hypothesized model is consistent with the observed data.

A grain of salt should be taken in interpreting the overall model fit. There are two main reasons why. First, the sample size was relatively small to perform path analyses. While traditional power analyses have yet to be developed for path models (i.e., the number of participants to reliably detect an effect of at a specified level), there is some guidance. Some suggest that for path models like ours, a minimum of 400 people should be recruited. Others suggest the “ten times” rule where we should have 10 times the number of elements in the model (for our model, that equals a sample size of 70). Our sample fairs well on the latter criterion but not on the former. However, most simulation studies suggest that the ten times rule is too modest in sample size estimates (Savalei & Bentler, 2005; Yuan & Bentler, 2000).

The small sample size would make it harder to detect statistically significant model misfit. That is, given the small sample size, it will be harder to determine if the hypothesized model in Figure 5.2. is inconsistent with the pattern of relations observed in the data. The second reason is that the model was specified after looking at the correlations among the dependent variables. This makes the specification of the model somewhat post-hoc and increases the risk of detecting false positives in the structural model. This concern can be somewhat mitigated since the correlations among the dependent variables were predicted before running the study. Nonetheless, sound scientific practice would dictate that to have increased confidence one should replicate

the model. Unfortunately, the sample that was used in this study is relatively difficult to get because it consists of a large number of vegans and vegetarians.

## 5.5 Research Limitations

The sample of the survey consisted exclusively of participants who were Americans. They live in a food culture where meat dishes dominate and carry particular cultural meaning. Vegans in other cultures and countries who also identify with food on a religious basis will likely have a very different life path and path to veganism. Also, the fact that the participants of the survey on average were more affluent than the average American potentially reflects socio-economic/educational bias in the sample. A person who lives in a food desert would have far less access to vegan food. Potentially, there is also selection bias. An awareness of the limitations of this research helps improve future survey designs that aim for more inclusivity and a more diverse sample of participants.

The survey helped getting in contact with vegans who were willing to share their food narrative by participating in Skype interviews (Research Stage III). The qualitative data analysis of the Skype interviews complements this survey analysis in that it offers more nuanced insights into the connections between veganism and intersectionality. Conducting the interviews using Skype was helpful in also discussing nonverbal cues, such as clothing, gestures, facial expressions, and movements. These cues may lead to a more full-fledged discussion of intersectional lenses. By looking at the rhetoric of veganism through an existing artifact (*Vegan: Everyday Stories*), an online survey, and

follow-up interviews, the rhetoric of veganism can be discussed using quantitative and qualitative measures.

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## **6 “Because We Have Chosen a Life of Peace”: A Qualitative Study of Vegan Food Narratives**

This chapter focuses on the qualitative data analysis of the project by offering an analysis of the data collected from vegan survey participants who gave permission to be interviewed and who responded to an email sent to them. This qualitative study of the rhetoric of veganism allows a more in-depth analysis regarding nuances among attitudes of vegans and to what extent these attitudes embrace intersectional thinking.

### **6.1 Participants**

Out of 61 vegan/vegetarian participants, 16 vegans gave consent to be interviewed via Skype at a later date. Out of these participants, ten vegans responded to the emails that invited them to an interview in Skype. The participants' age group ranged from being in their 20s to being in their 60s. Two men and eight women were interviewed in the time span between May 5 and May 29, 2018. The educational level of the participants ranged from being undergraduate students to retirees and full-time writers and activists. The participants live in mostly different states in the U.S. To protect the identity of the participants, they will be referred to as Participant#1 - Participant#10 throughout this chapter.

### **6.2 Transcription and Interview Procedures**

Each interview lasted between twenty and forty-five minutes with the majority of interviews within the twenty-minute range. After an interview time and day were determined with each participant via email, the interviews were launched and recorded.

Participants were reminded that they would be granted anonymity and that no identity-revealing details would be shared in this dissertation. Three out of the ten participants were more comfortable to be interviewed via phone. So, in the end three phone and seven Skype interviews were conducted.

All interviews were stored on a password protected laptop and were then transcribed into work documents that only used Participant#1 - Participant#10 as an identifier. The transcriptions had to be in part paraphrased due to the low quality of two phone interviews. Those sentences were clearly marked as paraphrases in the transcriptions to avoid any confusion when citing passages. The transcriptions were then uploaded to NVivo 12 and coded accordingly.

Through these interviews with participants who consented to being contacted after taking the self-report survey, the qualitative data was recorded using Quick Time Player. While quantitative data help understand basic correlations between concepts and, here, worldviews and lifestyles, a qualitative data set allows a much more nuanced perspective on veganism with an emphasis on intersectional thinking. For one, participants of the survey would not likely be inclined to share how little they care about the environment or feminism, especially when they share their email address at the end of the survey and therefore make their identity more public. While humans generally think they do care about the environment, the extent of that caring is much better understood by looking at qualitative data and nuances in their answers.



Analyzing vegan narratives and their intersectional nature can lead to storied activism that has been recently used more frequently in the vegan movement. Storied activism puts the food narrative of an individual on center stage and focuses more on the emotional, social, and ethical developments of a vegan. By focusing on the lived experiences of vegans and their evaluative belief systems, the listener of a story can make the decision to connect with a lifestyle that differs from their own. Looking at vegan narratives not exclusively through the nonhuman lens but also allowing human oppression to play a vital part in the belief system of vegans can illustrate how different forms of systemic oppressions are connected and where they appear to be separated from one another. The following email was sent to participants who consented to a Skype meeting at a later time:

*Dear Survey Participant,*

*Thank you very much for taking my online survey on *The Rhetoric of Veganism in March*. I hope you still agree to being interviewed in Skype. If so, could you please email me a day and time that works best for you? I am pretty flexible now that the spring semester has ended.*

*My Skype ID is \*\*\*. I will video-record the interview and will then transcribe it. The interview will not take longer than twenty minutes.*

*Please let me know if you have any questions. I am looking forward to hearing from you!*

*Best,  
Silke*

After establishing initial email contact with participants, a day and time for the Skype interview were determined. The participants who did not respond right away received a second follow-up email with the same content. Out of the 16 vegans, 10 in the

end were willing to be interviewed, either via Skype or telephone. Telephone interviews were only conducted if the participant clearly mentioned that he/she would prefer not to talk via Skype.

The ten interviews were semi-structured and ranged from 20 minutes to 45 minutes with the majority of the interviews in the 20-minute range. A few guiding questions served as content signposts to ensure that every interview covered the same main points and to keep participants on track. However, through the application of invitational rhetoric and rhetorical listening, participants still felt free to add extra information, stories, and to provide feedback. Allowing this extra space helped reveal how deeply participants were invested in other issues beyond animal rights and animal ethics. It also allowed for the asking of follow-up questions that led the conversation into new directions beyond veganism and food ethics. Since every food narrative reflects a different and a personal path, it was important to make sure participants could also lead the conversation at times. The guiding questions and script of the semi-structured Skype interview were as follows:

1. *Thank you for being willing to be interviewed for this study.*
2. *My food narrative is a slow story. I turned vegan slowly, step by step and it took me several years to stop eating animal products. After my partner became vegetarian in 2002, I slowly stopped eating meat because it seemed less practical to cook two meals every evening. First, I stopped consuming meat in our house but then I also stopped in restaurants, and I eventually stopped eating meat in Germany. After being vegetarian for a few years, I saw the benefits of not eating meat but slowly started considering veganism because it just somehow felt wrong to consume dairy. Taking a bioethics class inspired me to transition for good. My professor has been vegan for many years and I could ask her questions in a safe space, without feeling judged. I feel lucky that my partner willingly joined me in this journey because it seems easier if we both follow the vegan lifestyle. So, personally, the ethical arguments against eating animals sort of snuck up on me rather late in the process but gave me the last push I needed to challenge my food*

*habits. Please share your food narrative with me. Do you recall any signposts or decisive moments that helped you challenge your food habits? Please elaborate on them and the process of becoming vegan.*

3. *Do you think the treatment of animals can be compared to the treatment of other groups of marginalized humans?*
4. *Do you think veganism is a social justice movement? If yes, please elaborate. If no, please explain why. Do you believe veganism should become a social justice movement? If yes, how can it become one?*
5. *Can ethical vegans learn from other social justice movements?*
6. *Have you changed your beliefs about animals, nature, marginalized groups after you became vegan?*
7. *Is there anything else you would add? Do you have any questions?*
8. *Thank you.*

Transcriptions and interview data were saved in the same Google Doc. Each transcription was then analyzed using NVivo software. NVivo allows for a clear data analysis because this software creates word clouds, word banks, and color-coded strands and pie charts after text gets coded using a variety of nodes that are of interest to a research project. For this analysis, the following nodes were created in order to develop an understanding of vegan narratives and intersectional tendencies:

1. *Intersectionality*
2. *Feminism*
3. *Racism*
4. *Environmentalism*
5. *Ableism*
6. *Ageism*
7. *Speciesism*
8. *Health*
9. *Immigration*

These nodes were developed after the transcriptions of the interviews were finished and, after an initial screening of the data, these concepts were mentioned by several participants.

