

STUDENT JOURNAL OF

# VEGAN SOCIOLOGY



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# **Student Journal of Vegan Sociology**

Volume 2/2023

International Association of Vegan Sociologists

Cover art and design by Mina Mimosa, scene from the *just wondering...* video-essay  
"Ways of thinking about animal issues - after Matthew Calarco -"

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## Introduction

Vegan sociology is based on intersectional discourse. Informed as it is from the interdisciplinary fields of Feminist and Critical Animal Studies, vegan sociology charges that species must also be considered in examinations of race, class, gender, and the social structures that govern them. As a field, it aims to constitute itself in reflection, conversation, and interaction between a multitude of disciplines, actors, and topics. It proposes new, multi-method ways of looking at the social world, and it takes a situated stance rather than neutral observation or description. Its purpose is to produce activist scholarship that moves us toward liberated worlds, for non-humans and humans both. The contributions in our 2nd volume of the Student Journal of Vegan Sociology make space for these sociological possibilities by examining more-than-human views in education, taking intersectional perspectives over vegan social identities, and deliberating practices of speciesist consumption.

Our first article by Eike-Kristina Barth & Steven Avanzato-Driesner, "Perspectives on Diversity in Education," examines the meaning of diversity in different fields from social to natural sciences, arguing that a better, more comprehensive understanding of the concept is necessary. Although academia has traditionally excluded nonhuman animals and contributed to the replication of speciesist social systems and ideologies, the author suggests the consideration of a "biosocial complex" to address current and future challenges and build sustainable and ethical societies. Radical and compassionate educational efforts could challenge human superiority, ultimately retooling diversity as a concept for the purposes of pushing towards a flourishing multispecies society.

The second article by Julia Russell, "Veganism and the Social Identities of Race, Gender, and Sexuality," considers how key social identities might facilitate or inhibit engagement with veganism. The author notes that hegemonic masculinity and whiteness have particular relevance in this regard. Feeling disconnected from others, lack of accessibility, and stereotypical representation are themes that subsequently emerge from the literature as major barriers to adopting veganism. On the other hand, personal development, improved social relationships, enjoyment of good food, and participation in activism are seen as facilitators. Ultimately, the article suggests that veganism should be decolonized, but that it also has decolonizing potential.

Our final article by Nathan Poirier, "Three Paradoxes of Eating Animals," reflects on the persistence of non-veganism in an era of severe climate crisis. First, civilization is generally denoted by a reliance on animal products, yet this very reliance threatens the future of civilization (and the barbarity of speciesist violence required for procuring animal products is anything but "civilized"). Second, speciesism relies on considering humans superior, but if humans indeed were superior, they would not need (or want) to bestow such violence upon other beings. Third, the rise of "humane farming" provides another contradiction: it is impossible

to kill one's way out of anthropocentrism. "Humane" or "local" food alternatives only provide seemingly more ethical choices that strengthen animal agriculture's grasp on the collective imagination. The author suggests that a vegan perspective in sociology can expose such paradoxes, questioning them with the purpose of minimizing structural and epistemic violence, reducing harm, and enacting consistent anti-oppression views.

We wish to congratulate the researchers for contributing to the growing and diversifying field of vegan sociology. We also express our fondest gratitude to our community of reviewers who graciously worked with our contributors to improve the quality and focus of the three manuscripts included herein. We rely on a generous network of students, academics, retirees, and independent scholars to support this journal and the next generation of vegan sociologists. These knowledges are not to be constructed alone, but within multispecies collectives and for total liberation presents and futures.

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## **Perspectives on Diversity in Education – an Appeal for Change and Justice**

Barth, Eike-Kristina<sup>1</sup> & Avanzato-Driesner, Steven<sup>2</sup>

### **Abstract**

Prevalent educational schemes contain problematic, one-dimensional understandings of diversity inclusive only of mainstream human cultures based on the growth paradigm. Natural entities and nonhuman animals are predominantly excluded and human cultures with truly sustainable lifestyles ignored or devalued. Recent studies and psychological insight have shown that lack of compassion for minorities and nonhuman life has disastrous impact on biodiversity, the global community ('biosocial complex') and is highly destructive to a liveable future on this planet. This paper attempted to determine how the understanding of diversity can be widened through education to be inclusive of more than mainstream human lifestyles. Comparing the understanding of diversity in social and natural sciences, this paper explored the current situation. The food system based on large-scale monocultures and animal-agriculture was identified as a threat to diversity with the belief in human supremacy at its core, destroying the foundation of life. The urgent change towards a more inclusive, holistic and compassionate paradigm, increasingly demanded for by publications and organisations, was discussed. The results indicated that educational schemes must aim at creating a foundation of ecological democracy, plant-based food systems and solidarity on international and local level. Cultural stories need to be re-framed into positive utopias, based on just rights for all beings and thereby halt destruction of diversity. High-quality education, with topic-specific advanced training for teachers and educators, and empowerment for active democratic participation is recommended. A new paradigm in education is needed, combining insights of social and natural sciences in a relatable manner.

