

COMPARING THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION
IN VEGETARIANISM AND VEGANISM

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Abstract

There is very little research that analyzes experiences of vegetarians and vegans from a communication perspective exploring the messages used to describe their food lifestyle choices to others. Thus, for this thesis I will use Grounded Theory to explore the use of verbal and nonverbal messages regarding food lifestyle choices as a way to understand how communication shapes the identities of vegetarians and vegans. The current, and limited research often groups vegetarians and vegans together, but these are two distinct groups of individuals that make sense of their lifestyle choices through very different messages and perspectives. In order to enhance the understanding of each respective group, there needs to be an increase in research that examines, then compares, the communication characteristics of the two distinct groups. Separating vegetarians and vegans into two different demographics, exploring accounts from individuals in each group, and using Grounded Theory to analyze their experiences will enhance the research that discusses the communication process borne when adopting vegetarianism and veganism. More specifically, this thesis will compare vegetarians to vegans, using the role of communication in the participants' messages of conversion, maintenance, discussion, and defense.

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CHAPTER I

A BRIEF HISTORY OF VEGETARIANISM

Research shows that mankind has practiced a diet that refrains from consuming meat for centuries (Messina & Mangels & Messina, 2004). Before the sixth century B.C.E. Pythagoras, the scholar known for his contributions to philosophy and mathematics, encouraged a meatless, natural, healthy diet (Messina et al., 2004). Pythagoras, whom is considered the father of vegetarianism, gained the support of other historic philosophers. Plato, Socrates, and Horace are among the few that openly favored the idea. However, the expression *vegetarian* did not surface until the middle of the 1800s (Messina, et al., 2004).

Western civilizations explored vegetarianism many centuries after Greece (Hadisentosa, 2009). In the nineteenth century William Cowherd, a minister of the Church of England, began the earliest western vegetarian movement (Hadisentosa, 2009). The overarching reach of the movement was due to its religious affiliation (Hadisentosa, 2009). Cowherd formed a division of Christianity called the Bible Christians (Hadisentosa, 2009). The sect practiced bible literalism and insisted that the book of Genesis advocates a vegetarian diet (Hadisentosa, 2009). One Bible Christian, Sylvester Graham, ventured to Philadelphia (Hadisentosa, 2009). Graham traveled the United States giving lectures on the demons of tight pants, extramarital sex, refined white bread, and meat (Hadisentosa, 2009).

The rise of vegetarianism was heavily impacted by another church-related group. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, founded by Ellen White during the 1840s, stressed the significance of the relationship between physical life and religious life, and prompted church members to eat a vegetarian diet. Currently an estimated 40 percent of SDAs practice vegetarianism, and the church continues activity in health communication (Shurtleff & Aoyagi, 2014).

Religion-affiliated, and health-oriented movements signaled a spike in vegetarianism's popularity. However, its acceptance was challenged when the US government produced food guides mid-twentieth century (Messina, et al., 2004). The politically-funded guides mandated a healthy diet includes the consumption of meat (Scrini, 2013). Vegetarians only represented two percent of the population in 1943. Despite vegetarianism's low acceptance, the term *vegan* emerged in 1944 as one of its sub-groups (Messina, et al., 2004).

Vegans characterized vegetarians that refrained from the consumption of meat, eggs, and dairy products (Dupont, 2013). In November of 1944, the Vegan Society was formed (Messina, et al., 2004). A man by the name of Donald Watson is responsible for the modern-day vegan movement. He, and five other vegetarians who refrained from consuming dairy, created a charity group centered on veganism (Watson, 2004). Veganism was structured as a diet that considered the unethical implications of meat consumption. The Articles of Association revised the definition of veganism when The Vegan Society registered as a charity in 1979 as the following:

[...] a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude—as far as is possible and practicable—all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food,

clothing or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of humans, animals and the environment. In dietary terms it denotes the practice of dispensing with all products derived wholly or partly from animals. (Watson, 2004, p. 6)

Through the 60s and 70s a meatless diet shifted from its historically religious affiliation to incorporate a health-centered populace. Vegetarianism steadily gained the attention of more diverse groups. The Dietician's Guide (2004) further attributes vegetarianism's mainstream appeal to ethical practices much like the ones from the vegan movement. Two books, *Diet for a Small Planet* (Lappé, 1971) and *Animal Liberation* (Singer, 1975) emphasized the negative environmental and ethical implications of meat consumption. The publications influenced a change in Americans' lifestyles. In addition, *Animal Liberation* inspired the construction of the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals in 1975 (Messina, et al., 2004).

PETA initially mobilized animal activism through the research, animal rescue, cruelty investigations and public education (Fletcher, 2013). The organization is still known today for its activism on behalf of animals and its emphasis on the ethical practices of factory farms and their treatment of animals (Newkirk, 2009) but they take much more memorable approaches compared to the earlier methods. PETA won't hesitate to use controversial content in their campaigns in hopes to grasp attention from the media and its audience (Fletcher, 2013). There's a method to their shock-value madness. Some researchers believe scandalous practices like these may push the envelope, but the audience attends to the message nonetheless (Scudder, 2011). Along

with the other provocative movements, PETA has shaped the profiles of vegetarianism and veganism.

Profiles of Vegetarians And Vegans

In its more basic construct, a vegetarian diet is characterized by an eating pattern that refrains from the consumption of meat, poultry, or fish. The subgroup of a vegan diet extends the limitations of the typical lacto-ovo vegetarian diet. Vegans avoid dairy, eggs, and generally omit any type of food that includes animal products, such as honey, whey, or casein (Maurer, 2002). A 2011 CNN article that discussed the effect the term “vegan” had after people watched the independent film *Forks Over Knives*. In the film, Cleveland cardiologist Caldwell Esselstyn gave insight as to why the film omitted the “v-word”, claiming the word vegan makes meat-eaters get nervous. He attributed the omission to negative feedback he’s experienced as a health practitioner that specifically advocates a plant-based diet (Eatocracy, 2011). Esselstyn (Eatocracy, 2011) said, "If you start to use the v-word, people get nervous. Somehow, there's a feeling from years ago that vegans are strange. There are so many negative connotations."

Despite the historic backlash, there is growing attention in vegetarianism research. There has been an increase from less than 10 scientific articles per year in the 1960s to an estimated 76 per year in the 1990s (Messina, et al., 2004). The subjects have shifted from research utilized to question the nutritional sufficiency of vegetarianism to research that validates the use of a vegetarian diet to avoid and treat, chronic diseases (Saunders, 2003). Although there is an abundance in updated research proving the positive aspects of vegetarianism, the history of destructive inferences still have a negative effect on how it’s currently discussed (Hershaft, 1983). Aside from the scientific research, there is very

little research discussing the communication associated with vegetarianism, and even less research centered solely on veganism. The fact that the diet is historically associated with organizations with strict procedures may attribute to the negative perceptions of vegetarianism. Research on either vegetarianism or veganism could be hindered by the adverse opinions of one another as a result of their presentation as an interchangeable topic.

Preexisting Communication Research

Modern research concerning the lifestyles of vegetarians and vegans rarely exceeds beyond the scope of nutrition (Marcel, 2015) or ethics (Lund, McKeegan, Cribbin & Sandøe, 2016). Conversely, the same category of research that exclusively utilizes a communication perspective is virtually nonexistent. Malesh published a thesis (2005) that uses rhetorical analyses of vegetarian-oriented literature, cookbooks, and narratives to increase the mobilization of the ethical vegetarian movement. In the study, Malesh (2005) included results from surveys given to vegetarians and vegans. Although the thesis included messages from the surveyed participants about some of the messages they've experienced as a result of communicating their self-described vegetarianism, the approach was designed to retrieve quantitative results to uncover potential practices to mobilize the ethical vegetarian movement in America. The area of research that employs a communication perspective when collecting, then interpreting the meaning of messages of vegetarians and vegans is sparse. As seen by the work published by Malesh, most interdisciplinary research that examines the connotations associated with vegetarians and vegans often combines the two to form one demographic. This implies the two groups have identical indications. The forced and false single identity of veganism and

vegetarianism has been related to racism, environmental issues, and medical issues (Harper, 2010). Harper (2010) expands the literature that highlights some of the dissimilar characteristics of vegans and vegetarians, but only offers her knowledge of food studies and Black Women's studies in the cases mentioned.