Apart from these social justice movements, the following codes were also used in order to understand what motivated participants to become and stay vegan and how they made the decision of leaving animal products off of their plates:

1. *Process*
2. *Empathy*
3. *Knowledge*
4. *Vegetarianism*
5. *Veganism then and now*
6. *Reducetarianism*

Also, the following nodes were used to look at some general attitudes of vegans:

1. *Individuality/ Identification*
2. *Activism*
3. *Welfare*
4. *Lifestyle*

The nodes were developed because these concepts were more indirectly discussed in the interviews as underlying values and beliefs of participants. Uploading each interview to NVivo and coding the text by applying the nodes was crucial in adding a meaningful, qualitative layer to the already quantitative data collection based on the survey. This mixed-methods approach thus helped analyze attitudes and beliefs of vegans, their beliefs towards animals, and their connection to the social world at large in more depth.

### **6.3 Digging Deeper: Intersectional Veganism**

Allison Christopher, John P. Bartkowski, and Timothy Haverda (2018) discuss vegan motivations in a qualitative discourse analysis, and they broadly define vegans as either being motivated by health or by ethics (2). While there may be more factors involved, these are the two main strands of veganism. This dissertation attempts to look

at the beliefs of vegans and how they form their ethical worldview. The following analysis takes a look at the various intersectional lenses that vegans employ by asking vegans about their food narrative and their thoughts on overlapping oppressions.

Intersectional veganism tries to include the vegan movement in the framework of other social justice movements while still seeing individual differences within each movement. Feminism and veganism can be understood as connected movements because they both try to create an awareness about the exploitation of female bodies. While the oppression of women may not always directly be comparable to the oppression of farmed animals, a focus on the overlapping similarities can help reframe the vegan movement—and feminism—as a social justice movement which in turn can become the basis for an intersectional activism that is inclusive rather than exclusive. Moreover, the exploitation of male farmed animals, like male piglets being castrated without anesthesia or male chicks being ground up because they will not be able to produce eggs, connects veganism with sexual abuse and the inflicted and unnecessary suffering of bodies in general. In Chapter 4, I discussed how Burke (1969) reminds us of the flipside of identification, division. While we identify with a culture, group, or ethical belief system, we automatically create a division between us and those who think, act, or believe differently. The vegan movement has in the past too often separated itself from other movements by exclusively focusing on animal rights and not enough accepting the similarities between nonhuman and human oppressions. Not apprising human stakeholders of the issue reinforces division rather than identification and can lead to difficulties when it comes to movement growth and establishing ethos.

## 6.4 Digging Deeper: Intersectional Veganism

### 6.4.1 Education as a Shared Value

The NVivo word cloud of all ten interviews shows how knowledge/thinking can be considered a shared value that becomes a prominent theme for all participants. The umbrella value can be considered education. Knowledge and personal growth can be attained through the exposure of books or documentaries that address food ethics, animal ethics, and the effects of factory farming. These artifacts can lead towards a continued investigation of where our food comes from and they can also lead towards reading more, watching more documentaries, and asking more questions about veganism and the treatment of animals.

Image 6.1.: NVivo Word Cloud



The word count calculator in NVivo reinforces that *know* or cognates of *know*, such as *knowledge* or *knowing*, appear the most after the word, *vegan*, or cognates of *vegan*. In all ten interviews combined, the word *know* or cognates of it appear 205 times.

This should be taken with a grain of salt because fillers, such as “you know” are also included in this number.

The next word of importance for this analysis is *thinking* or cognates of *thinking* which has been mentioned 196 times throughout the ten interviews. Thinking leads to knowledge and so it makes sense how these two words are closely connected and in the center of the word cloud besides veganism. The CAFS (see Chapter 3) has also shown that the more a person tends to know about how farmed animals are treated and about the effects of a diet, the less they tend to consume animal products. The NVivo word cloud and word summary based on the interview transcriptions show that knowledge also plays a crucial role for all participants.

*Table 6.1.: The NVivo Word Calculation lists the frequency of words and their cognates in all ten interview transcriptions.*

<i>Word</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Weighted Percentage</i>	<i>Similar Words</i>
Vegan	5	282	2.57%	vegan, veganism, vegans
Know	4	205	1.87%	know, knowing, knows
Like	4	203	1.85%	like, liked, likely
Thinking	8	196	1.79%	think, thinking
Animals	7	179	1.63%	animal, animals
People	6	155	1.41%	People
Really	6	150	1.37%	Really
Just	4	139	1.27%	Just
movement	8	109	0.99%	movement, movements



Even though the word *know* is listed as one of the top word choices when it comes to the NVivo word count calculator, it helps to look at the interviews more closely to see if knowledge/education truly plays a crucial role for vegans. After analyzing the ten interview transcripts, it becomes evident that all survey participants experienced an Aha-moment or perception shift because all of them became vegan later on in life instead of being raised vegan by their parents. This Aha-moment was triggered in every participant by learning about the realities of factory farming or about animal ethics. Since the survey sample of the online survey is more educated than the average American and since the interview participants were recruited from the survey, it is not surprising that knowledge as a shared value permeates throughout all ten interviews. Moreover, it also makes sense that knowledge plays a vital role in challenging one's food habits because the easier way is to continue eating animal products simply because they taste good to most individuals. Adopting a vegan lifestyle means challenging one's own taste preferences, questioning cultural and societal norms, and learning new ways to prepare common dishes by using substitutes. Learning about a healthy vegan diet is a crucial step towards making that lifestyle happen.

Participant #5, for instance, emphasizes how reading John Robbins' *Food Revolution* "changed my life. And, uhm, I tried to read it a couple of times, but I wasn't really ready. You know, I wasn't. I wasn't personally ready to hear what the information had to tell me. And it was probably the third try and then I just devoured the book. And after that point it blew my mind. I said I can't do this, so I'm going to be vegan" (Participant #5). Reading a book on animal ethics, nutrition, or veganism can trigger a

perception change that leads towards veganism. Becoming vegan thus means changing one's perception, and the foundation for this perception shift lies in knowledge and learning. Participant #10, for example, shares her food narrative by emphasizing the importance of knowledge: “[Participant #1 did not hesitate when answering] Uhm, what made me become vegan was education. I learnt, I learnt about what would happen to animals based on what I chose to eat” (Participant #10). Making the connection between animal ethics and our food preferences and choices is one important step that creates the perception shift that underlies veganism. Participant #1 later shares that her sister gave her a PETA leaflet about the realities of the dairy industry (Participant #1). Her story emphasizes knowledge as the driving factor in her perception shift that lead to a vegan lifestyle.

Participant #9 also shares how knowledge became the key for her veganism. After growing up in a “meat and potato” family, she distanced herself from the food culture of her family after realizing “where meat comes from, how we obtain it, [...] the animal has to die no matter what, uhm, regardless of how that animal had been raised” (Participant #9). This first realization happened rather early in this participant's life, when she was around eleven years old (Participant #9). But later, as she moved away from home to attend college in a different city, the participant elaborates on knowledge as one driving force to become vegan. Not only did learning about food and animals help her make the decision, she also shares how living by herself made it easier for her to decide what she would eat:

[When I] went into my undergraduate program, um, my professor and mentor and friend, like, she was just everything to me [...] she teaches animal ethics. She is an ethicist. So, it wasn't until I met her and I became president [...] of the animal ethics club there and I started really diving into these issues, uhm, that I noticed [...] now I think that eggs are probably one of the worst ethical, uhm, unethical foods that you can purchase. [...] I slowly started to shift from, like, ok I'm definitely not living in accordance with my beliefs. Uhm, I have to be vegan! [laughs]. (Participant #9)

Educating oneself about veganism or food ethics in general in a safe space, such as a university classroom, seems to be an effective way to change one's ethical beliefs because a safe space allows for honesty without being judged and one can dig deeply into the arguments why we eat what we eat without being disturbed or side-tracked by cultural or family pressures. Participant #9's food narrative illustrates how an education in ethics can lead to changes in behavior, activism, and a new lifestyle. Participant #9 then continues to discuss how her support system was not ideal at first but how she could inspire and motivate her family to support not only her decisions when it comes to food but also their food narratives by becoming more aware and supportive of veganism:

Uhm, so it was just slowly educating myself, being around people who are very supportive and knew more than I did, who could teach me but [...] and others at my school and in the community had very much the mindset of "you need to reach these beliefs, these decisions, for yourself. Um, I can give you the tools, I can give you the information but at the end of the day it's you who has to go through, like, your own argument and come to the conclusion that you can reach. Regardless of what that conclusion might be. You know, you might think ok, this is fine with me." But, for me it wasn't, um, so that's like, mine [food narrative] in a nutshell, so I was vegetarian for three years, and vegan ever since, so I think I'm coming up on my nine-year anniversary. [...] My mom is now pescatarian. [...] Yeah, and she cooks, we live in different states and she's constantly cooking vegan, she cooks vegan for all her friends, uhm, we share recipes, like, really, that's our, like, thing that we do. [...] I have had maybe a shaky support system at first,

but it really grew, and I understand that not everyone has that.  
(Participant #9)

This participant's mother started out being worried about her daughter's health first and now regularly prepares vegan meals not only for her family but also for her wider social circle. Clearly, her attitude towards animals and food has been affected by her daughter's food choices and ethical beliefs. In *Beyond Beliefs: A Guide to Improving Relationships and Communication for Vegans, Vegetarians, and Meat Eaters*, Melanie Joy (2018) argues for the importance of an ally when it comes to advancing the vegan movement. An ally does not have to be a vegan necessarily, but alone respecting food choices others make can contribute to an overall improvement of how we discuss veganism in private and in public spaces. Participant #9's mother has become a supportive ally in promoting veganism even if she herself consumes animal products from time to time. This reaction to her daughter's new lifestyle is much more supportive than many of Participant #9's friends have experienced who faced bullying and force-feeding in their social circle after going vegan (Participant #9).

