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Becoming Vegan, Staying Vegan: Social Ties and Media

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

in

Sociology

by

René A. Becerra

Committee in charge:

Professor Nella Van Dyke, Chair
Professor Paul Almeida
Professor Zulema Valdez

2019

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University of California, Merced

2019

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Becoming Vegan, Staying Vegan: Social Ties and Media

by René A. Becerra

Master of Arts in Sociology

University of California, Merced, 2019

Professor Nella Van Dyke, advisor

Abstract:

Veganism has seen a sharp increase in adherents in the past five years. It is generally known that people become vegan for animal rights, environmental concerns, and/or health reasons, but how do people become vegan, considering the sharp increase in veganism? Are social ties significant to recruitment and persistence in veganism and what about the role of digital media? This study is based on 30 interviews collected from two vegan festivals in California's Bay area, contacts through social media, and through personal networks. In this study, I explore both the mobilization period (becoming vegan) and persistence period (staying vegan) of veganism as a lifestyle movement and ask whether the same factors that are influencing people to become vegan are the same factors that are influencing their persistence and maintenance. Additionally, I consider the role of social ties and digital media and how they factor into this process over time.

Introduction

In the United States, a 2017 survey reports that 6% of consumers identify as vegan[1], an increase from 1% in 2014 (Global Data 2017). However, other surveys on veganism in the US indicate lesser percentages[2], but generally show a growing trend in people becoming vegan (Newport 2012, Public Policy Polling 2013). This growth in veganism in the U.S. is nonetheless remarkable given the short time frame in which this has occurred. Other countries are reporting similar increases in veganism. Most notably, in the United Kingdom, a 2018 survey reports that 7% of consumers identify as vegan (Compare the Market 2018), up from 1% in 2016 (Ipsos MORI 2016). Accordingly, a global demand for plant-based foods has skyrocketed in recent years as many restaurants, major food companies, and food delivery services are reporting (Oberst 2018). Interest in veganism is increasing around the world as the online Veganuary Campaign reports that 168,500 people from 165 countries in 2018 have signed a pledge to try veganism for the month of January, compared to 3,300 sign-ups in 2014 (Miceli 2018).

Although it is currently difficult to obtain reliable and representative data on veganism over time, we can explore what inspires people to become vegan and whether those same factors are influencing their persistence in veganism. And although research shows that people become vegan for animal rights, environmental concerns, and/or health reasons, there is reason to believe the relative importance of these factors may have changed over time. In this study, I look at both the mobilization/recruitment period (becoming vegan) and persistence/maintenance period (staying vegan) and how social ties and the usage of media shift over time.

Veganism goes beyond diet preferences; it is also a political identity as many activists within the animal rights movements tend to be vegan (or vegetarian). Animal rights activists have the goal of changing how society treats captive/domesticated animals (Jasper and Poulsen 1993, Einwohner 2002, Villanueva 2015) and shifting perspectives towards the abolishment of animal usage all together (Jasper and Nelkin 1992). Animal rights movements often use *insider tactics* (Soule et al. 1999; Van Dyke et al. 2001) such as lobbying for animal welfare laws and policies. The 2018 passing case of California's Prop 12 is an example of insider tactics in which space confinement of livestock was addressed (by expanding the required space allowed for livestock) and outlaws the incoming sale of veal, pork, eggs, and livestock from other regions that do not adhere to this law. Animal rights also use *outsider tactics* (Soule et al. 1999; Van Dyke et al. 2001) where disruptions to otherwise routinized daily public life are used, including boycotts.

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[1] Being vegan means making the conscious decision to abstain from consuming and using animals and animal byproducts as practically possible, objecting to all invasive forms of animal use and exploitation included in food, cosmetics, clothing, vivisection/animal testing, entertainment, etc. (McDonald 2000).

[2] The reasons could be due to how surveys are defining veganism, using different questions, surveying methods, sampling methods, and how respondents are interpreting the questions.

An example of this has been documented when the Animal Rights group Direct Action Everywhere (DxE) has been shown interrupting (by yelling) restaurant goers who are eating meat/animal products. Regarding shifting perspectives, when vegans (and vegetarians) interact with their meat-eating counterparts, they often engage in “face-saving” techniques in order to protect both parties from alienation and attack, which include avoiding confrontation, waiting for an appropriate time to discuss veganism (or vegetarianism), focusing on the health benefits of switching to a plant-based diet, and leading by example (Greenbaum 2012). For these reasons, social movement theory can fruitfully be applied to veganism. In this study, I use research on recruitment to and persistence in activism as well as research on lifestyle movements to explore veganism.

In addition to using social movement literature on recruitment and persistence, I will also apply literature on lifestyle movements. There is little research into how individuals come to make the conscious decision to participate in lifestyle movements (but see Cherry 2014), and most existing research explores what happens when people have already joined a lifestyle movement. However, these studies are not very fruitful when explaining mobilization/recruitment into a movement and the reasons for persisting in a movement may be different from the reasons of initial recruitment/mobilization; these mechanisms require further analysis.

We know that media matters when trying to recruit or convince others to consider veganism as their new lifestyle (Cherry 2014). Pro-vegan/vegetarian and animal rights consumption of media in the past (and that still continues today) has been in the form of pamphlets, magazine articles, film/television, celebrity endorsement, websites, banners/billboards, etc. Current consumption of media seems to have shifted to more accessible forms of media like social media and documentaries shown on streaming services (i.e. Netflix & YouTube) that can easily be accessed via information communication technologies (ICTs) like smart phones and tablets. In my research, I have counted around 87 documentaries that concern veganism in some way and that may convince someone to choose a vegan lifestyle, dating back to 1981 and on to 2018 (see Figure 5 for graph). With so many pro-vegan documentaries, this leads me to consider how much influence documentaries have regarding the mobilization/recruitment of people to veganism in current times.

In this study, I explorer both the mobilization/recruitment period and persistence/maintenance period of veganism, how social ties and media factor in, and ask whether those factors are influencing people to become vegan and whether those same factors are influencing their persistence and maintenance in veganism. I first outline the initial recruitment/mobilization of my participants, where recruitment was mostly initiated through viewing documentaries as a “catalytic experience” (McDonald 2000) and where no or weak social ties did not factor into their recruitment. However, once the catalytic experience wore off, subsequent persistence and maintenance of veganism required a shift in media usage. Most of my participants, once mobilized as vegans, turned to social media to develop social ties/networks with other vegans in order to persist and maintain their newly found vegan lifestyle. Consequently, documentaries had little to no effect on persisting or maintaining the participant’s veganism, but rather, participating in vegan online groups further facilitated the persistence and maintenance of their vegan lifestyle. Lastly, I analyze a comparison between two groups of my participants, those that went vegan in 2013 or earlier and those that went vegan in 2014 or later. By doing this, I argue that most recent vegans who have no prior social ties to veganism are going vegan because of watching a pro-vegan documentary as their catalytic experience. This study contributes to the social movement and digital media literature by showing how they both intersect in lifestyle movement activism.

Literature

Lifestyle Movements

"Lifestyle movements" focus on people's lifestyle choices and less so on traditional political mobilization (Haenfler et al. 2012). For example, a number of consumer growing trends in the US, such as "meatless Mondays", "going green", or "buying local" have been on the rise. These trends can be politically or socially motivated as people follow socially conscious consumption patterns; a way for people to act on their prosocial concerns through their shopping choices (Shah 2012; Atkinson 2012). As Quéniart (2008) and Cherry (2014) find amongst youths engaged with prosocial and ethical concerns, youths attempt to match their ideals with their actions in everyday life to find ethical consistency. Many vegans are similarly engaged with prosocial and ethical concerns in their everyday life. This type of engagement is in line with lifestyle movements. Relatedly, most of my participants do not actively engage in any animal rights movements, but rather base their everyday actions on the ideals of veganism.

Scholars like Tarrow defines social movements as "…collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities." (Tarrow 1998, p. 9). This definition of social movements contains four empirical properties: common purpose, social solidarity, collective challenge, and sustained interaction. Lifestyle movements, as some scholars would argue, are more individualistic and woven into stylistic patterns of popular culture, generally detached from social change (Featherstone 1987; Willis 1990), and even recent scholars of new social movements still focus on organized hierarchical movements (Haenfler et al. 2012). However, scholars of socially conscious consumption and lifestyle movements would argue that the boundaries of public/private or citizen/consumer need to be transcended in order to understand how individuals' personal lives influence and inform their understandings of politics and vice versa (Atkinson 2012; Kennedy 2011; Lorenzen 2012; Willis and Schor 2012). Thus, many individuals are experiencing their "personal politics" in terms of their "personal lifestyle values" (Bennet 2012, p. 22). These individuals are not adhering to the traditional organized group structure, such as political parties, and are living their lives based on their personal lifestyle values. I not only apply a traditional understanding of veganism as a social movement: having a common purpose, having social solidarity, experiencing collective challenges, and sustained oppositional interactions, but also apply an understanding of lifestyle movements using

Haenfler et al. (2012, p. 2) definition as movements that primarily foster social change through promoting a lifestyle (or way of life), both actively and consciously.