Romo and Donovan-Kicken (2012) used the multiple-goals theory to examine the interests of vegetarians when communicating their diet. The multiple-goals perspective is a study within interpersonal communication that makes the assumption that: communication is strategic, whether and how people discuss certain topics influenced by multiple interests and purposes, and that messages are capable of accomplishing more than one objective at a time (Caughlin, 2010). The study concluded that vegetarian participants conduct communication strategies such as having a plan and minimizing the discomfort of others as a means to communicate their identity while maintaining their interpersonal relationships. Using the multiple goals perspective, the study uncovered the strategies that motivated the message of vegetarians. Research regarding the communication perspective was expanded by the completion of this analysis, but the area of separating, interpreting, and comparing the messages from vegetarians and vegans is a division that has yet to be understood.

It is clear that there is a need for diversity in the data comparing vegetarians to vegans. My thesis will examine the uncharted territory of using a communication perspective to collect, analyze and compare results within the messages of each group. A clearer understanding of the communication implemented in these two lifestyles accentuates the under-recognized differences between them.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Using a Communication Perspective

In order to get a better understanding of the transmitted messages, and their meaning as interpreted by the subject, my thesis will use a communication perspective. This viewpoint is characterized by the assumptions that communication as social interaction through messages is: accommodating to multiple disciplines; a system of interrelated signs and codes that are continuously transmitted and made available to others; adaptive to the culture in which it occurs; an aspect that's connected to all features of life (Fiske, 2010). Without communication there is no potential for mutual understanding; mutual understanding is the center of human relationships. Interest in the transmission of messages is one of two main schools in the study of communication.

Communication as a process asserts that whether intentional or not, the conduct of each person or entity both affects and is affected by the other as a result of the messages exchanged (Fiske, 2010). Typically the goal for connecting through communication is establishing a collective interpretation of the information being shared. An inevitable function of this process is the contextual basis influencing the message's function (Kurylo, 2015). Due to the numerous contexts, media, and cultures where messages are exchanged, a message's intended meaning may get skewed along the process (Singelis & Brown, 1995). Agreement is challenged enough by the fact that people have various

schema as to how they decode and encode messages (Gerver & Sinaiko, 1977). Whether the recipient processes the information as primarily intended or not, their applied meaning affects their behavior (Fiske, 2010). If the behavior of man is incited by the receipt of information, then the distinct behavior of vegetarians and vegans may potentially uncover a significant difference in the messages they're exposed to. Nutritionally, vegetarians and vegans are two groups with separate, yet similar qualities (Le & Sebaté, 2014). Communicatively, each group is considered as intricate as the individuals within them. Exploring the communication-oriented elements of these groups of cultural deviants will have multiple benefits. This study will not only determine the explicit messages vegetarians and vegans experience through phases of convergence and initially communicating their diet to others, but it will also consider the meaning applied by those involved in the communication process. More specifically, this study will examine the messages that took place when participants initially communicate about their vegetarianism or veganism to someone for the first time, the nonverbal and verbal messages that initially convinced the participants to adopt vegetarianism or veganism, the messages they received from others after initially telling them about their vegetarianism or veganism, and the messages they respond to the messages from others after initially telling them about their vegetarianism or veganism. Currently, the information pertaining to these minorities is limited. Completion of this study will enrich the research studying the communication features of these groups, in addition to the research across disciplines.

Grounded Theory

Due to the lack of research available, additional information must be collected. Grounded theory is the best approach to study the communication-centered phenomena

of vegetarians and vegans. With the grounded theory, a philosophy inductively emerges from the body of the data collected (Borgatti, 2006). Each case, and each message is distinguished as its own complex variable, collectively working with the other variables in its group, to produce a unified result. The case of each vegetarian will contribute to the construction of the theory for the vegetarian data, and comparatively the case of each vegan will contribute to the construction of the theory for the vegan data.

Based on the aforementioned arguments, the following research questions emerged by the use of this descriptive inquiry:

RQ1: What are the messages that convinced:

- a. Vegetarians to adopt vegetarianism?
- b. Vegans to adopt veganism?

RQ2: When communicating their dietary lifestyles, what are the messages:

- a. That vegetarians receive from others?
- b. That vegans receive from others?

RQ3: When responding back to the feedback from others, what are the messages:

- a. That vegetarians reply with?
- b. That vegans reply with?

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Participants

Ten in-depth, qualitative interviews were collected both in person and online (N=10). The sample consisted of nine female participants and one male participant. Six of the respondents identified their race as either white or Caucasian, and four identified as Hispanic. The participants ranged in ages between 19 and 30, and the average age was 22. All of the participants responded that their highest completed educational level was some college, or higher. Three of the respondents are currently freshmen in college, one participant has completed some college, two participants are still undergraduates, three participants have received their Bachelor's degree, and one participant completed a level 3 accounts diploma in the United Kingdom. Five of the participants identified themselves as vegans, and the other five participants identified themselves as vegetarians. When asked how long they have been either vegetarian or vegan, the responses ranged from two and a half months to ten years. However, one of the vegan respondents mentioned that she had been a vegetarian for 11 years prior to adopting veganism. Participants were recruited using chain referral sampling, which is commonly known as the snowball sampling technique (Emerson, 2015). In order to participate in the study, the participants needed to meet the criteria of identifying either as a vegetarian or a vegan, and have the ability to recall the verbal and/or nonverbal messages they've experienced

through different phases after adopting this dietary lifestyle. This type of purposive sampling was used due to the fact that these two groups are not easily accessible, as they represent a small percentage people (Emerson, 2015). Other than the aforementioned demographic questions, the participants were informed that their identities would remain anonymous (see: Addendum C). All participants gave their consent for their responses to be used in the study. There were no foreseeable risks for the respondents after participating in the study, but there were some potential benefits. The benefits could possibly be the reestablishment of their identity. Recollecting these messages could potentially help them to reorganize them for future cases. Other than these potential benefits, no physical compensation was given to those who were asked to participate in the study.

After establishing the required criteria, and after the study was given an IRB exemption, the snowball sampling technique was used to recruit participants in person or online through social media. Other participants were recruited from a variety of organizations that revolve around vegetarians and vegans. The researcher invited online participants through the “Vegan Friends” Facebook group. To lessen the pressure that could have potentially been experienced by the participants, they were informed that their identities would remain anonymous. After providing their consent, the online participants answered the demographic questionnaire (see: Addendum A) and the interview questions (see: Addendum B). Due to the anonymity, the study will identify the participants as Vegan Participant 1, Vegan Participant 2, Vegan Participant 3, Vegan Participant 4, Vegan Participant 5, Vegetarian Participant 1, Vegetarian Participant 2, Vegetarian Participant 3, Vegetarian Participant 4, and Vegetarian Participant 5. The corresponding

number of each interview is in chronological order, with the highest numbers given to the interviews that were most recently completed. For example, Vegan Participant 5 was the most recently completed interview for the vegan participants.