Making this connection between the food on your plate and where it comes from is one of the most foundational perception shifts a person goes through before going vegan. Anthropologist Barbara King's *Personalities on the Plate: The Lives and Minds of Animals We Eat* (2017) devotes each chapter to a species used for food and how that species lives. In my book review on *Personalities on the plate: The lives and minds of animals we eat*, I discuss how

[c]hanging the way we view animals can indeed introduce a cultural shift that can be understood as one of the first important steps towards reducing animal suffering. King emphasizes, '[a]s we work toward a world of empathy for other creatures, our gaze must take in not only the primates closest to us but also other mammals, birds, fish, and invertebrates. Only then we will see whom we are eating' (188). *Personalities on the Plate* opens a window for that gaze and contributes to seeing all species, and not just our companion animals or charismatic wildlife, on our moral radar. (Feltz, 2017)

King, who has written for NPR and whose Ted talk on animal grief will be published in July 2019, is one example of a scholar who uses her expertise to share how animals have been viewed in the past and how they could be viewed in the future with a wider audience. Public figures like King promote animal welfare by offering to educate the public outside of the classroom environment.

Participant #10 learnt about where our food animals are coming from not in the university setting but through efforts made by PETA. Her sister gave her a PETA brochure on the treatment of cows when the participant was in her early 20s, which was her first step towards veganism (Participant #10). Reading the brochure that focused on the realities of the treatment of cows inspired this participant to go vegan after having been vegetarian.

Last, Participant #2 also educated himself about the vegan lifestyle and made the connections between health and veganism early on:

Alright. Uhm, mine took a lot longer than yours. Uhm, in 1969, my father died of a heart attack. He was 54 years old which I thought was old but now that I'm much older, I realize that that's really young. Uhm, and we didn't have the internet back then and I read a whole lot of books on vegetarianism, nothing on veganism. I didn't even, I don't know if the term was around. Uhm, but I started doing research and

everything that I could discover was that eating meat led to heart attacks. My dad was also a smoker, so he had a bunch of different factors going. He had been raised on a dairy farm and dairy was a major portion of my diet. Uhm, I also had a very sickly childhood, I had heart disease at age nine. I often had fever and at age 13, I developed a heart murmur. So, knowing that my father had died of a heart attack and that my grandfather had died of a heart attack, and I had heart disease, it seemed logical to me to give up eating meat. And, um, it never occurred to me to give up dairy as well. I had to argue with family to, um, just to give up meat, um, everybody insisted I should keep eating fish at least, um, and I did continue eating fish probably another twelve to fourteen years. In the early 80s, I gave up all animal products except dairy. And it just never occurred to me that dairy was a problem. Uhm, and then, in the spring of 2010, my brother-in-law was diagnosed with lung cancer. He was a long-time smoker and I was sitting in the hospital with him and I asked him if he wanted to fight it and he said yes. And so, I just got on my phone and, and googled cancer cures and all these sites and books popped up on how if you went on a plant-based diet, you can sometimes reverse serious diseases. And so, I went out and I got the book, uhm, *The China Study*. I read it and I took it to the hospital and I told [name of brother-in-law], 'I think this is the answer.' All you have to do is to give up eating all meat and all dairy. Just go to plant-based. At least the cancer won't get any worse and it might get better. He said, 'Great, I'll try it!' And then the hospital dietician walked in and, and I told her that I just heard of this book, his largest nutritional study done to that point, and, uhm, she never heard of it. Yeah. And then they came in with his food tray which had meat and milk and jello, all these things, and he just started eating them and I said, 'What were we just talking about?' He said, 'Well, I don't really care.' And he died three weeks later. (Participant #2)

Being at the forefront of veganism and being exposed to T. Colin Campbell's *China Study*, Participant #2 both learned about the health effects of a vegan lifestyle while simultaneously realizing how difficult it can be to motivate somebody to change their food habits. Today, a vegan diet is commonly prescribed while hospital nutritionists had been much less educated about the benefits of veganism several decades ago.

As mentioned in Chapter 5 (Survey), the *2019 Global Survey Results on Why People Go Vegan* (McCormick) studies the motivators that lead to veganism. Besides the

14.7% and the 11.2% who mentioned, “other” or, “no” influences, the rest of the participants of this massive food survey (12,814 responses were recorded for this question) mentioned a type of education as their biggest influence in becoming vegan. After being asked what the first thing was that made them seriously consider going vegan, participants listed feature-length documentaries, conversations with trusted individuals, online videos, social media posts, online articles or blogs, and books. These types of influences listed all carry an educational component. The survey later on continues to share that the documentaries, *Cowspiracy* (2014) and *What the Health* (2017), represent the most influential feature-length documentaries on veganism while *The China Study* by T. Colin Campbell, *Eating Animals* by Jonathan Safran Foer, and *Animal Liberation* by Peter Singer represent the books that mostly influenced vegans to challenge their previous food habits (McCormick, 2019). Most of these artifacts on veganism are based on educating the public and disclosing truths about factory farming and animal cognition. So, knowledge logically plays a big role in becoming vegan which is also represented in this dissertation’s qualitative data set.

#### **6.4.2 Becoming Vegan**

Unlike vegetarianism, that can more easily be achieved in a rather short time span, veganism is a lifestyle that commonly takes longer. One reason might be the fact that a person does not need to learn much about nutrition to follow a vegetarian lifestyle. It is pretty easy to “vegetarianize” familiar dishes by eliminating meat or fish or by replacing them with vegetarian items (plants, eggs, or dairy).

The data analysis of almost all of the interview transcriptions show how veganism can be compared much more to climbing steps rather than to a quick change (Participant #10). All participants had been vegetarian by the time they considered veganism seriously, so vegetarianism seems to be the first step. The next connection was concerned with some of the realities of the dairy industry. These realities varied from mother cows being impregnated against their will (Participant #1) to dairy products being unhealthy (Participant #2). The participants did not go further into detail when it comes to the dairy industry. Moreover, scientific facts were mentioned when it comes to the dairy and egg industry, such as chickens don't have enough space in cages (Participant #4).

Two participants changed to veganism rather quickly and seamlessly (Participants #7 & #8). However, while one participant emphasizes how his veganism happened pretty much overnight, it is still important to notice how he still went through several stages of veganism when it comes to the motivations and beliefs behind the lifestyle:

So, I've been vegan I would say since about the summer of 2014. So, this was pretty much just an overnight change. It was originally for health reasons. I was pretty overweight and I thought, first I thought perhaps going vegan would help me lose weight because the food is very, very light in calories and less voluminous, and the problem that I had was just eating lots and lots of food so I stress ate a lot and I was still really young. So, this would lead up to more severe problems as time would move on. And eventually, I developed lots and lots of an over exercising habit and I became anorexic and I received a diagnosis for anorexia. And during my treatment of anorexia, my psychiatrist was really, really skeptical of my inclinations to a vegan diet because she thought this was a way of me asking to eat less because the more restrictions of what I can eat, I could deny food more easily. So, I really had a hard time trying to convince people that I actually did, even if I didn't believe in the ethical arguments of veganism then. But, I still felt an imperative to not try to go back and regress simply because I already had put at least a year into it and it seemed like if I could do it then,



then I should be doing it simply because I know there are benefits from doing it that are there besides from health that are worth keeping. And I was able to go into remission, I am fully recovered for three years now and just I'd say over a year ago I started buying into the ethical argument when I started researching more into animal ethics. And so I believed, I gave credence to meat eaters, I started seeing the flaws in them and that sort of really convinced me to believe in the ethical argument which is sort of being much more friendly towards, uhm, ethical vegan activism. (Participant #7)

Even though Participant #7 made the food changes towards veganism very fast which less common for vegans, he still went through stages of veganism because he started out as a health vegan and only after a while realized the ethical basis for a vegan lifestyle. And he started to see the importance of the ethical arguments after researching animal ethics in more depth. So, knowledge and learning led to his perception shift from being a health vegan to an ethical vegan while, for all other participants of this study, learning and knowledge led from being a meat eater to a vegetarian to a vegan or from being a vegetarian to vegan.

Participant #8 understands her veganism as a basic rule of ethics. Participant #8 was not willing to call her food narrative a journey and explained how veganism is a code of ethics for her, something that consequentially needs to be followed after learning about the treatment of animals:

First off, let me interrupt you right now. Vegans, real vegans, people who are in this movement to change the relationship between other species and humans, we don't consider it a journey. It is a matter of making a distinction. (Participant #8)

Participant #8 makes a direct comparison to the treatment of humans when she formulates her argument on how animals should be treated. Moreover, she clarifies how

she distances herself from viewing as a swift movement or a fad and rather sees it as a core value that is the basis of her ethical belief system. By emphasizing that some vegans are vegan because it is fashionable, she classifies vegans as “fad vegans” and as “serious vegans.” Even though her wording might sound harsh initially, Participant #8 discusses an important aspect of veganism: there are different ways to be vegan. Some individuals are vegan because of their health, others because of animal rights. Yet others are vegan because they enjoy trying out new diets and others again have the environment in mind as they follow a vegan lifestyle. This shows how veganism can reach many different types of activists and consumers. The framework of intersectionality can bring some of these attitudes to light.