For some individuals that are interested in participating in lifestyle movements, recruitment through social ties seems especially important, especially for youths (Gordon and Taft 2011; Hustinx et al. 2012; Cherry 2014), who are more inclined to live in accordance with their ideals (Quéniart 2008) rather than engaging in formal politics. Moreover, research has found that consumption behaviors can be influenced by social networks (Kennedy 2011). This is known as "prosumption" or a shift from passive consumption to active producers and consumers (Chen 2012). However, most of these perspectives seem to lack information on how individuals become recruited/mobilized into these lifestyle movements. My analysis explores this within veganism as a lifestyle movement.

When making the conscious decision to become vegan, research has found that certain individuals become motivated by certain "catalytic experiences" that start to facilitate a complete change of lifestyle (McDonald 2000), similar to Jasper and Poulsen's (1995) "moral shocks" in which a sense of outrage is raised by certain events or situations that inclines people towards political action. The distinction between catalytic experiences and moral shocks is that moral shocks tend to incline someone towards political change whereas catalytic experiences focus on a complete change of lifestyle. Moreover, it is worth noting that not all individuals that participate in lifestyle movements experience these catalytic experiences as Lorenzen (2012) found while researching individuals who *gradually* shifted into a "green lifestyle"; those individuals could not specify a certain experience that fundamentally shifted them to their new lifestyle.

Cherry (2006) has shown that cultural support via social ties/networks has helped individuals maintain their vegan lifestyle. And in a later study, Cherry (2014) shows how young people maintained their vegan lifestyle, requiring two factors: social support and cultural tools that provided the skills and motivation to remain vegan. These cultural tools were obtained through "virtuous circles" (Kennedy 2011) such as the subcultural punk scene, which "facilitated these processes of recruitment to and maintenance of veganism as a lifestyle movement" (Cherry 2014, p. 56). Given the sharp and continuing rise of veganism beyond Cherry's (2014) initial study done in 2002 and the advent of social media and how easily information can be accessed via ICTs, this leaves me to question whether the same factors that are influencing mobilization/recruitment are also influencing persistence in veganism as a lifestyle movement.

Recruitment and Social Ties

Previous research has paid much attention to how social ties play a role in mobilization of and participation in collective action (Oberschall 1973; Tilly 1978; Fireman and Gamson 1979; McAdam 1986; Klandermans and Oegema 1987; Fernandez and McAdam 1988; Gould 1991, 1993; McAdam and Paulson 1993; Polletta and Jasper 2001; Edwards and McCarthy 2004, etc.). Much research has focused on the types of social ties and how they influence individuals' participation in social movements, for instance how personal ties (friends, family, and colleagues) might affect participation in social movements (Rochford 1982; see also Opp and Gern, 1993 on "critical friends"). Klandermans and Oegema (1987), in their research on the Dutch Peace Movement, focus on the role of personal connections and have found that informal recruitment networks have helped individuals overcome certain barriers to participation in the movement.

It is true that social ties have especially mattered when individuals are mobilized/recruited into a movement requiring significant lifestyle changes (Snow et al. 1980), and such support can be provided by traditional social movement organizations (Maurer 2002). Other research, however, suggests that an individual's *formal ties* to an organization play a greater role in mobilization than do *personal ties* (McAdam and Paulson 1993; Anheier 2003; Passy 2003). In some instances, organizations can act as brokers to mobilize individuals to protest for a movement, as Ohlemacher (1996) has found. There are a few studies that have identified to what degree an individual's multiple social ties interact affecting participation (Snow et al.1980; Walsh and Warland 1983; Marwell et al. 1988; Gould 1991, 2003; McAdam and Paulsen 1993; Fisher 2010), and reviewing similar literature, Kitts (2000) has found that not all social ties support activism and might, in fact, discourage activism or compete for an individual's time and resources.

Though most previous research has focused on how an individual's social ties are motivating factors for participation in social movements or collective action, fewer studies have looked at how individuals without social ties (or disconnected people) become involved in social movements (Wuthnow 1991, 1998; Vala and O'Brien 2007; Bearman and Stovel 2000). These studies show how an individual's motivations can be encouraging enough for them to become involved with social movements that deal with civics and politics. Lichterman's (1996) study on grassroots environmental social movements shows when individuals joined voluntarily to help improve their communities, they also joined because they have developed a sense of personal fulfillment. Consequently, their orientations shifted from a community centered orientation to an individual centered orientation as they began to see themselves as "individual agents of social change" (1996, 24). In relation to this, a few studies on the religious right and Pro-Life movements look at "self-starters" or people who become involved in social movements on their own accord without any social ties and do not have any prior experience (Munson 2008; Wilcox 2000). What, then, compels these motivated individuals to join movements on their own accord?

There has been far too little studies on the social forces that mobilize disconnected individuals. Similar to McDonald's (2000) "catalytic experiences", Jasper & Poulsen (1995) find in their study on anti-nuclear and animal rights movements that disconnected individuals can become mobilized through "moral shocks", in which events or situations raise "such a sense of outrage in people that they become inclined toward political action, even in the absence of a network of contacts" (1995, 498). McCarthy (1987) also finds in his research that through direct appeals, the Pro-Choice movement was able to overcome its members' lack of social ties by mobilizing them individually than in preexisting groups. Recent scholarship (Fisher & McInerney 2012) regarding non-networked individuals and mobilization has been looking at individual pathways of mobilization and activist retention, while most recent scholarship (Ward 2016) has explored how individuals' social ties are differentiated at analytically distinct steps in the micromobilization process. Essentially, disconnected individuals or self-starters respond more positively "to direct appeals based on cultural or ideological alignment" (Snow et al. 1986) that are mediated through certain forms of communication as opposed to appeals associated with social ties to social movements or organizations. Given that past research finds that activists can be recruited into movements (such as the animal rights and vegan movements) via routes other than social ties, an updated account requires further analysis, especially factoring in current technology and media. I do, however, hypothesize that it remains true today, but it is an empirical question. Thus, an individual's social ties may be different in the recruitment stage than in the persistence stage of a lifestyle movement, especially when considering the influence of cultural products such as media. The beginning section of my analysis explores how individuals become recruited/mobilized to veganism and how cultural artifacts influences their decisions.

Cultural Artifacts and ICTs

Few researchers have explored ways in which cultural artifacts might influence mobilization and cultural outcomes (Van Dyke and Taylor 2018). Cultural artifacts are forms of objects and communication used by social movements as resources that mediate appeals to the wider public which represent a movement's ideas or shared grievances with the goal of recruiting and building solidarity (Roscigno and Danaher 2001; Rupp and Taylor 2003). These cultural artifacts are the direct appeals that disconnected individuals respond positively to. New ideas can be introduced through cultural products in a variety of ways: through music (Danaher 2010; Eyerman and Jamison 1998; Rosenthal and Flacks 2012; Roy 2010), through literature and print media (Isaac 2009; Meyer and Rohlinger 2012; Pescosolida et al. 1997), through films (Andits 2013; Whiteman 2003; Vasi et al. 2015), through art (Reed 2005), through fashion (McAdam 1988; Taylor and Whittier 1992), and through theatrical performances (Glenn 1999; Rupp and Taylor 2003). More prominently, however, is the form of documentary film. Vasi et al. (2015) look at how documentaries have long-lasting effects on the beliefs and practices of individuals, organizations, and the broader culture, thereby shifting the discourse and influencing mobilization and political outcomes. The vegan movement is no different when they produce cultural artifacts to promote social change. There are many forms of vegan cultural artifacts, especially now given the rise in veganism, but as mentioned above, there are currently around 89 documentaries that promote veganism (or vegetarianism or reduced a meat diet) as a solution to animal cruelty, climate change, and health.

When discussing accessibility to information, one cannot ignore the technological advances and services we have access to. This makes the dissemination of information more easily achieved than before as Almeida (2019) notes: "the new internet communication technologies provide a tremendous expansion in scale and mobilization potential by instantaneously reaching large portions of the sympathy pool that are connected online or via mobile networks." (p. 114). This is extremely beneficial for people who have full-time careers and therefore cannot devote much time towards participation in traditional social movement activism but are located within the "sympathy pool" or individuals who have *mobilizing potential* that can rally around a specific issue (Klandermans 1997). Known as biographical availability, an individual has a certain amount of time and capacity to devote participation in activities based on their stage in life (McAdam 1988). In some cases, an individual's biographical availability can also limit their social ties to political engagement, causing them to be disconnected. Typically, younger individuals who tend to be students and older individuals who have since retired from their careers have less time constraints on their biographical availability. Cherry's (2014) study, that is similar to this one, includes only younger participants (age range 18-31 and average age around 23) from the early 2000s, whereas my study does not have any age constraint (age range 19-59 and average age being around 35) and includes a more recent cohort of individuals who live in the digital age where information communication technologies (ICTs) are common, which grants access to vast amounts of information.