Procedure

Due to the study's characteristic of being a qualitative investigation, all of the interviews maintained a semi-structured focused format. This type of format utilizes open-ended questions, and the researcher guides the participants' responses by the use of specific wording within the questions being asked (Aleandri & Russo, 2015). Constructing the interviews in this manner allowed the participants to freely express their answers to the researcher, while allowing the researcher to ensure the collection of deep, useful, adaptable material (Aleandri & Russo, 2015). Aleandri and Russo (2015) explain that:

the semi-structured interview investigates aspects of affective-emotional nature. The wording of the questions is aimed at allowing the memory to open up and telling in order to accept and not judge. (Aleandri & Russo, 2015, p. 519)

Initially, the interview consisted of five demographic questions, two questions in regards to the corresponding criteria regarding vegetarianism or veganism, and four interview questions. The five demographic questions asked the age, sex, race, religion, and education level of the participants. Next, the respondents identified themselves as either vegetarian or vegan, and for how long. Originally, there were four interview questions. One of the two-part questions was divided into 2 separate questions, making

five total interview questions. The five questions the respondents were asked were the following (see: Addendum B):

- 1) Tell me a story about a time you've told someone about your (vegetarianism or veganism), and it was their first time finding out.
- 2) What are some of the specific verbal and/or nonverbal messages you tell to other people when you initially tell them about your (vegetarianism or veganism)?
- 3) What are some of the verbal and/or nonverbal messages that convinced you to practice (vegetarianism or veganism)?
- 4) What are some of the verbal/nonverbal messages you've received from other people after you initially tell them about your (vegetarianism or veganism)?
- 5) How have you responded to these messages in the past? Or, how do you typically respond to these messages?

The questions focused on the communication experienced by the groups. The relevance of the questions was verified by the supervising Professor. During the interviews that were conducted in person, additional questions were asked when further clarification was needed. In-person interviews were audiotaped, and later transcribed. Online interviews were collected by email as a word document primarily given from the researcher after respondents expressed their willingness to participate. The audiotaped interviews lasted between two minutes and thirty-one seconds to four minutes and forty-five seconds, with the average length of three minutes and thirty-five seconds. A three-step process was used during the actual interview. The steps included the participants signing the consent form, completion of the brief demographic questions, and ending

with the actual interview. Once the interview was finished, the respondents were thanked for their participation, and the researcher answered questions, if any, that the respondents had about the investigation.

Data Analysis

The transcripts were analyzed to describe the meaning of the participants' experiences through an examination of recurring patterns (Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory was utilized to identify the messages' themes (Glazer & Strauss, 1967). For the focus of this paper, only the messages dealing with specific communicative phases of the dietary lifestyle were explored. More specifically, this paper discussed the messages participants used to describe their motivations for adopting their diets as well as the messages used when initially communicating their diets to others. Emergent themes were identified utilizing open and axial coding (Spradley, 1979; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Then utilizing the constant comparative method, the meanings of the participants' statements were read numerous times to identify the important messages for each of the categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

An important step to understanding the communication that occurs throughout the experiences of the lives of vegetarians and vegans is to examine the specific messages the participants in each group provided during their interviews. More specifically, this investigation emphasizes the verbal and nonverbal messages mentioned by the participants.

The results of the study are organized according to the corresponding research questions; the responses that were representative of interviewee responses, and the categories that emerged from the messages mentioned during the interviews. The categories are separated into two groups, ‘Vegetarians’ to represent the messages collected from the vegetarian participants, and ‘Vegans’ to represent the messages collected from the interviews from the vegan participants.

RQ1: Messages that Caused Adoption

Animal Cruelty

In their analysis of on-line vegetarian persuasive rhetoric, Jorgensen (2015) explored the motivations vegetarians and vegans provided as to what provoked them to adopt a meatless diet. From the 1249 open-ended responses to the question “why are you vegetarian?” answers centered on animal rights or avoiding animal cruelty were the most

popular (Jorgensen, 2015). They expand on this concept by mentioning points made in Singer's (1975) book *Animal Liberation*. Singer devalued the dissimilarity between humans and non-humans by equating the rights of sentient creatures who happen to have restricted mental capacity to the rights of people who have similar qualities (Singer, 1975). He also acknowledges some animals' abilities parallel the abilities of children (Singer, 1975). Adding to his negative stance on meat-consumption, he criticizes the confinement animal feeding operations (CAFOs) (Singer, 2015). He labels CAFO practices as unethical, inhumane, and un-utilitarian (Singer, 2015). Singer's sentiments are shared by many individuals who have adopted a meatless diet, including the participants from this investigation.

Vegetarians

Much like the subjects from previous studies (Jorgensen, 2015) vegetarian participants from this study provided messages that were predominantly focused on animal rights. For example, when asked about the messages that convinced her to adopting vegetarianism, Vegetarian Participant 2 reflected on some of her initial thoughts about a meatless diet; she mentioned she first thought about the implications on meat-eating in grade school. She stated:

Well, I actually started trying to go vegetarian when I was in elementary school and that was just because I really loved animals. I was like "I can't eat them, they're cute" but then I failed all of the time because in elementary school you can't really pick your own meals. I pretty much ate what I was given. Then whenever I got to college I decided "you know, I've been trying to do this for a

really long time (Vegetarian Participant 2, personal communication, March 14, 2016).

They also touched on their abstention from meat as a sympathy factor due to their negative outlook on the practices of factory farming and the meat industry in general. Vegetarian Participant 1 (personal communication, March 14, 2016) said she “read a lot about factory animals and how so terrible [sic] they’re treated”. She even went as far as to say the stories she became aware of were “disgusting” to her. Vegetarian Participant 3, who has been practicing vegetarianism for six years, says that although she gets kind of tired explaining her diet to others, in the instances where she finds she has to explain it, she frequently talks about animals and the animals’ rights. In fact, she stated that the biggest thing that convinced her to practice vegetarianism was animal rights activist organization PETA’s website. Vegetarian Participant 4 also had early thoughts about a meatless diet. Aside from the vegan participant who adopted vegetarianism for 11 years before converting to vegan, Vegetarian Participant 4 holds the longest time period of all of the interviewees when asked how long they’ve practiced their dietary lifestyles. She became a vegetarian 10 years ago. During her interview she reflected on the messages that caused her to do so:

I was big into Greenpeace in high school, and their highly disturbing images kind of put the thought into my mind before anything else. I knew the decision would ultimately be helpful towards the future of animal equality (Vegetarian Participant 4, personal communication, March 14, 2016).

Some of the interviewees expressed various emotions toward their perceived negative implications of meat consumption. Vegetarian Participant 5 told a story about

when she first explained her dietary lifestyle to someone she was dating; she gave an emotional, personal account. She wrote:

I told him about the death of my dog, and how she meant everything to me. I told him that the condition that I saw her in looked like the meat that they serve in restaurants, or the meat that you see in the grocery store. I told him that there were a lot of reason[s] why I couldn't eat meat, but seeing my baby in that condition made it so easy to give up (Vegetarian Participant 5, personal communication, March 14, 2016).

Vegetarian Participant 1 (personal communication, March 14, 2016) provided an emotionally-oriented response as well and stated that the “many just [sic] disgusting stories on how they're [the animals in factory farming] treated and [she] think[s] that's what really made [her] go vegetarian.” Vegetarian Participant 4 recounted a story involving her distaste for meat as a reason for her vegetarianism. She wrote:

I usually tell people that my choice to stop eating meat came from me just not liking the taste of it. Truthfully, I became a vegetarian because I couldn't stand the way my mom cooked meat. Still, 98% of people that initially learn that I haven't had meat in ten years will bring out the “but bacon is so good” line, and to that I must disagree (Vegetarian Participant 4, personal communication, March 14, 2016).

Vegans

Like the messages from the vegetarian interviews, the theme of animal welfare dominated the messages given by the vegan participants when asked about what

convinced them to adopt veganism. Vegan Participant 1 explained his desire to avoid contributing to industrialized practices for producing meat. Like all of the other participants in the vegan group, he stated that nonverbal media messages that contain, what they perceive to be as, harm to animals were one of the motivators for adopting this dietary lifestyle. He elaborated by saying:

I just remember after watching that documentary [Food Inc.] thinking “I could never do something like what I saw in the film” and basically just consuming the meat products it was basically doing that, what these people that work in these factories are doing to these animals (Vegan Participant 1, personal communication, March 14, 2016).