When comparing veganism to the climbing of steps, Participant #10 uses the metaphor of a slope versus taking steps:

So, it was more like, uhm, going up steps, alright? It was not about going a slope, it was like going up steps. So, when I learned more about cows, I was not in the position right then to go vegetarian. I became vegetarian in the sense that whenever I had choices, I was vegetarian. I think it was a month later that I was completely in charge of my own food after that and went vegetarian. And then again, the next step happened when I learned about dairy. And then that was it. I would not eat dairy. But the way it is more like a slope is that I actually have a reading disability, so for me trying to read the labels and ingredients, I probably would not even see it. As far as eating straight up flesh, it went as soon as the education got me. As far as it goes about eating dairy, it went as soon as I made that link. But again, I would say, I mean you kind of know what it is about. Dairy is a little trickier. Dairy and eggs. (Participant #10)

This food narrative nicely illustrates how expanding her ethical boundaries, becoming more educated, and changing her perception towards animals and food creates

one step at a time, eventually, leads to her vegan lifestyle. Her slope metaphor comes in when she discusses the ethical quality of her vegan food choices. Since she has a reading disability and from time to time cannot identify all ingredients listed on a label due to that, Participant #10 realizes that she sometimes has consumed animal products unknowingly and forgives herself. This learning curve is what Participant #10 describes the vegan slope. On the vegan slope, she tries her best to live a vegan life even though she might, unintentionally, consume animal products. Furthermore, Participant #10 compares her perception change and her knowledge building about the meat, dairy, and egg industry to taking steps that are more clearly to be taken and followed. She would never consume an animal product knowingly, but she understands how some people, like herself, have consumed animal products by accident.

Participant #10, a vegan for decades, goes on to share her opinion about the changes the vegan movement has been through and how it has in some ways, despite many advances, been its own enemy that created more obstacles than needed. One main obstacle the vegan movement created is the idea of purity. Many vegans in online groups on social media publicly criticize and/or shame individuals who declare being vegan but then decide to consume fish or dairy again. This often happens to public figures who face the scrutiny of vegans when admitting they have eaten animal products or, what's even worse, if they get caught in the act eating fish at a restaurant (Arnold, 2019). While not all vegans have these high demands, the loudest voices in the movement seem to be voices who do not hold back their disdain and criticism when showing their

disappointment. Participant #10 shares how being vegan over 30 years ago was very different than it is now because of the emotions of purity:

Now, there is real emotions of purity. It was very different when I became vegan. And there were no vegans and nobody knew what vegan was. It's a very different world now than it was then. Then, vegans, I don't know. But now, people ask if a whole company is vegan. So, I would say it keeps changing, what it is to be vegan. So, that makes it a little trickier to say, was I vegan then? Well, certainly by my accounts I was. But [that was] by the accounts of the time.  
(Participant #10)

Participant #10 goes on to refine the official definition of veganism. While the Vegan Society defines veganism as “a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose,” (The Vegan Society) Participant #10 defines veganism a bit more nuanced:

See, and for me that definition is not workable. The definition of a vegan for me would be someone who tries to avoid. [...] To me, the definition of a vegan is someone definitely who tries to avoid animal products. If I can, I will try to avoid eggs and dairy. If I see it on a label, I would not buy it. I would certainly not buy if it obviously— I would never. But that doesn't mean I don't get into it sometimes. And also for me, I could buy something that has leather on it because for me, I look at the suffering something caused by manufacturing and I am better off buying something second-hand. So, for me, I have a little different definition of it. If less suffering and damage means buying something that has an animal product in it, then that is what I ought to do [the last sentence was slightly paraphrased due to poor quality of the telephone interview].  
(Participant #10)

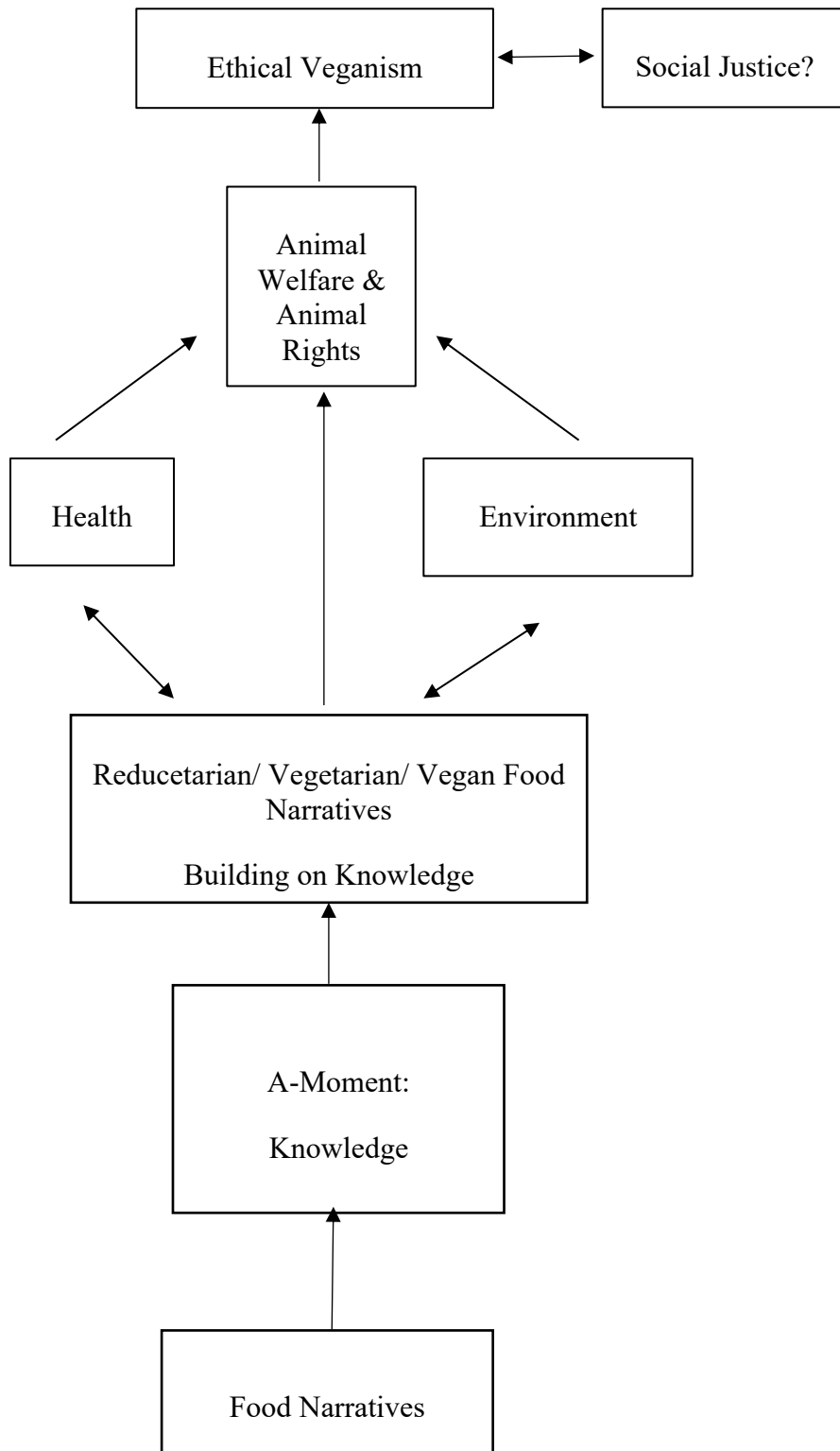
Participant #10 has a rather utilitarian view on veganism. She focuses on the suffering behind the production of any a product, and what is very important here to notice is that she focuses on human suffering as much as she focuses on nonhuman

suffering when purchasing a product. Therefore, she has no problem using a pair of leather shoes, for example, since she would buy them second-hand and purchasing them, she would contribute to less suffering in the manufacturing stage. Later in her interview, Participant #10 even discusses how eating eggs from one's own chickens that have been kept in an ethical manner is acceptable which the original vegan definition would, according to her, not condone (Participant #10). However, the Vegan Society's definition is not that different from Participant #10's definition if we remind ourselves that humans can be considered animals, too. This way, humans are included in the definition of the Vegan Society's list of beings who should not be exploited or treated cruelly. Vegans who do not include humans in that list and therefore only focus on the suffering of animals misread this definition and therefore miss how the definition in itself leads to intersectional thinking.

The qualitative data of this study on the rhetoric of veganism illustrates that veganism takes many different forms and goes through a variety of stages and qualitative measures. It also seems that animal ethics might or might not be the beginning of a vegan narrative while animal ethics clearly plays a significant role after having been through one's personal stages of veganism. These stages can look differently for everybody and are highly influenced by one's own culture, support system, and belief system. What can be said about all but one interview (Participant #8) is that veganism does for them look like a slope or a learning curve where new lifestyle choices are made after more knowledge is acquired.

The following figure tries to sum up this section's discussion on the steps of veganism. *Social Justice* is listed here a bit off the side with an arrow going towards *Ethical Veganism* and also back from *Ethical Veganism* to *Social Justice*. While ethical veganism can be merely concerned with animal rights, ethical veganism can also include social justice movements in general while still opposing animal cruelty. It is important to notice that the arrows do not indicate causation but rather how the narrative, for instance, unfolds a person's caring about their health or the environment. The narratives do not cause caring about the environment. Ethical veganism this way stands at a crossroads. Either, it can follow the path towards critical animal studies that generally focuses more on animal rights alone. Or, it can become a more inclusive movement that acknowledges and opposes other social injustices. The following section will focus on the evaluative beliefs of vegans and the connections between social justice movements and the vegan movement by furthermore looking at the narratives of the ten interviewed vegans.