ICTs/internet can facilitate the dissemination of information to disconnected individuals whose biographical availability is limited. Evidence does show that internet usage can motivate interest in political engagement (Boulianne 2009, 2011). Additionally, Earl and Kimport's (2011) study of online activism shows that there are two key affordances that internet usage can offer regarding mobilization: reduced coordination and action costs and collective action without the need to physically be together. As evidence suggests, ICTs can play a positive role in the micromobilization process (Bennett and Segerberg 2013; Crossley 2015) as ICTs can facilitate certain information that can reach disconnected individuals (Fisher and Boekkooi 2010). Furthermore, digital media can further facilitate mobilization and activist crossover by helping social movements and organizations reach the masses and manage a limited number of physical engagements (Walgrave et al. 2011). Streaming services such as Netflix and YouTube are great facilitators of information (such as pro-vegan documentaries), and researchers have argued to varying degrees the need to study such specific platforms (McBeth et al. 2012; Thorson et al. 2010; Thorson et al. 2013). Castells' (2012) research on the power to disseminate ideas, tactics, and a sense of opportunity through ICTs makes it evident that ICTs and contemporary social movements are inextricably linked. Moreover, Bennet and Segerberg (2013) discuss how online and offline activism are often blended together creating a hybrid form of activity, since most individual's daily use of ICTs facilitate certain actions and relationships. Lifestyle movements, like veganism, can offer ample ways for this research to be applied, as many vegan movements and organizations have used ICTs/digital media to connect to the sympathy pool by offering disconnected individuals who have constraints on their biographical availability a way to mobilize by becoming vegan and making them feel like they are doing something meaningful with their lives. Moreover, research has suggested that online groups can facilitate in the persistence of activism for individuals whose biographical availability is constrained or for individuals who would otherwise withdraw from activism (Anduiza et al. 2014; Rohlinger and Bunnage 2015).

Persistence and Maintenance

Only a few researchers have looked at the relationship of how activists, once mobilized, persist in movements or organizations. Furthermore, the studies that have explored this relationship have done so with individuals that have social ties. For example, in his work on the Freedom Summer campaign, McAdam (1989) finds that activists ended up developing social ties with the organization and developed personal relationships that which enabled continued activism (also see Barkan, Cohn, and Whitaker 1995; Hagan and Hansford-Bowles 2005). Similarly, in their study on the AFL-CIO Union Summer student internship program, Van Dyke and Dixon (2013) find that as less-skilled participants come into well-organized campaigns and develop social ties within the program, they acquire an activist human capital in which they learn organizational and related skills that enables them to feel empowered and to sustain their activist involvement. Moreover, Cherry (2006) has shown that social ties/networks in the subcultural punk scene provided cultural support in order to maintain a vegan lifestyle amongst young individuals. On their work with the peace movement, Downton and Wehr (1997) look at how activists persist, shift to other movements, or those who terminate their activism all together (also see Klandermans 1994, 1997) and conclude that changes in social ties allowed for some activists to shift and some to drop out.

Very few studies have explored ways in which disconnected individuals sustain their activism once mobilized. Fisher and McInerney (2012) do shed some light on this with their study on paid canvassers working for non-profit organizations. They find that self-starters were more likely to stay working for the organization longer than those that came onto the job with social ties. However, the authors contend that since the self-starters had no other social ties, they became “trapped” in their canvassing positions “as long as they maintained a sense of efficacy – for example, feeling they were ‘making a difference’. Once canvassers’ sense of efficacy faded, however, they sought activist opportunities elsewhere or simply left activism altogether” (2012, 123). However, very few scholars have studied whether the *same* factors that influence initial mobilization also influence persistence.

Cherry’s (2014) study on vegan youths who participated in the punk subculture looks at what factors influence recruitment into veganism and what sustains it. She identifies that recruitment required learning, reflection, and identity work. Maintenance and retention, however, required two factors – social support from family and friends and *cultural tools* that provided skills to motivate these youths to remain vegan. These cultural tools were acquired while participating in the “virtuous circle” (Kennedy 2011). Cherry identified the punk scene as a virtuous circle of veganism since most in that circle were vegan (or vegetarian) and promoted it through their music and performances, as well as social gatherings that included potlucks and promotion through other cultural artifacts. However, with the recent high incidences of individuals becoming vegan, this requires further analysis to see whether the same factors that are influencing vegan mobilization are the same factors influencing vegan persistence. By analyzing participation in vegan social media groups and pages, my analysis will show that social ties mattered more than cultural artifacts (or documentaries) at the persistence stage of veganism.

Methods

The data come from 30 in-depth semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 2 for Interview Guide) self-identified vegans and plant-based individuals. Participant data were collected from two vegan festivals in California's Bay Area, vegan groups on Facebook, and through my own personal networks (see Appendix 1, Figure 11 for graph). Interviews were conducted in-person, by phone, or by email[3]. The average interview time was around 33 minutes in duration[4]. I transcribed each interview, coding for significance. I use the extended case method (Burawoy 1991, 2000) to analyze my data. By using the case of people utilizing media as a means to become and stay vegan, theories of mobilization and retention are extended into lifestyle movements by way of cultural artifacts.

Participants were recruited in three ways: purposive sampling, convenience sampling, and snowball sampling. During the summer of 2018, I decided to go to two vegan festivals where there would most likely be a high concentration of vegans. I collected 13 interviews from the two vegan festivals in Oakland and San Jose, California. These types of festivals encourage people to come together to celebrate and promote veganism with food, entertainment, wellness workshops, dancing, activities, curated goods, and more. In May of 2018, I went to Oakland's Lake Merritt Amphitheater where the free event "VegFest" was being held. I conducted six in-person interviews while there and one interview conducted later that same day by phone[5]. In June of 2018, I went to San Jose's Santa Clara County Fairgrounds where the paid event "South Bay VegFaire" was being held. I conducted six interviews while there. After conducting about a third of the interviews from the two vegan festivals, in the proceeding months, I conducted the rest of the interviews, acquired from vegan groups on Facebook[6] and my own social ties.

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[3] I allowed for these interviews to be conducted by email because two of the three participants were not confident speaking in English but could understand some English if given more time to think about it and/or able to translate any words in their own language themselves. The other participant had trouble physically speaking.

[4] My first iteration of my interview guide had less questions. I realized more questions needed to be asked as I was transcribing the first set of my interviews. My final iteration of the interview guide had more questions, thus making the proceeding interviews last longer.

[5] Participant preferred to do the interview later by phone.

[6] Personal and economic restrictions prevented me from going to more vegan festivals or gatherings, thus relying on convenience sampling.

This garnered 17 interviews. There were various types of vegan groups on Facebook that I solicited to gather the data. 10 interviews were conducted by phone, two conducted in person, and three by email[7]. The remaining two interviews were gathered using my own social ties and were conducted in-person. All my participants have pseudonyms.

My sample includes 17 male participants, 11 female participants, and two non-binary/gender queer participants (see Appendix 1, Figure 13 for graph). The age range of the participants is 19 to 59, average age being 35. Regarding race/ethnicity, 16 identified as White, six identified as Latino/Hispanic, four identified as Asian, two identified as Black, and two identified as mixed or other (see Appendix 1, Figure 12 for graph). Out of the 30 participants, 24 were employed, four were full-time students, and two were unemployed. Regarding highest level of education completed, seven completed high school with a diploma, two completed trade school, one completed an AA degree, 16 completed a BA/BS degree, three completed an MA degree, and one completed a PhD. Regarding marital status, 17 claimed they were single, nine were married, and four were either engaged or with a partner. Regarding sexuality, 13 identified as heterosexual/straight, 11 identified as homosexual/gay/lesbian, and six identified as bisexual/queer. Regarding political affiliation, 10 identified as Democrat/liberal/left-leaning, three identified as republican/conservative/right-leaning, six identified as independent/green/neutral, 10 identified as having no political affiliation or other affiliation, and one declined to state. Regarding religious belief, eight identified as Christian/Catholic, one identified as Buddhist, one identified as Wiccan, eight identified as spiritual, 10 identified as atheist/agnostic/none, and two declined to state.

My participants had been vegan, on average, for about 3.38 years at time of interview, ranging from just three months to 15 years. Though most of my participants considered themselves vegan, there were only three participants that identified as plant-based[8] (but intermittently referred to themselves as vegan). For the purposes and convenience of this analysis, I have referred to my participants collectively as vegan because the plant-based participants and those in transition to becoming vegan (two participants) were such a low count. Despite plant-based being health centered, the way in which the plant-based participants talk about it seemingly goes beyond just health. Furthermore, my analysis reveals that both vegan and plant-based/in transition participants show similar pathways: how they came into their vegan or plant-based identities and the way in which they interact with others (either online or offline) to find strategies or reasons to remain vegan/plant-based.