Vegan Participant 2 spoke about a research project explicitly over animal cruelty that she did for one of her college English classes. After exploring the content for the project, she stated that “it really got [her] to understand and see why it’s bad to eat animals; because of the cruelty part of it (Vegan Participant 2, personal communication, March 14, 2016).” Both Vegan Participant 3 and Vegan Participant 5 mentioned the film *Earthlings* as their persuaders. *Nation Earth* (2016) described it as a documentary released in 2005 exploring the human species’ reliance on animals, and animal products in general, for commercial purposes. The film is divided into five chapters; Pets, food, clothing, entertainment, and scientific research (*Nation Earth*, 2016). The content in the film incited a prompt reaction for Vegan Participant 3. She stated that her cousin, her greatest inspiration for going vegan, suggested that she watch the documentary. “Ten seconds was enough for me to go vegan instantly,” she wrote about the film (Vegan Participant, personal communication, March 14, 2016). Vegan Participant 5 mentioned

the film on multiple instances. She attributed her initial vegetarianism, then later her veganism, the later her boyfriend's veganism to the content in the film. She said she challenged her boyfriend to watch *Earthlings* by telling him "he wouldn't be able to stomach watching it (Vegan Participant 5, personal communication, March 14, 2016)." She said that "he became curious and he watched it (Vegan Participant 5, personal communication, March 14, 2016)." Afterwards, he stopped eating any animal product immediately and he cooked for himself. She stated that he began cooking for himself because "he used to live with his family and his mother wouldn't bother cooking separately for him (Vegan Participant 5, personal communication, March 14, 2016)." According to the participant, this didn't stop his veganism because he's been vegan for a little over a year.

In both the vegetarian and vegan interviews, a theme of principled activism on the behalf of animals emerged as the most common subject in the provided responses. Animal cruelty surfaced as the most common basis of the messages that the participants from both groups stated as causing them to adopt their dietary lifestyle choice (RQ1). The participants mentioned their love for animals, repulsion, disagreement with meat-producing practices, and a general disgust for the implications of the meat-eating culture as their motivations, which mimic the results of previous studies (Jorgensen, 2015).

Environmental Concerns

As mentioned in the first chapter, *Diet for a Small Planet* (1971) provoked changes in Americans' diets in the 1970s by emphasizing the environmental implications of meat-consumption (Messina, et al., 2004). Lappé validated her ecological perspective with facts such as the reduction of soil which has decreased the protein in wheat supply

as well as the harmful effects of vastly wasting resources, such as grain and water, on animal production as a society with limited supplies (Lappé, 1971). Any and all negative effects, whether speaking in terms of larger or smaller-scaled practices, must be considered in order to ensure a livable future. The World Commission on Environment and Development Report from the United Nations (1987) emphasized the need for individuals to consider the effects of their eating practices on the needs of the global population, the current state of the environment, and the limitation of the environment's future abilities to continue sustainable reproduction (Chumakov, 2014). Some of the participants supported these sentiments. They disclosed messages that acknowledged that refraining from consuming meat directly influences environmental conditions.

Vegetarians

Similar to the ideas mentioned in *Diet for a Small Planet*, Vegetarian Participant 2 spoke about her concerns about desertification as a reason for researching and adopting vegetarianism. She said:

I did more research on it, and the more I found out about the more environmental issues, the deforestation and all of the things that are caused by factory farming and the agriculture business, if I really do care about this stuff like I say I do then I just need to do it (Vegetarian Participant 2, personal communication, March 14, 2016).

Vegetarian Participant 5 shared a similar experience that included an environmental, nonverbal message as one of the causes for adopting vegetarianism. Her roommates suggested she watch a five-minute video. Admitting that she initially had no

interest in watching the video, as she was an avid meat-eater, she stated that one roommate “challenged” her by saying, “if you care about animals and the environment as much as you say you do then you should at least watch it (Vegetarian Participant 5, personal communication, March 14, 2016).” The participant believed that she “couldn’t argue with what she [her roommate] said, so [she] watched it” and after watching the video, she stated that she “refrained from eating meat ever again (Vegetarian Participant 5, personal communication, March 14, 2016).”

Vegans

Messages from the vegan interviews also contained ecological concerns as motivations for adopting veganism. Though she didn’t convey an advantage specifically, Vegan Participant 3 (personal communication, March 14, 2016) mentioned that her cousin “always expressed the benefits of veganism on...the environment.” Vegan Participant 4 (personal communication, March 14, 2016) said she “decided to become a vegan at the age of 14 when [she] read about factory farming and the environmental...consequences of eating meat online.”

Both vegetarian and vegan interviews had reasons involving environmental concerns as motivations for avoiding meat consumption, but this theme occurred more frequently in with the vegetarians. It was the second most common theme the participants stated as their reason for adopting vegetarianism, as opposed to the third most common theme for the vegans.

Health and Healthy Body Image

A study titled *Health Benefits and Risk Associated with Adopting a Vegetarian Diet* (2014) is among the many investigations that assert that individuals may experience many positive advantages when they avoid eating meat. The authors of this study, Pilis, Stec, and Zych provide these benefits as examples:

It has been shown that properly applied vegetarian diet is the most effective way of reducing body mass (expressed as BMI), improving the plasma lipid profile and in decreasing the incidence of high arterial blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, stroke, metabolic syndrome and arteriosclerosis. In addition, improved insulin sensitivity together with lower rates of diabetes and cancer has been observed (2014, p.9).

Whether pertaining to external or internal wellbeing, there were participants from each group who recognized the health-oriented benefits to validate their choice in diet.

Vegetarians

Vegetarian Participants 3 and 4 mentioned health when asked about their motivations for adopting vegetarianism. However, Vegetarian Participant 3 (personal communication, March 14, 2016) says she “talks about health” as a general reason while Vegetarian Participant 4 gave a reason that pertained more to a healthy image. She stated that she “knew [she] wasn’t the healthiest kid in high school, so [she] wanted to do something easy that would keep [her] at an ideal weight without totally cutting out everything [she] loved in life (Vegetarian Participant 4, personal communication, March 14, 2016).” She then went on to say that she would “trade a hot dog for cake any day of the week (Vegetarian Participant 4, personal communication, March 14, 2016).”

Research shows that neither hot dogs nor cakes are perceived as healthy (Mirvish, Haorah, Zhou, Clapper, Harrison & Povey, 2002) (Steenhuis, Kroeze, Vyth, Valk, Verbauwen & Seidell, 2010) supporting the participant's sentiment of using vegetarianism as a way to maintain her weight while allowing her to indulge.

Vegans

All of the vegan participants mentioned health-centered messages in their narratives, but Vegan Participant 1, Vegan Participant 2, Vegan Participant 3, and Vegan Participant 4 stated that these types of messages directly influenced their overall decisions to practice veganism. For example, Vegan Participant 1 and Vegan Participant 3 encountered verbal health-related messages. Vegan Participant 1 inquired about the dietary lifestyle to his vegan friend. He stated that he remembered “asking him a lot of questions about what his daily diet was, [sic] how it made him feel better physically (Vegan Participant 1, personal communication, March 14, 2016).” The aforementioned cousin of the third vegan interviewee “expressed the benefits of veganism [for]...our health (Vegan Participant 3, personal communication, March 14, 2016).”

Although both groups of participants discussed health as a factor convincing them to adopt their diets, the messages from the vegans mentioned health more frequently. As mentioned, all vegan participants, with the exception of one, discussed causes related to health as reasons for adopting veganism. Because of this, health was the vegans' second most common theme within the messages representing what convinced the participants to adopt their dietary lifestyles.

Self-Improvement

Another sub-theme emerged from the messages of persuasion involving ethical advocacy: self-improvement. “Look sexy and be sexy”, is the ninth reason PETA provides in a 2011 article on their website that lists 10 for going vegan. PETA (2011) asserts that, “Vegans tend to be thinner than meat-eaters and have more energy, which is perfect for late-night romps with your special someone.” The organization takes an approach appealing to one’s aesthetic appearance as opposed to one’s apparent character. The latter emerged as a theme from the messages of one of the vegans.