Figure 6.1.: The Steps Towards Ethical Veganism



After discussing the belief system of the featured individuals who became vegan in the documentary, *Vegan: Everyday Stories* (Chapter 4), it is of interest for this study to look at the belief system of the vegans who participated in the food survey. The survey participants were randomly selected because they signed up for the study after seeing a link posted on social media. The documentary, on the other hand, focuses on carefully selected individuals who have truly inspirational stories to tell. It might be of more interest, though, to look at truly everyday vegans and learning about their beliefs regarding animals and marginalized groups and how these beliefs have changed over time.

After experiencing the steps, the slope, and the perception change that ethical veganism evokes, it might not surprise how the belief system that comprises an ideology of a person can be affected by veganism as well. One of the first changes when turning towards veganism is a sort of *empathy awakening*. Participants of the interviews mention a heightened sensitivity when it comes to the treatment of animals, and this sensitivity either had been dormant or deeply hidden in their subconscious. This can be compared to a stubborn ignorance because one is aware that a more direct engagement with the facts would bring along emotional engagement that one might simply not be ready to deal with. Participant #6 remembers how educating herself on what we eat by reading Jonathan Safran Foer's *Eating Animals* caused an emotional turmoil:

I mean, I've always been an animal lover but like I've been, I really have been focused more on people than on animals like just my own work and I still am, I mean just like the way we treat animals now and just like the way we call it like, humane slaughter and things like that. However, the rhetoric is, it's just absolutely atrocious. I mean, it's like



the stuff I can't, reading that Eating Animals book, that's the first and only book that I've ever read that I've cried, like I've never actually read a book and I cried, it's kind of weird but like, I actually had to put it down and I think a lot of people like [to] avoid looking at stuff like that because, so you have to, I mean, you can't avoid it, you know? We do so much to make ourselves comfortable and like, you know, and it's happening and it's really atrocious and something needs to be done because there's, you can't be like an ethical person whether or not you like animals or not just let that happen. It's just you know, it's the practices. It's disgusting. (Participant #6)

This quote shows how common it is for individuals to call themselves animal lovers while still consuming animal products on a regular basis. Identifying as an animal lover gets redefined after becoming vegan through expanding the moral horizon across species used for food and not only towards animal companions or animals living in the wild. Food animals gain a new ethical status in the belief system of a vegan that becomes bigger and more inclusive. Participant #6 shows how we can expand our moral horizon so as to overcome speciesism. When Singer popularized the concept of speciesism, he did so through an intersectional perspective by comparing it with racism and sexism. Singer (1975) defines speciesism as “a prejudice or attitude of bias toward the interests of members of one’s own species and against those of members of other species (pg. 7). Learning about the practices and the systematic oppression of farmed animals can be a powerful step towards expanding one’s moral horizon and veganism.

Participant #6 also brings up the sensitivity towards rhetoric during her interview. The way we talk about animals in our everyday life can show how we not only oppress animals but also marginalized humans. Dogs, pigs, or cows are often reference points for critiquing humans. A man is a dirty pig. A woman is a lazy bitch or a stupid cow. Veganism does not end with what’s on the dinner plate. Veganism also calls for a moral

inventory when it comes to the way we speak and think about animals and humans which invites engagement with oppression in general and not exclusively the oppression of animals.

Last, Participant #6 emphasizes how Foer's *Eating Animals* was the first book to ever make her cry (Participant #6). This emotional engagement is a common step when becoming vegan. Realizing how food animals are treated and killed for our pleasure is one of the most important realizations vegans make before feelings of guilt, shame, and responsibility towards animals can surface. All of these changes contribute to the vegan perception shift that not only makes animals more visible but also defines a new ethical framework for oppression in general.

Moreover, the perception shift of Participant #9 shows how her veganism might have triggered more empathy towards not only marginalized humans but also nature:

[T]here was recently or, like, last year a huge forest fire that decimated some of my favorite hiking trails and some of, you know, landmarks for [...] and that hit me really hard and I'm just like, I mean it wasn't just oh the wildlife died or the homes are being destroyed or the lives lost but I noticed, wow, I am getting choked up because of the trees, because of the nature paths because this was a home to me when I first moved to [...]. I would go there almost every week. I do see myself sort of, toying around at least, appreciating nature for itself, in a way I probably wouldn't have, like, twenty years ago, so that's been interesting to see. But it's definitely not to the same degree as how, I mean I am a pretty radical thinker, like animals are on the same level as humans, you know, I don't see any difference, I don't think we are more special for any reason than an animal isn't. Um, not quite there [with nature], not quite like, you know, this tree is Michael, but I'm noticing these small little changes to how I perceive the world for sure. (Participant #9)

Participant #9 starts to include her natural world into her moral horizon in a way she had not done so years ago. One could argue that the environmental movement is simply getting stronger as more information is spread about how human behavior affects the Earth. One could also argue that participant #9 clearly had a strong emotional bond with the hiking trails in and around her home and that she maybe was per default emotionally more invested when the fires happened. Still, Participant #9 is aware of “little changes to how [she] perceive[s] the world” which draws attention to the perception shift that happens after becoming vegan. And this perception shift can easily expand beyond the treatment of animals.

Participant #1 states this general perception shift the following way: “I think it’s just a general feeling of wanting to make improvements in the world and doing my best [and] see how I can improve those who are close around me” (Participant #1). This interest in improving conditions of humans and nonhumans that are nearby suggests an interest in improving injustices in general.

However, not all participants experienced a strong perception shift. Some participants had been active when it comes to fighting for social justice before going vegan. For them, veganism came either as a result of being conscious about one’s ethical choices or after filling in the knowledge gap, especially regarding the dairy industry. Participant #2, for example, did not see a big change after becoming vegan. Having been active when it comes to social justice since the 1960s, he only had to learn the truths about the dairy industry to go vegan:

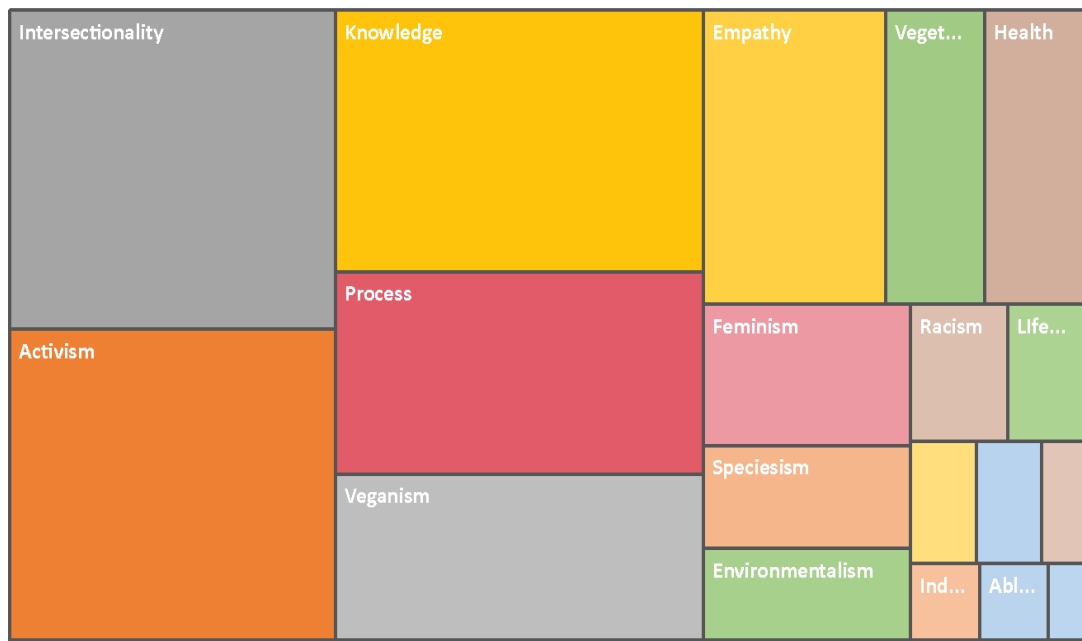
I don't think my beliefs have changed much, um, I became a pacifist in 1969 when Martin Luther King was assassinated. Um, and that changed a lot of the way I think about people, marginalized groups, animals. I think I just didn't realize for a long time how bad dairy farms were. Uhm, and I probably justified [them] a little bit" (Participant #2).

Also, Participant #8 emphasizes how an ethical evolution can happen in one's lifetime, but how this evolution might not be directly linked to her veganism (Interview #8). Growing up and growing older come with change which also affects somebody's ethical framework. The following section discusses to what extent the ten interview participants share intersectional thinking when it comes to their veganism.

### **6.4.3 Veganism and Intersectionality**

The intersectionality node was used in three interviews only once or twice (Participants # 3, 4, & 7). In all other interviews, the intersectionality node came up between four and six times, making up more than half of the interview data for one interview in particular (Interview 9). The following Treemap (Figure 6.2.) that NVivo creates based on the coded data shows how intersectionality and veganism together with knowledge and activism can be considered equally important throughout the ten conducted interviews.

Figure 6.2.: The NVivo Treemap is a visualization of how often the above listed nodes were used in all ten interview transcriptions. More frequently used nodes like intersectionality or knowledge are represented by taking up more space than less frequently used nodes like health or individuality. The empty boxes represent the nodes welfare, immigration, veganism then and now, and reductetarianism.