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[7] I withdrew one email interview (not part of the three mentioned above) because the participant was not available for follow-up questions.

[8] A plant-based diet is like veganism, however there is much more focus on health. Plant-based diets encourage eating more nutrient dense, whole plant foods and minimal to no processed foods, oils, and animal products (Lea et al 2006, Tuso et al. 2013). The most notable distinction between a plant-based diet and veganism is the allowance of minimal animal products in the diet – though two of my three plant-based participants said they actively ate minimal animal products due to certain circumstances, however, they had intentions of doing better by avoiding them when they could.

I coded for two themes: mobilization (becoming vegan) and persistence (staying vegan). For mobilization and persistence, I coded to what degree did social ties and media influence the participant's decision to become and stay vegan. The way that I measured social ties was if the participant knew other vegans, how they interacted with them, and if those interactions had a long-lasting impression that may have influenced their decision to either become and/or stay vegan. These interactions and affects were indicated by a strong vs. weak (or none) distinction (see below for breakdown).

Lastly, I split my sample into two groups by time they said they became vegan: 1) since 2013 or earlier (nine participants) and 2) since 2014 or later (21 participants) (see Figure 1). I did this because 2014 was the year that many more pro-vegan documentaries started to come out (see Figure 5). For instance, 10 of the "newer" vegans (none of the "older" vegans) mentioned having watched the documentary *Cowspiracy* (the highest count amongst the documentaries mentioned), which debuted in 2014 (see Figure 8). By analyzing both groups in this way allows me to see which mechanisms convince people to become vegan.

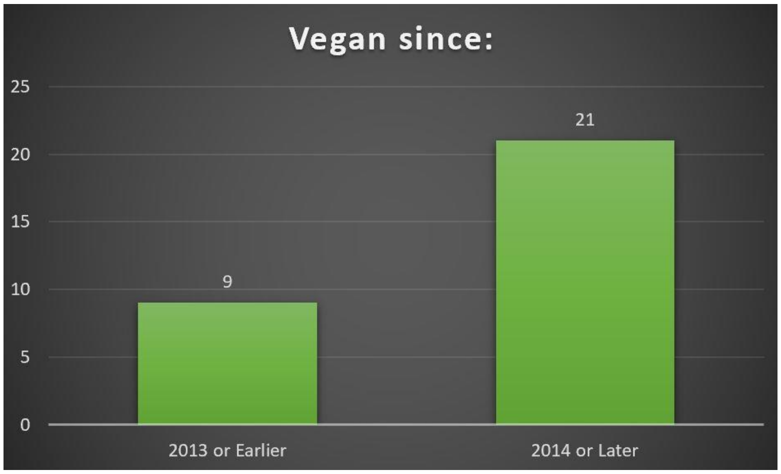

Figure 1: Number of Participants that were vegan since 2013 or earlier and 2014 or later.

Results

Gauging Veganism as Lifestyle Movement

In order to grasp details of the analysis, I would like give context to an understanding of veganism as a lifestyle movement. Based on Cherry's (2014) definition of veganism as a lifestyle movement, veganism's primary tactic is for people to abstain from consuming any animal products by any means, but the majority of the work involves people addressing and changing key parts of their identity to adhere to the tenets of veganism. Though there is no official vegan movement or group to join in order to become vegan, non-profit organizations like the Vegan Society, Vegan Outreach, and PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) are available to offer resources for new vegans assimilating to a vegan lifestyle. For instance, Sue (age 38, vegan since 2004) found that PETA was a good source of information for her when she decided to go vegan:

> *"I think I was on the PETA website a lot… it was a good source of information back in the beginning. Now, there's so much more, but back then; I can't think of anything else besides PETA."*

It is important to note that people within lifestyle movements engage in daily acts of resistance through the choices they actively make in their lives, rather than being actively involved in conventional movement organization (Haenfler et al. 2012). Only three of my participants were currently involved and four had been involved in animal rights movements and three donated regularly to vegan or animal rights organizations. Moreover, nine of my participants expressed feelings of wanting to get involved in an animal rights movement or vegan organization in some way but their biographical availability often prevented them from getting involved. Consequently, vegans aim for changing cultural and economic practices through choices made in their everyday lives and not explicitly targeting the state as a viable means of change, (Haenfler et al. 2012). For some of my participants, they saw that just being vegan was creating meaningful change, as Peter (age 34, vegan since 2014) says about being an example of someone who is vegan: *"I believe seeing examples in others makes people more curious and drives them to start the journey on their own."*

Findings: Mobilization/Recruitment

As mentioned above, a change in lifestyle does involve people addressing and changing key parts of their identity to adhere to the tenets of veganism. Lorenzen (2012) points out that changes in lifestyles proceed very gradually since these changes require deep conscious considerations. Moreover, Cherry (2014) notes that "mobilization is more about changing one's everyday behavior than it is about attending a protest" (p. 60). Mobilizing into veganism, thus, requires a concerted identity shift. Cherry (2014), using a combination of theories from several scholars, utilizes conversion theory (Ferree and Miller 1985) and a reconfigured transformation theory (Mezirow 1991) done by McDonald (2000) to argue that her participants were recruited into veganism through a combination of learning and reflection where the participants had catalytic experiences. These catalytic experiences (McDonald 2000) then pushed her participants to learn more about veganism, shared what they learned through interactions with friends, and then decided to become vegan by shifting their identity and practices to align with the tenets of veganism. My participants went through a similar process of learning and reflection brought on by catalytic experiences. For instance, Steve (age 54, vegan since 2013) recalled a documentary he watched that made him rethink about animal cruelty (since he was already vegetarian) and where food comes:

> *"I had seen a couple of documentaries… One of those documentaries, I hadn't put it together*- milk and killing cows. *That didn't equate and so that angered me, and the whole 'happy cow' thing. Once you confront that, then you realize the leather- I always felt like in the back of my mind, yeah, leather is* (animal cruelty)- *but I hadn't seen it. Once I seen it, then, I just decided one day, when I was in the Stop & Shop grocery… that I would do that* (go vegan)*."*

In fact, Figure 2 shows that 19 of my participants said that they were influenced to consider going vegan, whereas 11 were not influenced by documentaries at all.

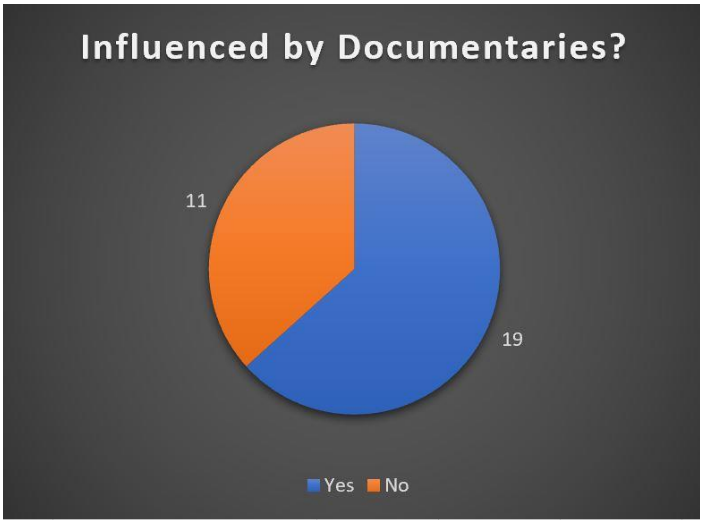

Figure 2: Participants influenced by watching pro-vegan documentaries.