Vegans

Outside of the typical reasons that incorporate ethical, health, or environmental motivations, Vegan Participant 4 said that her life-changing decision was influenced by getting to know some moral, virtuous vegans. She wrote:

I think having known several really awesome vegans helped to leave a good impression in my mind of the kind of person a vegan was, a kind and loving person, and the kind of person I wanted to become (Vegan Participant 4, personal communication, March 14, 2016).

This response expands the category of messages that promote ethical practices. She provided internally-environmental, externally-environmental, health, and animal-related explanations for her veganism, which is a holistic perspective of trying to improve the state of the world.

RQ2: Responses from Others

Attacking/Judgmental

A person's eating patterns have the potential to influence others' attitudes about them, as well as their behavior towards them (Thomas, 2015). It's not abnormal that non-vegetarians have reported negative perceptions of vegetarians and vegans, due to their differing practices and beliefs (Lea, 2001). According to Shapiro (2014), "our beliefs, perceptions, values, needs, and feelings are inescapable parts of every conflict in which we are involved (p.9)", and the responses the participants received from others highlights this type of negative communication within this theme.

Vegetarians

All of the subjects interviewed from this group provided responses whose descriptions fit this category, and all of them, with the exception of Vegetarian Participant 4, reported the receipt of nonverbal messages within this category. For example, Vegetarian Participant 1 (personal communication, March 14, 2016) disclosed that she has received "looks of disgust" and "looks like 'oh you're a dumbass'." When she told her mom that she decided to become a vegetarian, Vegetarian Participant 2 (personal communication, March 14, 2016) said her mom "just kind of looked at [her] like 'are you kidding me?'" Vegetarian Participant 5 also mentioned receiving these types of messages from her family. When she told family members about her vegetarianism for the first time she said that she received "eye rolls or just any type of mocking behavior (Vegetarian Participant 5, personal communication, March 14, 2016)." The nonverbal facial expressions (Hall & Knapp, 2013) experienced by Vegetarian

Participant 1, Vegetarian Participant 2, and Vegetarian Participant 5 differ from the nonverbal message reported by Vegetarian Participant 4. Vegetarian Participant 4 communicated the auditory nonverbal feedback (Hall & Knapp, 2013) she typically receives from others when she's in her hometown. She stated:

I'm from Fort Worth, and there's a lot of meat there. Over there you just get like [sic] a lot of disapproval. People laugh at you and will be like "Ha ha, vegetarians"... yeah at home there's a lot of like, "oh, OK." And they make jokes (Vegetarian Participant 3, personal communication, March 14, 2016).

Vegans

Like the vegetarian group, the vegans also reported receiving attacking/judgmental messages from others after initially communicating about their dietary lifestyle. The distinct difference in the vegans' messages in this category is that the participants didn't report that they received nonverbal messages within this category like the vegetarians did. These messages were also reported less often than the vegetarians. Still, Vegan Participant 4 mentioned times when she had been verbally attacked after disclosing her lifestyle to others. She said:

Some people get immediately defensive and go on the attack and say how "God put animals on this Earth for us to eat", "I love bacon", etc. [sic] or will otherwise make crude jokes or arguments against vegetarian/veganism (Vegan Participant 4, personal communication, March 14, 2016).

Vegan Participant 5 has received these types of comments both from relatives as well as acquaintances. She described the responses from her family as "negative,

mocking and degrading.” She says they make “popular comments such as ‘you’ll die, you’ll be sick, [sic] you’ll only eat grass’.” She described experiences with colleagues and said “they think it’s silly, that nothing’s going to change and everything will be the same either way (Vegan Participant 5, personal communication, March 14, 2016).”

The messages that correspond to this category varied from the vegan messages in two distinct ways. The vegetarian participants reported receiving aggressive responses more frequently than the vegan group. They also reported receiving nonverbal messages within this category, while the vegans did not.

Curiosity/Seeking Information

Studies have shown that sometimes meat-eaters have a preconceived set of barriers, such as a lack of knowledge or potential negative social influences, causing them to doubt the feasibility of a meatless diet (Lea, 2001). It’s expected that the participants of this study reported times when people have expressed interest in a lifestyle that many characterize as impractical, inconvenient, or downright impossible (Lea, 2001).

Vegetarians

The second most common theme of the messages reported from the vegetarian group revolved around the idea of interest, either in a negative or positive context. For example, with the exception of Vegetarian Participant 4, all of the participants were initially asked *why* as one of the primary responses when telling people about their vegetarianism for the first time. The *why* questions varied with each interview. “Why are you a vegetarian?” (Vegetarian Participant 1, personal communication, March 14, 2016), to “Why are you doing this?” (Vegetarian Participant 2, personal communication, March

14, 2016) to an elongated, audible “*Whyyy?*” (Vegetarian Participant 3 personal communication, March 14, 2016), and finally “Why do you do that [vegetarianism]?” (Vegetarian Participant 5, personal communication, March 14, 2016) are a few examples. However, the curiosity isn’t always centered on the participants themselves. Respondents mentioned times when people wanted further clarification about the reasons the participants provided as their motivators for adopting their lifestyles. For example, Vegetarian Participant 5 stated:

The typically [sic] ones are always “I could never do that” or “how do you do that?” or “why do you do that?” Sometimes, if I already started the topic of the animal cruelty or [the] environmental implications of it [factory farming], then people will ask more questions because they usually don’t understand the conditions these animals are in, what they’re being injected, and how horrible it is for the environment (personal communication, March 14, 2016).

Vegans

With the exception of one, all of the other vegans reported instances when others inquired about their diets. The participants communicated that others frequently express interest either in the functions of practicing a plant-based diet, or their reasons for adopting a plant-based diet. Vegan Participant 1 stated he normally receives a certain question from the people who are aware of one of the key differences between vegetarian and vegan diets. He said, “The people that eat meat, their initial reaction is always ‘dude I could never do that, how do you give up cheese?’”(Vegan Participant 1, personal communication, March 14, 2016).” He even admitted that he felt the same way “awhile back” when he was a vegetarian. Another participant mentioned receiving responses

pertaining to diet as well. Though she wasn't specific as to who she was speaking about, Vegan Participant 2 (personal communication, March 14, 2016) said, "They were definitely surprised, like [sic] the first thing they said was "Why? Don't you ever want to eat meat? Don't you miss it?" Other participants disclosed more positive-natured examples that didn't appear to criticize their actions. After telling one of her good friends, Vegan Participant 3 (personal communication, March 14, 2016) said her friend "was very supportive and very curious as to why [she] transitioned." Vegan Participant (personal communication, March 14, 2016) 4 stated that, "Some people though [sic] respond with curiosity, [sic] they ask questions about what you eat, why you're vegetarian/vegan...but from a kind, inquisitive place."

Both groups experienced occasions where individuals question the behavior associated with their diets. Most of the messages provided by the vegetarians contained messages where they're being asked about their motivations for adopting this diet, while most of the vegans were asked food-related questions specifically.

Respectful Acceptance of Differences

Even if they become aware of the benefits associated with a meatless diet, some meat eaters simply aren't able, aren't persuaded, or aren't healthy enough to abstain from eating meat (Lea, 2001). In their study, Lea (2001) stated "[f]or non-vegetarians, the enjoyment of eating meat was the strongest barrier to consuming a vegetarian diet (p. 105)", followed by not wanting to change their dietary behavior. These were more important than social barriers to vegetarianism, for example, concern about how they would appear to others (Lea, 2001).

Though meat-eaters and non-meat-eaters differ in opinions, disagreement has the ability to remain polite (de Botton, 2015) as demonstrated by the interviews from each group.