When looking closer into the interview data, a tendency to include oppression of other marginalized groups into the moral horizon can become evident even though this data should be analyzed carefully. It is one thing to say one cares about marginalized groups. It is another thing to do something about it. This difference between talking the talk and walking the walk is tricky to determine in this data set. While Participant #4 is more hesitant in seeing the similarities between oppressive systems and marginalized groups in general, all other participants would, to an extent, include veganism into the same category they put other social justice movements. Participant #4 distances herself from a direct comparison but does acknowledge the work that has been done recently when referencing Tyler's *Beasts of Burden*: "I don't think it can really quite be compared. I mean, I mean I think it's all different kinds of oppression. Uhm, you know, those kind of rub me the wrong way. But, like there are, there are, like I guess— I know there's a book out and it's like written by a disabled woman and it's about, I haven't read it yet" (Participant #4).

The other participants all show an intersectional awareness based on their ethical mindset, lived experiences, and upbringing. Participant #1 and Participant #8 go back to their childhood to explore their attitudes about oppression. Both felt early on how they had a sensitivity for "the underdog" and were keenly aware of injustice (Participant #8). This sensitivity stuck with them into adulthood and might have influenced their decision to go vegan. Participant #8 grew up with several older siblings and learnt early on to become an ally for those who were considered less strong:

I'm the youngest of seven children in a volatile family and I had to learn to defend myself and I always identified with the underdog. And from a tiny age, like 3 or 4, I began rescuing animals, like children who would be hurting animals or my mother about to hurt a mouse and I would go between them. And I have been active in the feminist movement. My very first political action or activism was when I was just 13 or 14, I guess, and I was involved in an environmental action at Cambridge mass where students and people were trying to save about 100 sycamores that were lined along [...] River in Cambridge. That was my very first movement, my very first action with, you know, adults, and it was heavy. Now, we won! The trees are still there. We saved them. So, I thought, it could be done, working together. Injustices can be dealt with. So, I marched in the civil rights movement in Massachusetts where the schools were very segregated and the whole towns were segregated and when the federal law required desegregation, the mayors of a couple of towns in Massachusetts actually marched to stop the busses, hauling the children, black children, into their towns. [...] I'm not a Catholic, I am an atheist, but I was brought up in an Irish Catholic family. So yes, I consider all these justice movements intertwined. (Participant #8)

Participant #2 was also an activist in the civil rights movement. He goes so far to compare the treatment of animals to the Holocaust, which the other participants were much more hesitant to do since they felt they could not speak to the experiences of an oppressed group they are not part of, or compare them to the oppression of animals directly (Participants # 4 & 6). By comparing the suffering of animals directly to the suffering of humans, the intersectional approach of Participant #2 becomes rather divisive and could be insulting to family members of Holocaust victims or to Holocaust survivors. Being sensitive and aware of overlapping oppressions does not mean oppressive systems need to be directly compared to one another. Critical intersectional veganism does not ask to directly compare different kinds of oppression. It merely points us to differences and

also to similarities when it comes to oppressive systems. Intersectionality can help develop an awareness and sensitivity when it comes to overlapping oppressions.

The Skype interviews also offered insights when it comes to visual rhetoric. Participant #2, for example, chose to wear a T-shirt that read: “Love sees no color. Racism hurts everybody.” This T-shirt hints at the participant’s intersectional lens beyond being vegan for the animals. By wearing a shirt with this message, the participant raises awareness of social justice issues, in this case racism, through his wardrobe choice. Again, this T-shirt alone does not prove that the participant is active in his community fighting racism. But it shows that there is a rhetorical awareness about social justice issues beyond the oppression of farm animals.

Participant #10 illustrates how important the intersectional aspect of her veganism is today unlike decades ago when she started out being vegan. She points out how she was raised with an environmental awareness but besides that, she calls herself “ignorant” when it comes to the overlapping nature of oppressive systems (Participant #10).

I would say I managed to be an animal rights activist for a very long time and be completely ignorant about everything else. Short of the environment because I grew up in an environmental family. That came with the animal stuff. For me, [...] the environment is also a social justice issue. [...] [the change happened by chance] I was writing [...] and in the process I learned and by nature I’m a pretty open person, so when I started to get it, I started to get it but I easily could have remained ignorant probably right up till today, now I’m part of that change, it’s hard to know how much have the overlapping oppressions gone, how pervasive is it? I don’t know but I think it’s harder to be as ignorant as I was for my first 20, 25 years of being vegan. And so, I have a friend who is vegan in Montana, and he basically went from being [...] from [...], knuckle head to vegan, and now he’s doing all this social justice stuff. And for him it went incredibly fast. Just a year



ago, I was at a conference with him in which somebody raised a question about Native Americans and I said I am not telling Native Americans what to do but if they come and talk to me I would definitely talk to them and he was there and he said, 'I'd tell them what to do,' and I said OKAY. [emphasis on okay] Now he would NEVER do that. Within a year he's come completely on board with intersectionality. (Participant#10)

This answer illustrates how vegans often go through enormous changes while being vegan and how veganism is not a stagnant lifestyle that has everything figured out. Still finding answers, still growing and reevaluating one's moral horizon is a natural part of veganism, and Participant #10 states again how important the learning curve was for her and how she, through her writing and scholarship, could understand the intersectional nature of her own veganism better which in turn affects her way of reaching out to others as an activist. She chooses to remain silent when it comes to pointing out how marginalized populations should live or eat because she does not feel comfortable being morally prescriptive when it comes to groups who have experienced suffering she cannot directly connect with.

The survey participants all had fruitful thoughts on intersectionality with one participant acknowledging it and nine embracing it as a productive part of veganism.

## **6.5 “Because We Have Chosen A Life of Peace”: From Overlapping Oppression to Overlapping Peace**

When asked if there was anything else she would like to share at the end of Interview #2, Participant #2 made the following statement:

[B]ecause we have chosen this truly; a life of peace because we are saying we are not going to kill animals, we are not having a baby calf cry for its mother [...] kind of like what you mentioned about all the

racism and the other -isms and all that. All the other movements. It seems like once you, once you see that; the hate of how we are treating these animals; it seems like we've already, we've already. I don't know. I don't know vegans that are racist, you know? I don't.  
(Participant #2)

Participant #2 continues to wonder if the data I collected in Research Stage II (survey) and Research Stage III (interviews) shows how vegans might be more peaceful in general, not only peaceful towards nonhuman animals (Participant#2). By pointing out how vegans tend to be less violent, in her opinion, she acknowledges how veganism extends to human suffering and the empathy and sensitivity that can come along with the before-and-after-effect of a vegan lifestyle directly impacts other marginalized groups, as well.

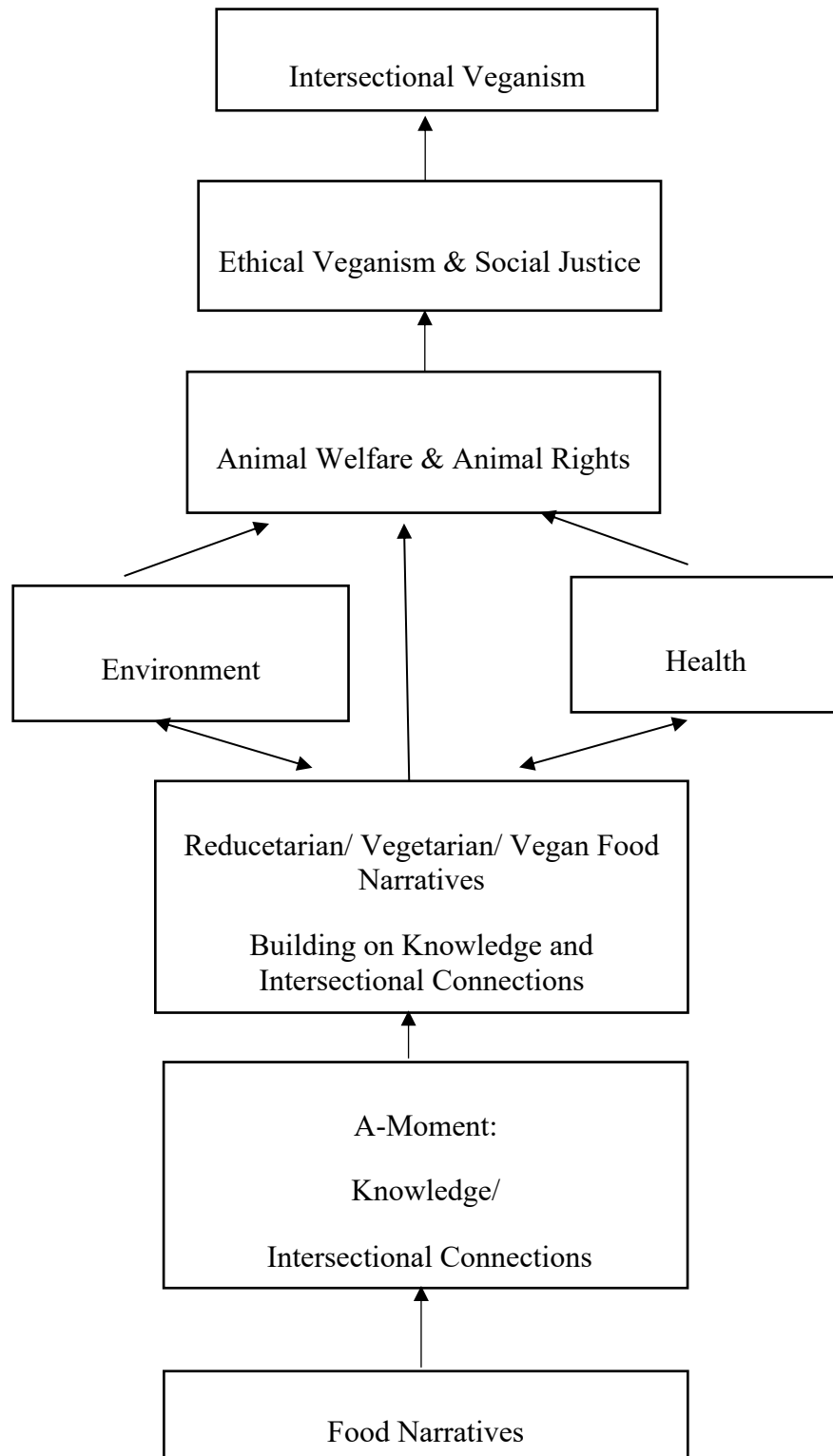
It is not realistic to state that veganism in general is an inclusive movement that also considers other social justice movements. The recent incident where an animal rights activist snatched the microphone from Kamala Harris at a political event shows how the lack of intersectional thinking causes damage that in turn hinders the vegan movement from any kind of ethical advancement (Politico). The activist clearly only has the suffering of animals on his mind which can lead to reckless behavior and the blatant discrimination of other marginalized groups. So, when Participant #2 makes her statement about vegans being less violent and more peace-loving, then this statement includes wishful thinking to a certain extent. A white man taking the microphone from a black woman in order to spread his message about the plight of farm animals is an example of both racism and sexism in action, a consequence of the lack of critical intersectional thinking within the animal rights movement. Carol Adams quickly