After watching *Forks over Knives*, Kate (age 40, vegan since 2016) had a catalytic experience regarding health concerns:

> *"That's the video that actually made me go vegan… There was a lot that I didn't know about food and that was really shocking. I own a copy of it now and I try to get people to watch it because it really had a big impact on me".*

In her study, McDonald (2000) listed a sequential seven step process of how people become vegan. In this "vegan learning process" an important step, aside from the catalytic experience, is the "learning" step. This process involves researching various information on animal cruelty, the effects of animal agriculture on the environment, nutrition, and what/how to eat. For instance, several participants said that they became almost obsessed with finding out information regarding several aspects of veganism[9] that took them down a "rabbit hole" of finding out more. They either watched more documentaries or referred to other cultural artifacts (usually of the virtual kind) like YouTube videos, websites, books (including cookbooks), etc. – most of which come from vegan/animal rights organizations. Continuing on from Kate:

> *"It was a like a whole new world that I never knew existed! I never knew why people went vegan; I never heard that meat being unhealthy for you; I never heard dairy being unhealthy for you… Since then, especially eating a lot of the whole foods* (non-processed foods) *… I no longer have the brain fog. I have a lot of energy. You know, if it was just for my health alone, it would be hard to do. But then, YouTube takes you to other videos… Emily Chesher* (YouTube influencer), *I would watch her… she's also plant-based. Watching her videos really opened my eyes to a lot of things that were not good for you… One video she talked about was Earthlings. So, after watching Earthlings, that's when I realized the animal aspect of it. So, I feel like the combination of my health and the animal aspect is really what kept me going… Once you know about it, you can't undo that… It's a really big deal".*

Takeo (age 33, vegan since 2017) had similar experiences of researching more about veganism through more documentaries:

> *"I… watched my first documentary, which was Cowspiracy. And from there, I went down a rabbit hole of different documentaries. They just kind of catapulted me into really actually deciding that 'hey, I need to make this change in lifestyle'".*

It is also worth pointing out that the participants I mentioned up to now had no or weak social ties prior to going vegan. In fact, 20 participants had weak or no social ties prior to going vegan, whereas 10 participants had strong social ties (Figure 3).

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[9] Some people may not research all aspects of veganism, where some aspects may be more important than others depending on the person.

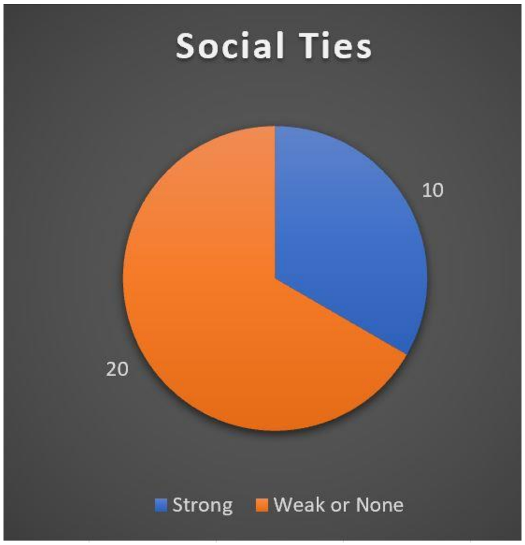

Figure 3: Overall participant social ties to veganism.

For example, after asking Misty (age 30, at time of interview: transitioning to be vegan) how she came into veganism, she said that her grandmother had colon cancer which prompted Misty to do more research on it:

> *"I found out a lot of information that shocked me! I kind of went down the rabbit hole of YouTube and you end up on veganism as a solution to help you with colon issues. That led me further down the rabbit hole of how it impacts African Americans in particular, especially colon cancer and reproductive issues for women. The colon is so close to the womb and a lot of times miscarriages and reproductive issues happen simply because we're not taking a shit. That was just really interesting. That's what sparked the whole thing… Once I found people who were like me who were connected to it* (plant-based eating), *I fell even more in love with the idea and I realized that it's so much more a part of my culture than I thought… wow, this is me coming back to what my ancestors were doing in the first place. Once we started with this Americanized diet, that's when we had the problems with colon cancer and reproductive issues."*

Not only did Misty's catalytic experience happen when she found out that the way she and her family were eating was not good for their health, but her learning experience led her to find out more about her own culture and that it aligned plant-based eating lifestyle. This suggests that some participants would reconstruct their identity around culture. Even further, Miles (age 48, vegan since 2015) would reconstruct his religious identity around moral and ethical issues:

> *"A friend of mine from India… I met her on Facebook… She shared a video on Facebook about cows and dairy and what happens, dairy farms, that kind of thing. I saw how the injustices and cruel treatment. I saw everything and it really- it put a tear in my eye and I had to ask myself or to God* (that) *I would never eat meat again. I would never eat cheese or yogurt or anything. And ever since then, I never had temptation to go back, ever, since that moment… I put it all together, so my cat at home, this cow here, they have feelings – they cry; they feel pain. So, I was able to connect them together... I started to see them as 'wait a minute, these are living beings. God created them. I believe that God is love, so, I'm to be good to them'"*

Though Miles did have a social tie into veganism, it was until he actually saw the shared video about dairy practices that he considered veganism more seriously, coupled with his religious identity. Miles's new identity and practices were based on a Christian worldview that had been reconstructed upon moral and ethical issues of animal cruelty. This influenced him to think of his religious identity in a new way, through the lens of veganism. Accordingly, after the initial catalytic experience sets in and the learning of information related to veganism has occurred, a moment of reflection of the participants' lives transpires whereby their entire worldview changes and they now experience the world as a vegan (McDonald 2000).

Contrasting other theories of recruitment into traditional social movements to those of lifestyle movements may help better understand how these processes work. Recruitment into traditional social movements requires attempts made by activists to change the beliefs of potential recruits. Framing (Snow et al. 1986) requires a three-step process whereby a diagnosis and a prognosis of the problem is conveyed, and a rationale to action to carry out the solution – all of which must carefully resonate/align with potential recruits. Social networks can either push a potential recruit into activism based on their ideology aligning with the movement or pull them into a supportive movement based on a history of prior experiences in activism (McAdam 1986). And as mentioned above, moral shocks (Jasper and Poulsen 1995) can greatly compel a potential recruit into activism. These recruitment techniques can convince potential recruits to actively participate and mobilize into traditional social movement activism (protests, campaigns, petition signing, etc.), however, these methods do not adequately explain participation into lifestyle movements. As Haenfler et al. (2012) note, recruitment into lifestyle movements happens at the individual level, through private action and ongoing participation engaged with cultural targets. The process of recruitment into a lifestyle movement shown here – catalytic experiences, learning new information, periods of reflection, and then identity and daily living habits shifts to align with the new identity – is an iterative process that better explains how people's lifestyles come to change.

With social ties *not* being an important factor to facilitate catalytic experiences, the initial step towards changing one's lifestyle, participants were recruited mainly through media, most notably pro-vegan documentaries and videos. Then with the learning process, additional cultural artifacts (usually more virtual media including additional documentaries, videos on YouTube, websites, etc.) were researched by participants. Most of my participants had full-time careers, which constrained their biographical availability as Carol (age 59, vegan since 2010) noted: “I’ve had jobs that have been ridiculously time consuming”. Consequently, vegan cultural artifacts, like documentaries and videos, were more accessible to them during this period where social ties were not yet developed.

Continuing on with the becoming vegan process is the period of reflection, which is individually experienced but ultimately concludes that the participant should change their lifestyles to align with the tenets of veganism. However, this recruitment or mobilizing period does wear off (the catalytic experience eventually fades) and, thus, does *not* facilitate in keeping people vegan. What, then, makes new vegans persist in their new lifestyles?

Findings: Persistence/Retention:

As the initial processes of recruitment into lifestyle movements fades, new processes are required to maintain a vegan lifestyle. Lifestyle activism requires social support for lifestyle persistence, which is pivotal for veganism as it affects important practical aspects of a person’s life such as shopping for groceries and handling precarious social situations. Moreover, preferences for interacting with a vegan community varies as we now live in the digital age where communication can be easily achieved through ICTs and social media.

When asked if having a vegan community was important to them, overwhelmingly, 29 of my respondents said that it was important. The preference for community engagement were either in-person, online, or both. When asked how they preferred interacting with a vegan community (Figure 4), five participants preferred in-person mainly, 16 participants preferred online mainly, and nine preferred both equally.

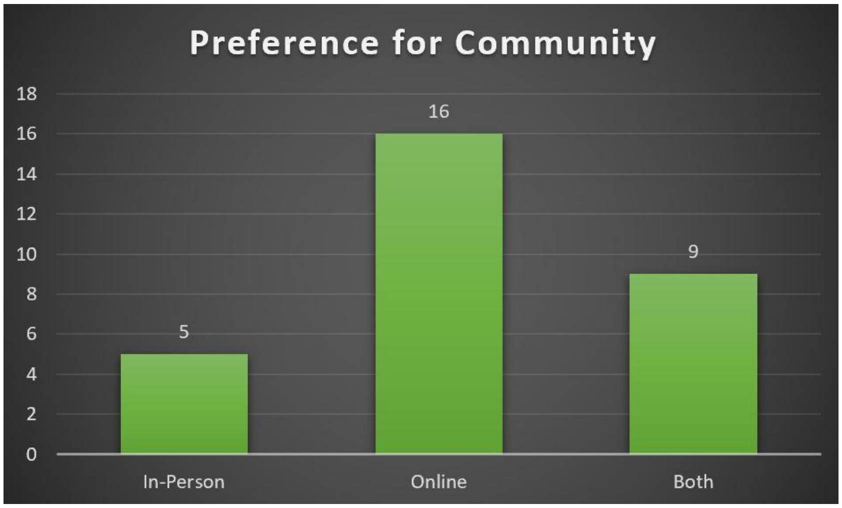

Figure 4: Preference for community engagement.