Vegetarians

Although it occurred less frequently than the other types of reported messages, Interviewees mentioned favorable responses from others. “Oh, right on! I could never do that,” is one the messages Vegetarian Participant 1 (personal communication, March 14, 2016) received, which she personally described as “positive”. Others have even complimented participants’ dietary lifestyles. Vegetarian Participant 2 (personal communication, March 14, 2016) said she receives messages from “people that are like ‘Cool, that’s awesome! Good for you, I couldn’t do that’”. It was previously mentioned that Vegetarian Participant 3 mentioned that she gets negative feedback about her dietary lifestyle when she’s in her hometown of Fort Worth, but “but since [she] moved, and since [she’s] gotten [sic] to college it’s gotten a lot better: A lot more people admire it (Vegetarian Participant 3, personal communication, March 14, 2016).”

Vegans

Every vegan interview contained messages from others that fell within this category. Vegan Participant 1 (personal communication, March 14, 2016) has been told “Damn, I could never do that.” Vegan Participant 2 mentioned receiving a similar message. In her interview she said, “They definitely say ‘I don’t think I could ever do that, you know, but good [sic] for you (Vegan Participant 2, personal communication, March 14, 2016).” Vegan Participant 3 also discussed positive encounters. “I am one of

the lucky few who has [sic] received nothing but positive feedback and encouragement about my vegan lifestyle,” she said about her responses from others (Vegan Participant 3, personal communication, March 14, 2016). One participant mentioned that one of her experiences was both supportive, then later romantic. Vegan Participant 4 stated:

When I first met my now-husband and told him I was a vegan he said something along the lines of “That’s good, my last girlfriend wouldn’t eat any vegetables and only ate meat. It was gross and she was sick a lot.” That’s when I knew I’d really like him (personal communication, March 14, 2016).

Though they acknowledge it, Vegan Participant 5 (personal communication, March 14, 2016) stated that her friends simply “dismiss it” by “thinking it’s something they would never be able to do.” She said, “They see it as a personal sacrifice.”

Both groups of participants shared instances when others have acknowledged the dissimilarity in their diets in a dignified way. According to the results of this study, vegans tend to experience this type of reaction more often than vegetarians.

Health Concerns

According to a study conducted by Lea (2001) *Vegetarianism Health Concerns* lead results analyzing the perceived barriers to vegetarianism. Non-vegetarians, semi-vegetarians, and vegetarians expressed concerns including insufficient iron, protein, energy and strength associated with vegetarianism (Lea, 2001). Others communicated similar concerns to the vegan participants of this study.

Vegans

Respondents spoke about moments when others expressed apprehensions about the participants' well-being. "Whenever I told him [his father] that I no longer consumed any kind of dairy or animal products at all I remember he was just, like, shocked cause [sic] he thought I was just trying to take things out of my diet," said Vegan Participant 1 (personal communication, March 14, 2016). He recalled his father vocalizing this health concern when he initially told him about his veganism. During the interview, the participant said this after acknowledging that his father had known he had been a vegetarian for six years. Vegan Participant 2, Vegan Participant 3, and Vegan Participant 4 also mentioned times when others questioned the state of their state of health due to their abstention from consuming animal products. Vegan Participant 2 (personal communication, March 14, 2016) said, "Some people are like 'no, where do you get your protein from'?" As previously mentioned, Vegan Participant 3 considers herself lucky due to the positive feedback she's received from other people, but she stated, "[The] two questions that tend to come up are - where do I get my protein (B12) and calcium from (personal communication, March 14, 2016)." Mentioning the receipt of feedback with a more negative undertone, Vegan Participant 4 (personal communication, March 14, 2016) has been told that "God put animals on this Earth for us to eat...you need protein/calcium/iron from animals to be healthy."

Out of the two groups, only the vegans communicated times when they've received messages questioning the effect their diets had on their health.

Defensive Remarks

Greenebaum (2012) conducted a study using “Goffman’s concept of impression management (p.1).” In the study, vegetarian and vegan participants discussed how they have promoted their diets to others, and their interpretations of the responses they’ve received from omnivores. The study stated that some of the contributors mentioned occasions where meat-eaters started attacking the arguments supporting veganism (Greenebaum, 2012). One vegan participant from Greenebaum’s study described this as part of the *Defensive Omnivore Bingo* (Greenebaum, 2012) (see: <http://vegansaurus.com/post/254784826/defensiveomnivore-bingo>). Individuals frequently receive aggressive reactions when they communicate about their meatless diet to others, especially when the discussions include contrasting viewpoints from either side.

Vegans

The responses each group reported receiving from others became more distinct when this theme emerged from the messages from the vegan interviews. After speaking about their veganism for the first time, participants mentioned that others replied with self-justifying responses. Vegan Participant 4 said the following about her responses from others:

Many people typically either respond with guilt or defensiveness. Some people will tell stories about how they were once vegetarian but aren’t anymore because their iron was low or will say how much they love animals too but wouldn’t know what to eat as a vegetarian or something like that – those are the guilty ones (personal communication, March 14, 2016).

“Explains how they tried vegetarianism once and it didn’t work out.” is mentioned on the *Defensive Omnivore Bingo*, validating that Vegan Participant 4 shared an experience similar to many others (Jordanpattern, 2009). When she first spoke about being vegan “due to how animals are treated to [her] current boyfriend” Vegan Participant 4 said, “He was slightly defensive as he used to fish frequently and even hunt from time to time. Yet, his barrier was not fully erected against the idea that animals suffer (personal communication, March 14, 2016).”

The emergence of the additional themes of *Health Concerns* and *Defensive Remarks* differentiate the responses received by the vegans from the responses received by the vegetarians, even though participants from each group mentioned health-related motivations for adopting their diets.

Converting Others

Both vegetarians and vegans have contemplated the most effective strategies to persuade omnivores to adopt a meatless diet (Greenebaum, 2012). In the past, non-meat-eaters have presented their grounds positively by engaging in “face-saving” approaches “such as avoiding confrontation, waiting for an appropriate time, focusing on health benefits, and leading by example” (Greenebaum, 2012, p. 309). Participants of the present study communicated instances when others communicated a decision to convert to a diet that refrains from the consumption of animal products.

Vegans

The theme *Converting Others* was the third category to further distinguish the vegans’ messages from the vegetarians’ messages. This category involves messages of

transformation, meaning the interviews mentioned experiences when others communicated to the participants that they have decided to adopt veganism as well.

As mentioned, Vegan Participant 3 (personal communication, March 14, 2016) reported sharing her vegan lifestyle with her good friend, who was “supportive and curious” about her transition. “Needless to say after all the subtle hints and non-graphic documentaries I have suggested she is now vegan as well,” Vegan Participant 3 said about her friend (personal communication, March 14, 2016). Vegan Participant 5 mentioned a similar experience:

His barrier was not fully erected against the idea that animals suffer. After I’ve [sic] noticed that, I started speaking in more detail on how animals are treated and even offered him the choice to watch *Earthlings*. I made it as a challenge to him: I told him he wouldn’t be able to stomach watching it to which he became curious and he watched it. Afterwards, he stopped eating any animal product immediately and he cooked for himself (he used to live with his family) as his mother wouldn’t bother cooking separately for him (personal communication, March 14, 2016).

Both groups had messages categorized under the themes of *Attacking/Judgmental*, *Respectful Acceptance of Differences*, and *Curiosity/Seeking Information* when reporting the responses they’ve received from others after initially communicating their dietary lifestyles, but vegan participants reported messages with the additional themes *Health Concerns*, *Defensive Remarks*, and *Converting Others*.

RQ3: Participants' Responses

Providing Information

Whether trying to promote the adoption of a meatless diet, or merely trying to “save face”, or “protect both parties from attack and alienation” (Greenebaum, 2012, p. 309), vegetarians and vegans have no issue discussing the details of their lifestyles when others express interest (Greenebaum, 2012). Thus, this section highlights how vegetarians and vegans communicate and respond to their food lifestyle.