responded to this incident with the following Tweet: “Another self-righteous white vegan man deciding how to raise the issue of animal rights by rudely accosting Black women and telling them and others what matters (apparently not gender equality!)” (Adams). This reaction from Adams shows how intersectional veganism does not encourage or condone this sort of activism at all. When Participant #2 considers vegans to not be racist, she might either not know any vegan activists who put animals and only animals first or she might have never encountered this aggressive and unhelpful kind of activism that does not consider the suffering of other marginalized groups in general.

The following figure attempts to include an intersectional lens when it comes to veganism by now incorporating social justice directly into the vegan lifestyle. Veganism and vegan activism in particular take many different forms. Ethical veganism can be focused on animal rights alone. A person can identify with ethical veganism without showing much empathy or understanding of other forms of oppression. However, if intersectional thinking becomes a vital part of ethical veganism, then other social justice movements can be included on the moral horizon and vegan activism also becomes part of the feminist movement or the LGBTQ+ movement. If social justice is incorporated into vegan activism, an intersectional vegan activism can contribute to veganism being less isolated and more integrated as a lifestyle that opposes all forms of oppression. This kind of activism can not only advance the vegan movement but might advance other social justice movements as well. The role of an ally is crucial in making the vegan movement more inclusive. Being an ally to vegans, as a non-vegan, helps everybody understand the food preferences of others better and fosters better communication.

However, vegans need to be allies to other social justice movements as well and support other oppressed groups beyond animals. Recruiting allies for a movement is a two-way-street. Offering to be an ally in other social justice movements and also welcoming non-vegans as allies to be a vital part of the vegan movement allows social justice to become part of ethical veganism which in turn can lead to intersectional veganism.

Figure 6.3.: The Steps Towards Intersectional Veganism



This idea is not only represented in this dissertation’s data set, though. Jay Shooster, animal rights activist and lawyer, recently published a piece on how more animal rights groups include human rights and vice versa. Shooster (2019) ends his article by thanking human rights organizations for “showing me that our commitment to liberty and justice for all really does mean something for *all* victims of injustice, brutality, and discrimination—human and non-human alike” (*Open Democracy*). By introducing new practicing, structural changes, and policies that fight oppression in general, both human and animal rights organizations could combine forces and be stronger united rather than existing in fragmented silos. The previously mentioned importance of offering to be an ally and accepting allyship within the vegan movement and for other social justice movements would be an important step into a more productive discourse of oppression.

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## 7 Towards Storied Activism

The previous chapters analyzed the rhetoric of veganism by looking at an existing rhetorical artifact in form of a documentary, by collecting quantitative data through an online survey, and by collecting qualitative data through interviewing survey participants via Skype. In particular, these three research stages that represent the core of this dissertation pay attention to how an awareness of intersectionality in connection with veganism can advance the vegan movement and social justice movements in general. This mixed methods approach discusses insights into the attitudes and beliefs of vegans and how they navigate their moral world and social surroundings. The following chapter revisits some of the major results of this research project, their implications for vegan activism, and opportunities for future academic endeavors.

### 7.1 Research Outcomes

The documentary, *Vegan: Everyday Stories*, shows only indirectly how important a role intersectionality plays when becoming and staying vegan. Chapter 4 discussed how the film visually illustrates how veganism overlaps with ableism. An example of this is seen towards the end of the documentary. When saving the one-winged chicken, one of the featured vegans in the documentary is shown with her own bodily difference. Like the animal she saved, she has one upper limb. The camera shows her bodily difference at the end of the documentary, while showing only her head and shoulders earlier. This has a rather dramatic effect and the viewer might consider the connections between the oppression of animals and the oppression of disabled individuals. But ableism in

connection with veganism is not discussed more directly throughout the film which leaves room for speculation as to why Lacey (2016) did not discuss oppressive overlaps in more detail.

Another moment that indirectly connects intersectional thinking to veganism is seen when Genesis, the young African-American girl who decides to go vegan at age four, talks about sports and how she surprises boys her age with how many push-ups she can do. Genesis navigates her social world as a young girl who thinks she can do everything boys of her age can do, which might teach the viewer how her veganism can also empower young girls to be more visible and respected. But the film does not go into more detail about feminism and the marginalization of girls and women *per se*. The feminist connection veganism offers is also illustrated in the interview with Jessi Hasley who recalls how she helped give birth to a lamb on her farm. She describes how this transformative experience shaped her beliefs towards animals and thus became an important signpost of her veganism. Again, the film does not discuss the connections between the exploitation of female bodies and eating animals in more detail which aligns with its invitational nature.

Even though several connections between oppressions are seen or hinted at throughout the documentary, *Vegan: Everyday Stories*, does not directly spell out these overlapping oppressions. The film this way neither discusses intersectionality as the bridge concept that can include veganism as a social justice movement like feminism or anti-ableism, nor does the film emphasize moments that illustrate overlapping oppressions. This way, Lacey (2016) makes sure to maintain an invitational framework

for his film that offers an intersectional awareness without arguing for it. These connections merely remain present in the background, without being analyzed in depth. The rhetorical analysis of this film, Research Stage I, attempts to reveal these moments a bit more clearly and becomes the foundation for the next two research stages that focus more on the intersectional lens vegans and veganism can adopt.

The online survey on food ethics and social justice showed how values like knowledge play a significant role when it comes to consuming less animal products, but overall there was no significant evidence for intersectional thinking among the vegetarian or vegan participants that is more pronounced than the intersectional thinking among omnivores. Food habits aside, the survey participants represent highly educated individuals with an annual income that is higher than the average income in the United States. Both the 4Ns and the KAFS when applied to the participants show how the more one knows about food, the less likely one is to consume animals or animal products.

While knowledge regarding the treatment of animals and nutritional knowledge can be compared to a red thread that is visible in the survey results, it is trickier to discuss the concept of intersectionality when analyzing the survey results. Even though the survey was carefully designed to ask participants questions regarding their attitudes about social justice issues, animals, and food, no obvious thread emerges from the data when looking for clues on intersectional thinking. The path model developed of the survey results (see Chapter 5) stresses how several different factors are clearly involved when it comes to vegetarianism or veganism. Some of these factors are knowledge and income. Another factor is politics which hints to attitudes that might be intersectional. This multi-

factor path model illustrates the complexity of veganism, though, and shows that a serious consideration of factors that are not only surrounding animal ethics but also marginalized groups in general is possible. This is why the third research stage of looking at the qualitative interview data becomes a vital part of this project. Through analyzing Skype interviews with vegans, their food narratives become a way of communicating their intersectional tendencies.

The Skype interviews show a direct connection between veganism and other social justice movements. While one participant distanced herself from comparing her veganism to the oppression of other marginalized groups, she still acknowledged the connection even though she is not ready yet to commit to it (Interview #4). The other participants described in detail how they have been socially and politically active, some of them since their childhood. They have voiced their opinions as protesters and activists. They fought for the protection of our planet, for civil rights, and for women's rights. They research disability studies and display a sensitivity when it comes to what Participant #8 calls "the underdog" (Interview #8). Moreover, their path towards veganism illustrates an awareness of other factors, like knowledge. It is the value of knowledge that lead the Skype interviewees to understand the connection between veganism and environmentalism, veganism and feminism, or veganism and other social justice issues and overlapping oppressions at large. This last research stage of collecting and analyzing qualitative interview data proved to be extremely useful in understanding the intersectional lens that becomes the moral foundation of the fundamental perception shift vegans undergo.

While Research Stage I was the foundation for the survey, Research Stage II became a fruitful platform to learn about the multi-layered nature of veganism. Moreover, the survey provided quick access to vegans interested in being interviewed in more depth. Lastly, the results of Research Stage III more clearly discuss the intersectional behaviors and beliefs of vegans. Since veganism can more easily be understood through an intersectional lens, activist efforts should also embrace the narratives of vegans rather than exclusively focus on the truths of factory farming and animal ethics.