In some instances, some disconnected and newly vegans used online methods of reaching out to a vegan community in order to meet in-person. For instance, Janet (age 24, vegan for two months) tried veganism before, but she could not remain vegan because she did not initially seek out a vegan community:

> *"I think it is definitely very helpful* (a vegan community). *I know that that's why I didn't remain vegan the first time around. I didn't have anyone else that was eating the same way I was. This time around, I'm part of a Vegans United group and What Broke Vegans Eat (both Facebook groups). (These groups are) constant reminders of why I chose to eat this way in the first place… and I am definitely trying to connect with other vegans physically in my area."*

Janet's description of how she was unable to remain vegan because she lacked a vegan community shows how crucial having a vegan community is to persist/maintain a vegan lifestyle. In fact, some disconnected vegans do relapse because they had not developed social ties to veganism after initial mobilization. Amadeus (age 31 vegan since 2016, but also including relapses) shows how he fell out of veganism because of precarious social situations:

> *"I was afraid of how people would look at me – bring my bag of broccoli when I'm out with friends or something… A lot of the relapses* (were) *due to* (the fact that) *I just want*(ed) *to fit in with the rest of the world."*

As Amadeus relapsed, he expressed feelings of guilt and would watch additional pro-vegan documentaries and videos on YouTube, including footage of animal cruelty, to reaffirm why he initially went vegan. But as he expressed multiple events of relapses, the initial mobilization process into veganism suggests that it has limits. Amadeus was interviewed at the San Jose South Bay Veg Fair and was there to build social ties with other vegans: “Yeah, that’s why I’m here. I absolutely have no vegan friends as of now, pretty much. I’m hoping to change that today (laughs).”. He had additionally expressed feelings of establishing a romantic relationship in the future: “Well, I’m single now. So, hopefully, I won’t be in five to ten years (and I’ll be) with a vegan companion”. This further suggests his longing for being connected to other vegans. Since Amadeus was disconnected, he lacked certain cultural tools in order to maintain his veganism, as Cherry (2014) notes: “vegan social networks provide participants with cultural tools that inform their vegan practices and shape their vegan identities” (p. 67). Vegan cultural tools can include skills on how and what to cook, but also the skills to know what sort of foods, products, ingredients, companies, etc. to abstain from. Participating in vegan social media groups (which can also shift to offline meet-ups) provides vegans with a social network and cultural tools. These “virtuous circles”, or the effects of social ties on consumption patterns (Kennedy 2011), thus can help vegans with maintaining their veganism with lifestyle activism.

Even after joining online vegan groups (or virtuous circles) to network with other vegans and learn about vegan cultural tools, some vegans experience negativity because others in the groups share videos on animal cruelty. Since members in the group already align with the tenets of veganism, many refuse to watch videos on animal cruelty and do not actively seek out similar material. Clint (age 34, vegan since 2017), after joining a vegan Facebook group, talks about how videos being shared have waning affects after initial mobilization into veganism:

> *“*(They) *overshare the heck out of those* (animal cruelty videos)- *I have most blocked now. I just can’t handle the negativity anymore of it. You can only share so much negativity before we* (including his vegan wife) *blocked it out… I’ve seen them all and everyone is like re-sharing them over and over again. The shock is now gone. You got to have new footage but at the same time I don’t want to see that footage. I’m never going back. I don’t need to see it again.”*

Consequently, participants use of media shifts from more introductory and shocking material in the form of documentaries and videos to social media where they can connect with other vegans to share ideas and experiences, which helps maintain their vegan lifestyle. Moreover, social media can help further connect people in their immediate area to meet in-person. Continuing on from Clint, he says that having a vegan community has:

> *“…helped a lot, actually. I have met a few people online and we actually have conversations. The Fresno Vegans, they do a monthly thing where they meet up and- we had a potluck one time and it was nice to meet people and to see vegan families, like how everyone looked great together. It helps a lot to actually have*

> *people… actually have a conversation other than negativity. It's nice to have someone on your side, which is pretty rare."*

For Clint, it was more important for him to move from an online vegan community to an in-person vegan community. Some vegans feel the need to shift from online to an in-person community so that they feel less alienated, as Misty, who was interviewed at the Oakland VegFest, says:

> *"(You don't) feel like an alien in this community and that was big for me. Especially in the Bay Area, I'm fortunate to where there is a lot of diversity… I think community is really important and, luckily, with all these festivals it's easier."*

As far as familial support, research has shown that relatives can present problems for people deciding to go vegan or vegetarian (Greenebaum 2012b; Hirschler 2011; McDonald 2000), but eventually come around to show some degree of support (Cherry 2014), similar to King's (1995) research on young environmental activists. Some of my participants expressed similar pathways of familial support from initial skepticism to varying degrees of support. As Julio (age 53, vegan since 2003) says about his family:

> *"I think, when I first did it* (went vegetarian as a teen) *they thought 'oh, it's just a phase'. They figure that about all teenagers. I mean, they thought everything about me was just a phase at one time or another, but they see that that's not the case… they don't have any problem with it* (being vegan). *I don't know if, maybe, they roll their eyes – whatever. But, at this point, because I've been doing it so long, they know that I'm sincere. I think it would be different if I said if I was vegan and I wore fur or worked at a rodeo or I did something like that. They might think 'well, wait a second, that's a little hypocritical. Why are you doing that and doing this?' You know, I'm pretty consistent and have been for years."*

Persisting and maintaining a vegan lifestyle requires a supportive social network. This requires new vegans seeking out vegan communities in multiple forms. Most, however, do seek out an online community, which is more easily accessible, to be able to interact with other vegans. Within these "virtuous circles", new vegans will be able to ask questions related to veganism and develop their cultural tool kit to handle real life situations. In some instances, some individuals just prefer to belong to a vegan group, even if they do not interact with others, they can read other people's postings or consume the various media being shared – which reinforces their veganism. Having offline support is just as important where vegans do not feel alienated or excluded – to feel normal. Even when support from family is not initially there, family eventually comes around to accepting their vegan relative. The consequences of not developing social ties with other vegans (either online or offline) or not having the support from an one's close circle risks the chance of not persisting/maintaining a vegan lifestyle.

Findings: Documentaries and Social Ties

In this section, I would like to do a comparison of the two groups I split up and include documentaries. Before that, I would like to first show the relevance of documentaries. As mentioned, I have accounted for 87 documentaries from 1981 to 2018 (Figure 5) on themes of animal rights, health and food industry, environment and species extinction, and inspiration (motivation to go vegetarian/vegan) (Figure 6). It is not until around 2008 and on that we see more documentaries on health and food industry – explicitly promoting a vegan/plant-based diet, around 2014 and on we see more documentaries on environment and species extinction, and around 2014 and on we see more inspirational documentaries taking the lead (Figure 7). Figure 8 shows the documentaries mentioned by my participants: *Cowspiracy* takes the lead with 10 mentions, then nine mentions for *Forks over Knives*, then eight mentions for *What the Health?*, and seven mentions for *Earthlings*. By no means is my data representative, but rather suggests a pattern that could explain the high increase of individuals choosing a vegan lifestyle.

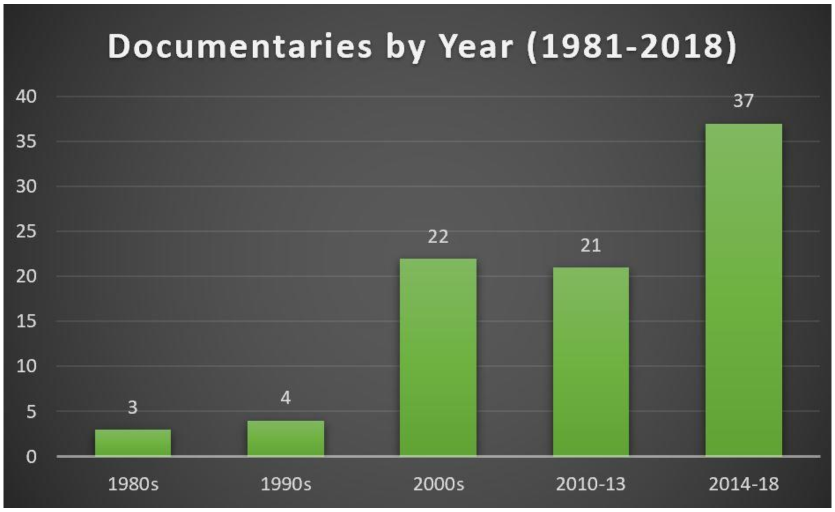

Figure 5: Documentaries separated by time, from 1981-2018

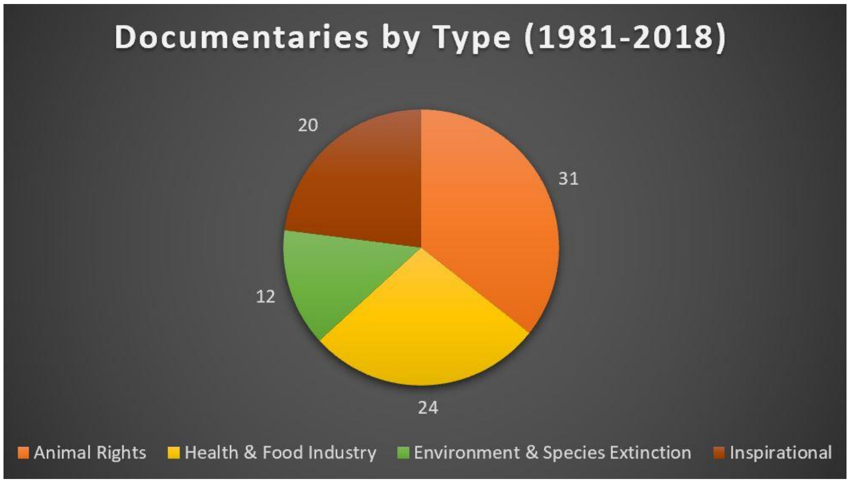

Figure 6: Documentaries separated by their main theme, from 1981-2018.