Vegetarians

Vegetarian Participant 2 (personal communication, March 14, 2016) attempts to “save face” and says she’s “always reluctant to say why” when other people ask why she chose to adopt vegetarianism. She said:

I don’t want it to seem like I’m “harshing” on other people who do eat meat, but I just tell them it’s much better for the environment if you don’t, and it’s a lot better for the welfare of the animals (Vegetarian Participant 2, personal communication, March 14, 2016).

Vegetarian Participant 5 mentioned that she’s offered food-related information to others when they inquire about her diet. She said:

If people respond with questions then I respond by answering the questions to the best of my ability. I feel like what frequently happens is people ask what I eat, so I’m acting like a damn host on the food network or something and start listing off all of these recipes with meat products in them then telling people the meatless

substitutions (Vegetarian Participant 5, personal communication, March 14, 2016).

Vegans

Every participant in the vegan group spoke about a time when they've responded to others' remarks by offering a better understanding about a diet free of animal products. Vegan Participant 1 said that he focused on messages centered on animal cruelty when people ask him why he chose to become vegan. When asked if she missed eating meat, Vegan Participant 2 said:

I mean yeah sometimes I do miss eating fish but I for sure will never eat chicken, or meat. Yeah [sic] you just tell them the reasons why it's environmentally better for the Earth, you save a lot of water, and it's just better, healthier for you (personal communication, March 14, 2016).

Vegan Participant 3 (personal communication, March 14, 2016) responds to others "by sharing/texting images [she has] saved on [her] phone - for example, an image of the most common sources of plant based protein." Vegan Participant 4 acknowledges the many components of her lifestyle when others express interest. She said, "If someone is speaking to me about my veganism from a place of curiosity then I will gladly tell them more, whether it be about my food, morals, health, etc. (Vegan Participant 4, personal communication, March 14, 2016) Vegan Participant 5 has given various informational responses in the past. She mentioned responses about animal welfare, such as "I speak gently about how we are used to think animals do not suffer when they die. I try to break the misconception that death is painless. After all, death is quite painful," and

“I speak how emotionally developed animals are and tell stories of my rabbits which surprise people (Vegan Participant 5, personal communication, March 14, 2016).” She has even given health-related responses to validate her diet. She wrote:

I use these [the aforementioned reasons] motives to justify veganism and then I start with the health aspect. I speak about how it personally affected me, such as a great reduction in acne to the point of becoming extremely rare of getting even 1 [sic] small pimple (Vegan Participant 5, personal communication, March 14, 2016).

The vegan participants reported replying to others’ feedback by offering information more frequently than the vegetarians. Only two vegetarian participants mentioned times when they’ve responded using these types of messages, while every vegan responded using informative messages on at least one occasion.

Respectful Acceptance of Differences

Despite the advantages associated with a meatless diet, non-meat-eaters recognize their behaviors conflict with mainstream practices and characterize them as a minority group (Romo & Kicken, 2012). In their study, Romo and Kicken (2012) found that every participant favored minimizing conflict by avoiding the topic of their vegetarianism in order to accomplish the goal of *talking about vegetarianism without judging others*. Vegetarians and vegans occasionally maintain a civil environment by accepting the discrepancies between themselves and others.

Vegetarians

Vegetarian Participant 2 attempts to steer the conversation in a positive direction when people react negatively to her vegetarianism. She said:

I just try to explain to them “Look, I’m not judging you for how you eat, so I would prefer that you don’t judge me for what I eat.” And it usually ends up being like a respectful thing. Everyone ends up being cool with it in the end (personal communication, March 14, 2016).

Vegetarian Participant 3 has spent years as a vegetarian, and attributes the way she responds to others to her years of experience. When asked how she responds, Vegetarian Participant 3 said:

Honestly, not a lot [sic]. I’m just kind of like “OK”. I’ve gotten used to it, to be honest. In the beginning I would get kind of mad and defensive and [sic] would try to explain it. Over time I just kind of accept whatever they’re saying and say back “oh OK” (Vegetarian Participant 3, personal communication, March 14, 2016).

Vegans

Even after providing their reasoning for not eating meat, some of the vegans choose to accept the behaviors of meat-eaters, as opposed to trying to change them.

Vegan Participant 1 said:

I mean, honestly I don’t sit there and try to make people become a vegetarian or vegan because I respect what your decision is with your diet. I have no control

over somebody else. I mean if somebody just doesn't understand why I'm doing it, to me I just don't understand them but I'm not going to sit there and be like "Oh, I could never do that" (Vegan Participant 1, personal communication, March 14, 2016).

Vegan Participant 4 mentioned that she tailors her response according to the feedback she received from others. She stated:

If someone is responding in a guilty way [sic] I try to be sympathetic, [sic] after all I was not born a vegan and it took me well over a decade of being a vegetarian to become a vegan. It isn't my place to judge them [sic] and making them feel judged will not help them to change their ways (Vegan Participant 4, personal communication, March 14, 2016).

The difference between the two groups is that the vegetarians' messages within this category were geared toward preserving a respectful outcome, while the vegans' messages specifically acknowledged their misunderstanding of the behaviors of those who choose to eat meat.

Self-Accepting

For some, being a vegetarian is the basis of their identity and is the center of their values (Romo & Kicken, 2012). Romo and Kicken (2012) spoke about the communicative dilemmas the participants in their study have dealt with:

They had the competing goal of wanting to fit in and to get along with other people without drawing attention to themselves. While all of the participants found it relatively simple to talk about vegetarianism with fellow vegetarians

whom they could trust and with whom they could forge a bond, they also reported that being forthright about their eating habits to meat eaters could result in mockery and stereotyping, yielding unwanted attention and making them feel like they did not belong (p. 410)

Participants of each group communicated times when they've upheld their beliefs, regardless of the backlash they've received from others.

Vegetarians

Vegetarian Participant 1 kept the attention on herself when she shared how she's responded to others in the past. She said:

Normally I just say like "This is a choice that I'm doing for myself, if you don't like it, it's just me. Like [sic] it has nothing to do with you. I'm not trying to force vegetarianism down your throat. It's just a choice that I made to do [sic] for myself, to better myself (Vegetarian Participant 1, personal communication, March 14, 2016).

Others' skepticism doesn't deter Vegetarian Participant 2 from continuing with her choice. She stated, "I don't let it get to me when the people have negative reactions to it [her vegetarianism]. It's not their body. They don't get to choose what I put in my body, or like [sic] what I don't put into my body (Vegetarian Participant 2, personal communication, March 14, 2016)." Vegetarian Participant 3 made a statement similar to the one given by Vegetarian Participant 2 in the sense that they share the idea that neither participant allows others' negative remarks to cloud their own judgments. Vegetarian Participant 3 said:

I've never let the opinions of others bother me too much. Obviously nobody knows my body better than myself [sic], and so I don't let people's comments get inside my head. I am proud of my years as a vegetarian and am happy to educate anyone willing to actively listen to what I have to say (personal communication, March 14, 2016).

Vegans

Vegan Participant 2 was the only vegan who reported replying to others with messages under this category. She asserts her beliefs when she responds to others. She said, "I'm not going to be selfish and be like "I don't care". I just stand for what I believe in, and that's the most important part (Vegan Participant 2, personal communication, March 14, 2016)."

Vegetarians in this study seemed to prioritize self-acceptance since this was the most common type of messages vegetarians used when responding to others' feedback. The theme of *Self-Accepting* was the most common type of response for vegetarians and the least common for the vegans.

Ignore/Disagree/Argumentative

Though it may result in negative consequences, it's customary for vegetarians and vegans to resort to using confrontational or aggressively defensive methods when discussing their diets with others who differ in practices (Greenebaum, 2012). Though it's normal for both groups, participants from only one group reported using these types of responses.

Vegans

Vegan Participant 4 reciprocates negativity when others disapprove of her diet.

She said:

If someone comes to me defensive or mocking [sic], then I just ignore them.

Those are not the kind of people I wish to converse with or have a relationship with. I simply tell them I disagree and walk away, or if I'm feeling particularly feisty I'll tell them I'll be the one laughing when I'm 100 and healthy and they're long dead (Vegan Participant 4, personal communication, March 14, 2016).