## **7.2 Towards Storied Activism**

The data analyses illustrate how a discussion of food narratives can reveal the intersectional tendencies among vegans. Sharing our stories connects us because we understand one another better if we openly talk about lived experiences and the steps and the slope of veganism. At the same time, the sharing of stories sets us apart from one another because we see differences and moments of disagreement. Burke (1969) discusses how division is always part of identification in *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Storytelling this way becomes a rhetorical strategy that shows the “wavering line between peace and conflict” (p. 45). All vegans that were interviewed for this project shared a moment of inner conflict since none of the vegans interviewed were raised vegan. Challenging one’s food history automatically involves conflict, just like identifying with veganism automatically separates from non-vegans. Storytelling can help us understand the conflict a person experiences when becoming vegan. It can foster understanding in times of division. By understanding the motivations of vegans and by learning about their values and worldview, the listener of a vegan food narrative may start questioning their

own choices when it comes to how someone wants to position themselves among animals and as part of the interconnected world. Moreover, rhetorically listening to vegan food narratives can contribute to developing an awareness of other points of disconnect within our society in general. These moments of disconnect can be politically or socially motivated.

Storied activism may be more effective for advancing the vegan movement than traditional approaches since veganism has a widespread reputation for being in a social silo. On social media, for example, vegans often become an in-group that criticizes non-vegans for their immoral food choices or for being inconsistent. Storied activism can open the lines of communication between vegans and non-vegans and create a better sense of understanding. The sharing of lived experiences this way becomes a strong foundation that may be more likely to lead to change and to finding allies for the movement, rather than simply telling those who are in the out group that they are wrong or morally bad people. Storied activism can create safe spaces for encouragement, understanding, and better communication.

Moreover, veganism may be more normalized if the communication between vegans and non-vegans is improved through storytelling, and the identification aspect becomes bigger than the division aspect of veganism. If somebody who consumes animal products starts to identify with veganism, they may not turn into strict vegans from one day to another. But they may challenge their own ethics and become more mindful of what they eat, how it affects the animals, their health, and the planet. Listening to and

telling vegan narratives may this way contribute to individuals becoming reductarians, flexitarians, or vegetarians.

Just like veganism may experience a shift towards normalization through storytelling, so can animals in general experience a shift in human perception. Listening to vegan food narratives teaches us that we can not only challenge our way of treating farmed animals but also our way of viewing other species. Vegan storytelling that moves the human gaze into the background can show us the nonhuman gaze which can lead to animals becoming the rhetor without our further assistance or help. Thus, vegan storytelling can illustrate how vegans try to not interfere with the world of animals in general.

An example of this is my own experience with a beehive in my pecan tree. The bees were there before my husband and I bought our house. My initial reaction was to force the beehive out of the tree trunk so we would not get stung or disturbed. I have always had a relentless fear of bees and even though I did not intend to harm them, I definitely wanted them to be off my property. But what if I just let them be(e)? Just because bees don't look at me with a puppy dog look like my dogs when they want to go for a walk doesn't mean they don't have preferences. And since they had been living in the tree before I came, I should not interfere with their way of life. So, I didn't. And I now live with the bees who have never even once been unfriendly. Letting animals be, for who they are and not for who we want them to be, leads to a more peaceful interspecies coexistence.

The telling of vegan food narratives brings forth the intersectional lens that acknowledges how oppressive systems are intertwined and overlap. Even though they cannot always be directly compared to each other in degree and kind, oppressions *function* in similar ways in that power is abused and groups are marginalized, discriminated against, or attacked. Through the sharing of lived experiences, non-vegans can understand better not only how vegans believe animals should be treated, but also how we should position ourselves within society and on our planet. Vegan activism this way can grow in ways that go beyond animal ethics alone. An example of this intersectional activism can be seen in Carol Adams' latest book, *Protest Kitchen: Fight Injustice, Save the Planet, and Fuel Your Resistance One Meal at a Time*. In *Protest Kitchen*, Adams (2018) discusses how veganism is more than a diet that stands for animal rights. Veganism rather should be understood as a lifestyle that also fights climate change and resists the current political climate that fosters fear for marginalized groups in the United States and around the world. Being vegan not only helps you and your body feel better physically, but it also contributes to you being part of something bigger than yourself because it can be understood as a political statement that rejects the social oppression of women and is a vital step towards what Adams calls an "inclusive democracy" (p. 93). Adams (2018) states that "[o]ppression elevates some humans as deserving equal protection and equal participation as citizens, and lowers others, by making them 'other' and suggesting they are more like animals" (p. 97). Fighting oppression and including those who are on the margins is a crucial step in building a society that chooses a life of peace (Participant #3). Storytelling can show an awareness



of overlapping oppressions and therefore can be used as a powerful rhetorical strategy to grow and advance the vegan movement.

Another example of storied activism is Lisa Kemmerer's book, *Sister Species: Women, Animals and Social Justice* (2011) where Kemmerer, an intersectional feminist and vegan activist, collects powerful stories of women who are also vegan activists. Each food narrative told in this book is a chapter that shows how individual vegan food narratives are, and how veganism can be understood as a way to resist other forms of oppressions. The lived experiences of the *Sister Species* authors illustrate how different the path towards veganism can be while it still remains the same in its core: a longing for peace and inclusion. These personal essays discuss race, immigration, religion, and sexuality in connection with speciesism and systemic oppression. In the introduction of her anthology, Kemmerer (2011) points out that

[t]his anthology is about expanding understandings of social justice, about connecting dots— recognizing links of oppression. Ultimately, we must deeply consider, do our addictions and other forms of consumption contradict our antiracist and antipoverty social justice beliefs?' (Harper "Social"). Does our diet contradict our antiracist, feminist agenda? This collection of essays stems from an understanding that social justice activism in the twenty-first century must address intersectional oppression, and that these interlocking oppressions include— to name just a few— speciesism, sexism, racism, and homophobia. (Introduction)

Kemmerer argues that we have a responsibility, as activists and also as informed citizens, to be more mindful when it comes to the interconnectedness of systemic oppression. Connecting these dots can help the vegan movement to leave the silo of being situated by itself, and mostly being embraced by upper middle-class, white consumers as

a lifestyle statement. Rather, the vegan movement could become a vibrant social justice movement that is intertwined with other movements and that resists not only violence against animals but also violence against the oppressed in general.

The telling and sharing of stories can bring this interconnected nature of veganism to light. Listening to truly everyday vegans who share their food narratives can this way be considered a powerful way of vegan activism.

### **7.3 Conclusion: Future Research**

The rhetoric of veganism can be studied in many forms. This dissertation focused on the narrative as a rhetorical strategy that can illustrate the intersections between veganism and other social justice movements by looking at overlapping oppressive systems. Also, this project discussed other factors that lead towards veganism, such as knowledge and empathy.

The three-tier analysis of this project still is a small representation of the rhetoric of veganism and its connections with intersectionality. Looking into vegan food narratives on a global scale by analyzing stories (e.g. shared on YouTube) would be one next step for this research project. By expanding the scope of the project, international vegan food narratives could provide more insights into oppressive systems globally.

Since the link between veganism and knowledge as a core value of vegans is a clear outcome of my analyses, it would be beneficial to study the effectiveness of vegan interventions. This could be done by looking into the food narratives of consumers of different foods, cultures, socio-economic backgrounds, and age groups. The sharing of

food narratives in the form of a focus group could be a project that could lead to more insight into where individuals position themselves in their own food narratives. If we look at veganism more like a slope and less like steps that need to be taken, like Participant #8 points out during the interview, then a new way of measuring veganism could be developed where everybody, even an omnivore, might find themselves on a food scale that leads towards veganism in today's world. A more holistic and inclusive food scale could be a helpful instrument that allows for honest discourse among vegans and non-vegans.

A larger scale study of food narratives could also lead to an elaboration of what people know about veganism. My analyses show how multi-layered veganism is because many factors play a role. How can the public be better educated about veganism? Educational interventions on veganism and the "VeganIQ" could be a fruitful way of studying the rhetoric of veganism further.

Last, the qualitative data set of this dissertation could also be transferred into quantitative data by using protocol analysis. The timeframe of the dissertation did not allow for this analysis, but it might be of interest to continue using the existing data set in a variety of different ways.

The rhetoric of veganism will continue to be studied, and it is a joy to see more calls for papers, conference proposals, and book chapters that include veganism into the feminist and rhetorical canon. I hope I can contribute to this field of study in the future by looking into the depth of vegan food narratives through an interdisciplinary perspective.

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## A Appendix A

Table 1: Spearman's (non-parametric) correlations among the measured dependent variables. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$  (1-tailed).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Omnivore	1									
2. Conventional	-.16*	1								
3. Attitudes	.09	.26**	1							
4. Intentions	-.09	.55**	.55**	1						
5. 4Ns	.65**	-.2*	-.15*	-.2**	1					
6. Knowledge	-.33**	-.02	.13	.11	-.5**	1				
7. Sex	.12	.05	.28**	.1	-.05	-.03	1			
8. Politics	.15*	-.58**	-.23**	-.38**	.28**	.08	0.3	1		
9. Post-grad	.16*	.21**	.05	.19**	.17*	-.18*	.03	-.17*	1	
10. Income	.14*	-.06	-.06	-.2**	-.21**	-.2**	-.06	.06	.36**	1
11. Conscientiousness	.04	-.06	.17*	.08	-.05	-.03	.11	.01	.03	.05