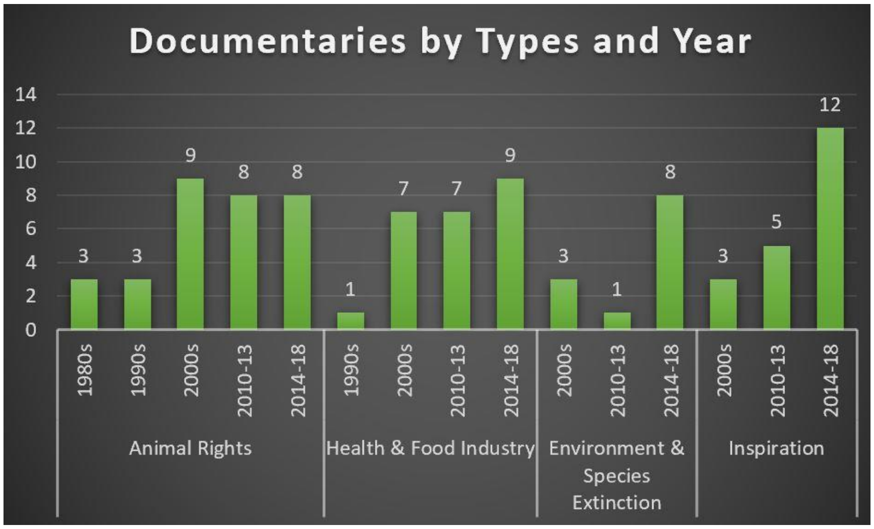

Figure 7: Documentaries by type and year.

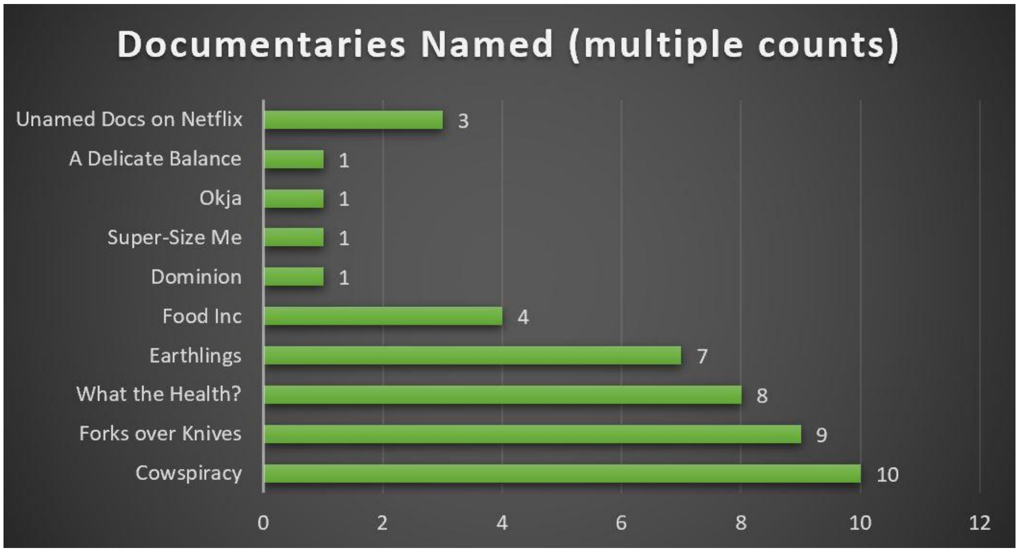

Figure 8: Documentaries mentioned by participants, includes multiple counts (for example, a participant may have mentioned three of these documentaries.)

Below are two graphs that consist of the split groups: those who went vegan in 2013 or prior and those who went vegan in 2014 or later. Figure 9 shows the relationship between the time the participant went vegan and if documentaries mattered for them to consider veganism. Three participants who went vegan in 2013 or earlier were influenced by documentaries to go vegan, whereas six were not influenced by documentaries at all. 16 participants who went vegan in 2014 or later were influenced by documentaries to go vegan, whereas five were not influenced by documentaries at all. Comparatively, the 2013 or earlier group shows about a half difference between whether documentaries mattered or not for participants, whereas the 2014 or later group shows about a two-thirds difference between whether documentaries mattered or not. This suggests that individuals in recent years are being more influenced to go vegan by watching pro-vegan documentaries.

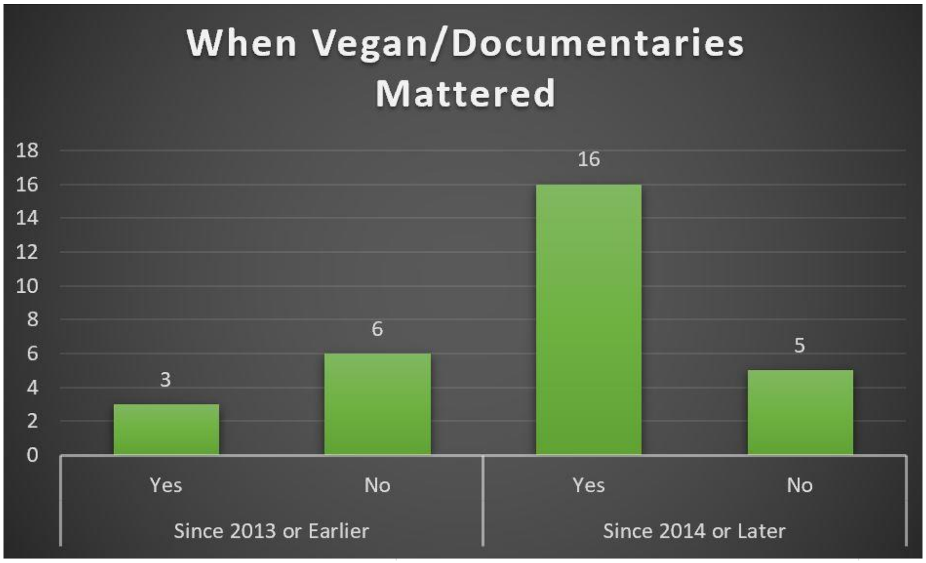

Figure 9: Time that participant went vegan and were influenced by pro-vegan documentaries.

Figure 10 shows the split groups, 2013 and earlier and 2014 and later – and the relationship of social ties. The social tie relationship accounts for participant's prior social ties to veganism, whether they knew someone that was vegan and the effect of their interactions with them. This was determined when the participants were asked how they came into their vegan lifestyle. The 2013 or earlier group shows that four participants had strong social ties to veganism, whereas five had weak or no social ties. The 2014 or later group shows that six participants had strong social ties to veganism, whereas 15 had weak or no social ties. This suggests that more individuals that are choosing to live a vegan lifestyle in recent times have fewer social ties to veganism than people who have been vegan for longer.

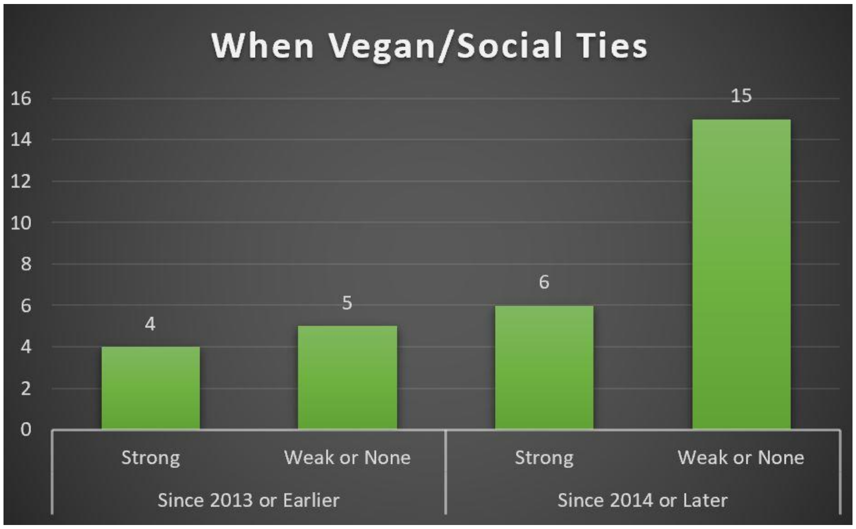

Figure 10: Time participants became vegan and social ties to veganism.