When asked how she typically responds to the replies from others, Vegan Participant 5 (personal communication, March 14, 2016) said, "I always reply back, either with sarcasm or with blunt statements."

None of the vegetarians reported giving this type of response, while two of the vegan participants did. Vegan Participant 4 said that she structures her response according to the messages she receives from others, and only utilizes messages under this category if others seem to be behaving defensively or mockingly. Vegan Participant 5's answer implies that she replies by ignoring, disagreeing, or arguing with others regardless of their initial responses.

CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN VEGETARIANISM AND VEGANISM

After examining the messages each group of participants provided, it's clear there are distinctions between the communication experienced by each. Peoples' choices in food is associated to other varieties of decisions. The participants of this study demonstrated how individuals choose to discuss their dietary lifestyles is significant because it demonstrates one's passions, perceptions, values, and ethical construct.

The messages vegetarian participants provided as their motivations for choosing to avoid eating meat (RQ1) were predominantly associated with their concerns about animal cruelty within factory farming practices. Most of the accounts mentioned being exposed to disturbing media. Emotions they cultivated after this exposure inspired future behaviors, such as researching the healthy, environmentally-centered benefits to vegetarianism. Though the vegan participants articulated similar motivations, the first significant distinction was found when the two groups differed in their prioritization of causes centered on health and the environment. Also, the vegan accounts seemed more elaborate than the vegetarians', in so much as the vegans highlighted the unethical factory farming practices. Specifically, unethical practices emphasizing the food the animals are fed, the chemicals they're injected with, and their malicious treatment. The narratives

from the vegans explicitly mention some of the practices these individuals seem to be so affected by, while the vegetarians mention the topics more generally.

The responses the participants received from others after communicating their diets for the first time (RQ2) were clearly different. Whether becoming aware by chance, or being told by the participants directly, the vegetarians described being attacked far more than the vegans. Others tended to respond more respectfully and inquisitively towards the vegans. The vegetarians spoke about their dietary lifestyles without offering much information about their rationale, which leaves more room for others to give judgmental responses. Others may seek clarification on the information given by the vegans since participants are prepared when they immediately present detailed facts or appealing messages.

In regards to the participants' responses to others' feedback (RQ3), the vegetarians responded to the attacking/judgmental responses from others by sticking up for their personal beliefs in a non-defensive manner. If one wishes to behave in a certain way, then self-affirmation is needed to validate their decision. The vegan group typically responds to others by providing information since others normally express curiosity first.

Their detailed accounts caused the vegans' messages to be categorized using more themes than vegetarians'. Individuals who self-identify as vegan use their communication to educate and inform. Vegans' motives, considerations, and communication reflects a degree of activism, while the vegetarians respond to their environment more submissively.

In reference to the people who questioned the vegans' reasons for adopting veganism, perhaps they're curious about what really inspired the participants to adopt such an intense lifestyle. Vegans seem to demonstrate more knowledge behind their reasons for adopting. People are so puzzled by the idea of veganism, because a vegan's choices extend beyond what to eat, or not eat. Veganism involves the way individuals live their lives and affects daily decisions. The ethics behind veganism influences the clothes they wear (avoiding clothing containing wool, fur, leather, or animal products), the products they use (avoiding anything that contains animal products or products that have been tested on animals), the way they treat animals (refrain from funding puppy mills, circuses, dog races, elephant rides, etc.), and beyond.

CHAPTER VI

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DISCUSSIONS

Limitations

The study's limited sample size was the most significant restriction that hindered the ability for further exploration. Following suit, the data would have increased in quality with a more diverse sample of participants. Diversity lacked in the demographic areas classifying the gender, age, race, years of diet-adoption, and geographic location of the participants.

Future Discussions

Even with a limited sample size, this study still identified communication-oriented differences between vegetarians and vegans. Further exploration in the differences discovered by this study would enhance the limited preexisting information that compares the difference between these two demographics. In addition, looking at the participants' religious beliefs, cultural norms, socioeconomic factors, and educational level might impact the communication regarding their food lifestyle.

Various communication theories should be applied throughout future investigations in order to create a better understanding about the role communication plays in the messages that shape the personal, professional, and public lives of vegetarians and vegans.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Communication is a reflection of who people are as individuals and perhaps more importantly the communication of our lifestyles is a daily affirmation and a re-commitment of our choices. A majority of the preexisting research primarily analyzes the nutritional or ethical implications of a meatless diet, but upon further exploration into the communication experienced by the people who adopt this lifestyle reveals that there's more to the story. They speak about their dietary lifestyle choices in a way that's associated with the way they live their lives. The messages these individuals use to describe their choice in diet not only discusses the food they eat, but also the things they value. Communication about one's diet represents an individual's commitments, passions, and behavior.

Addendum A

PRE-QUESTIONNAIRE

These questions would be asked (briefly) by the interviewer or filled in if obvious.

Background Information:

Age: _____ Sex: _____ Race: _____ Religion: _____

Education Level: _____

Are you vegetarian or vegan?: _____

How long have you been (vegetarian or vegan)?: _____

Addendum B

Interview Questions

- 1) Tell me a story about a time you've told someone about your (vegetarianism or veganism), and it was their first time finding out.
- 2) What are some of the specific verbal and/or nonverbal messages you tell to other people when you initially tell them about your (vegetarianism or veganism)?
- 3) What are some of the verbal and/or nonverbal messages that convinced you to practice (vegetarianism or veganism)?
- 4) What are some of the verbal/nonverbal messages you've received from other people after you initially tell them about your (vegetarianism or veganism)?
- 5) How have you responded to these messages in the past? Or, how do you typically respond to these messages?

Addendum C

Informed Consent Form for Research

Texas State University

for

COMPARING THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION

IN VEGANISM AND VEGETARIANISM

This research is being conducted under the auspices of the Texas State University. This document is your consent form for your participation in the research project with said conditions listed below.

Principal Investigator: Sean Sydney Johnson, ssj21@txstate.edu

Co-investigator: **Dr. Maureen Keeley**, Professor, Department of Communication Studies Maureen.keeley@txstate.edu

Description: The purpose of this study is to examine the communication that takes place in different phases of the lives of vegetarians and vegans. “Communication” refers to the nonverbal and verbal messages experienced by the participants. More specifically, this study is examining the messages that took place when initially communicating about their (vegetarianism or veganism) to someone for the first time, the nonverbal and verbal messages that initially convinced the participants to adopt (vegetarianism or veganism), the messages they received from others after initially telling them about their (vegetarianism or veganism), and the messages **they** respond to the messages from others after initially telling them about their (vegetarianism or veganism).

Possible Risks: There are no possible risks of this study.

Possible Benefits: The benefits of the participants could possibly be the reestablishment of their identity. Recollecting these messages could potentially help them to reorganize them for future cases. The goal of the investigator is to identify the messages experienced by a group of vegetarians and a group of vegans, then compare the ultimate findings of each group to each other. There is limited research about the communication of either group, and there is virtually no research comparing the communicative qualities to each other. This study will assess the major, or minor disparities between the two to contribute to research aiming to distinguish these groups.

Approximate Duration of Interview: 2-10 minutes

PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT: I hereby give my consent to participate in this study. I understand that:

1. I give my permission to talk one-on-one with the interviewer regarding my nonverbal/verbal messages communicated as a result of my (vegetarianism or veganism).
2. My participation is entirely voluntary.

I do not see any foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study. If you have any questions, you can reach the primary investigator Sean Sydney Johnson by phone at 832-725-8618 or by e-mail at ssj21@txstate.edu

I **will** _____ or I **will not** _____ choose for my interview to be audiotaped.

I hereby agree to participate in the above-described research. I understand that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without any impact on my participation in any camp activities.

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Principal Investigator Sean Sydney Johnson: _____ Date: _____

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