Conclusion

In this study, I have shown how factors that are influencing initial recruitment/mobilization are analytically different from the factors that are influencing persistence/maintenance of veganism as a lifestyle movement. My participants experienced catalytic experiences brought on by viewing documentaries and videos, then followed by the learning period whereby information related to veganism was learned, and lastly their decision to go vegan was motivated by a period of reflection which caused a shift in lifestyle. Also, it is important to note is that more recent vegan converts, most of which have weak to no social ties to veganism, are being influenced mainly by viewing documentaries and videos than those who have been vegan for longer.

Persisting/maintaining a new life as a vegan, however, shows a shift in practices. Participants were able to persist/maintain their veganism through a shift in media, from the initial catalytic experience of compelling documentaries to the social support from vegan social media groups, which also provided the cultural tools to remain vegan. It is also important to note that social ties varied over time as most of my participants had weak or no social ties to veganism in the mobilization period, but then social ties to veganism became important as many individuals sought out a vegan community in some form in the persistence period. Additional research could look at how vegans share information and what feedback are they getting either from online or offline sources. This work contributes to social movement and media literature by showing how both intersect in lifestyle movement activism.

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Appendix 1: Additional Graphs and Charts

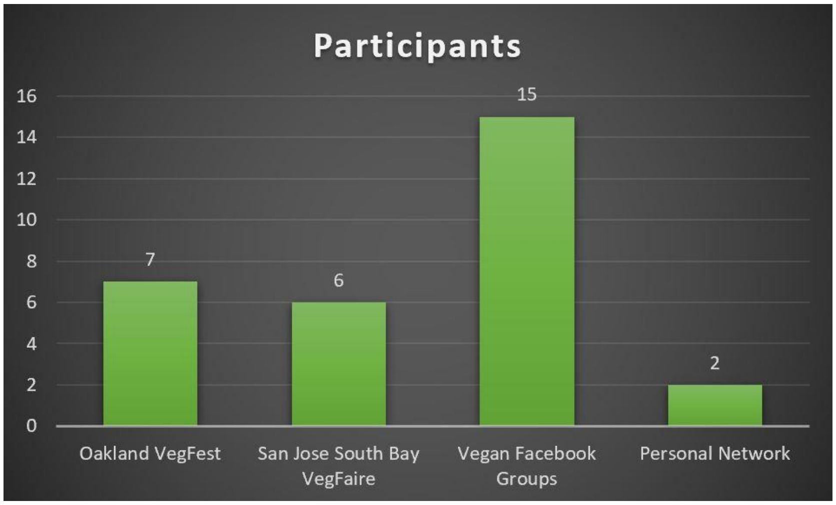

Figure 11: How participants were gathered.

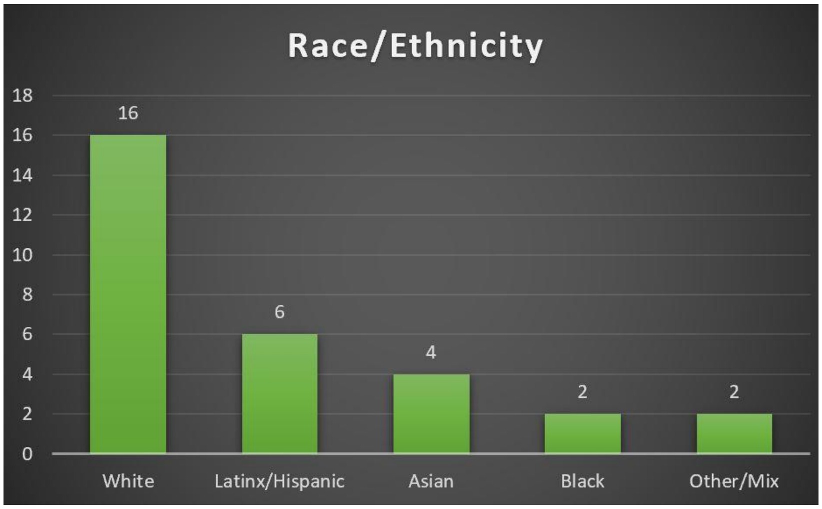

Figure 12: Race/Ethnicity of participants

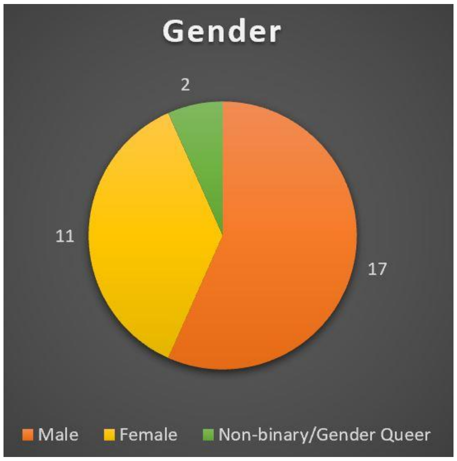

Figure 13: Gender of participants

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

Introduction

This study seeks to find out why there has been a huge surge of vegan/plant-based diets and lifestyles in the recent years rather than in decades past. What is driving this movement? I will be interviewing people who identify themselves as vegan or plant-based (vegan diet, but without the ethical and/or environmental concerns and/or the concern with having a "vegan" label). I will ask questions about themselves, their background, on being vegan/plant-based, their family, community, and movement (if involved), and where they see themselves and veganism in the future. Some of these questions may be used for future research and not just address the question stated earlier.

1. What brings you here today? Phone interview: what brought you to the event? (Asked at vegan festivals or if participant wanted to later be interviewed by phone.)
2. Tell me a little bit about yourself? Where are you from? Where do you work?

On Being Vegan/Plant-based

3. How do you identify yourself (vegan, plant-based, vegetarian, etc.)?
4. Can you walk me through when and why you went vegan/plant-based?
    a. What was your primary motivation to becoming vegan? Can you take me back to that moment when you decided that – What was going on in your life when you became vegan?
    b. How long did it take for you to go vegan/plant-based?
    c. Did any media info influence you to vegan/plant-based or what sort of information was available to you that made you conclude that going vegan or plant-based was an optimal choice for you? What info was in it (or what did you see)?
    d. Have you had any difficulties in the beginning being vegan/plant-based? What about now?
    e. Do you ever have any exceptions to being vegan/plant-based? (i.e. you might consume animal products on a special occasion or if you find that it is too inconvenient for someone; you wear clothing or use products that contain animal products; you buy pet food that contains animal ingredients; etc.)
    f. Is being vegan/plant-based a temporary decision or for life?

Family, Community, Movement

5. How do the people closest to you (partner, family, friends, etc.) view your veganism/plant-based lifestyle?
6. Is having a vegan/plant-based community important to you? Why?
    a. Is the community primarily in-person, online, or both? (Do you prefer it to be one way or the other?)
7. Do you share information (via in-person or online) about veganism/plant-based diet?

    a. Have you had any negative feedback when communicating about veganism? (If yes: Does that hinder you in any way?)
    b. Have you inspired or convinced others to go vegan/plant-based or reduce their animal consumption?
8. Are you involved in any animal rights or vegan movements? To what extent?
    a. Have you been or are currently are involved in other movements or organizations besides animal rights/vegan movements?
9. What are your thoughts on the animal rights/vegan movements that you know of?
    a. Do you think what they're doing is effective activism?
    b. What does effective activism look like to you?
10. What do you think is attributed to the success of veganism growing every so quickly in recent years?
    a. Do you think that vegan festivals, restaurants, and/or media play a role in this? Do you think that this is a sort of activism?

Future Self

11. Where do you see yourself five to ten years from now? Where do you see veganism in five to ten years from now?

*These next few questions will ask for demographics such as age, occupation, education, etc. If you feel some of these questions are too personal, you do not have to answer them.

Demographics

There is no need to ask these questions directly, the participant can fill this section out after the interview.

12. Age:
13. Occupation:
14. Education:
15. Race/Ethnicity:
16. Marital status:
17. Gender identification:
18. Sexual orientation:
19. Political affiliation:
20. Religious/spiritual/no belief:

Conclusion

21. Do you have any questions for me?

This concludes our interview. Thank you so much for your time!