**keywords:** diversity, education for compassion, sustainability, biosocial complex

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The term *diversity* is being defined and understood in quite divergent ways in social and natural sciences. Pointing out perspectives, underlying belief systems, and possibilities for change, as well as highlighting the potential impact of education is the core purpose of this paper. The hypothesis proposed here is that understandings of *diversity* need to be adapted in our societal apprehension and hence taught differently in all applicable institutions of education. This is imperative to tackle current and future (ecological) challenges and to effectively halt diversity loss.

In recent years diversity has been widely discussed and researched in both the natural and social sciences. The keyword search for 'diversity' shows about 489 million hits on Google Germany and roughly 4.7 million scientific publications in the library database of Freie Universität Berlin. However, it still seems uncommon that the findings from the natural and social scientific fields are being brought into conversation with one another, remaining distinctly bound within their disciplines.

In a publication in the field of conservation biology in 2019 on embracing diversity, the authors point out the necessity of "leading societies toward a more sustainable, equitably shared, and environmentally just future [which] requires elevating and strengthening conversations on the nonmaterial and perhaps unquantifiable values of nonhuman nature to humanity" and hereby granting importance to all living members of the so-called 'biosocial complex', including all relationships and interactions between all living species on this planet (Kohler, (Kohler et al. 2019). This understanding of 'diversity' should urgently be incorporated into modern-day education if we want to create a more sustainable, ethical, and peaceful future for ourselves and those generations to come.

However, large-scale and global education goals, such as the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), set up by the UN in 2015 (aiming to promote diversity, end poverty, inequalities and tackle climate change through education and further a more sustainable future (United Nations 2021)), are unfortunately not inclusive in its strategies of the *biosocial complex* as an interdependent system. From this point of view, the UNESCO paper on 'Rethinking Education' (UNESCO 2015:29ff) fails to clearly and actively address the challenge of bringing together human and nonhuman diversity in a fundamentally insightful way to protect nature and hence all human life on this planet.

The potential depth of a shift in the societal understanding of *diversity*, away from human-centric views, so far remains under-represented. This is reflected in teaching, as well as the ways leading research institutions, such as the German Max-Planck Institute (n.d.), are still focusing solely on human diversity e.g., in a recent series of published books on diversity in society, regardless of the urgency of biodiversity loss.

The following research questions will guide the remainder of this paper, offering a framework for the speculative exploration of this topic:

- How can we change and widen the understanding of diversity through education?
- Who is part of the group we talk about when referring to *diversity*?
- What is needed within education to be able to teach about *diversity* differently?

To start this essay the term *diversity* is defined according to the two scientific perspectives at hand, in an attempt to find common ground between these. Subsequently, in part 3 the problematic current concept of *diversity* is described. The two different outlooks on *diversity* in natural and social sciences are compared in part 4, further problematising the separation of these fields and suggesting the potential benefits of a combined approach. The interlinked problems, with diversity loss in the natural world and the implications on cultural diversity and social stability, are then further analysed and discussed, referring to and focusing mainly on critical and forward-thinking recent publications on the importance of the entire *biosocial complex*, its intrinsic value and rights. Part 6 is pointing out what is needed to take the topic to education and to teach about it differently. The conclusion sums up the main points, providing prospects.

## 2. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Within social and natural sciences, the term *diversity* is defined in different ways, to some degree excluding the other field's definitions. In social sciences *diversity* mainly refers to conscious behaviour concerning diversity in various aspects of modern human societies (culture, ethnicity, belief system, age, gender, sexuality etc.) and treating each other with respect as well as appreciation.

"Diversity means conscious handling of plurality in society: it is an organisational as well as socio-political concept, which puts forth an appreciative, intentional and respectful interaction concerning differences and individuality" (Hochschule München n.d.).

Within the field of natural sciences, the definition of *diversity* more generally talks about all forms of life with their genetic and ecological varieties, not further specified for human societies.

"Biological diversity means the variability among living organisms from all sources, including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems" (Convention on Biological Diversity 2006).

A general but to-the-point definition of *diversity* can be found in the Cambridge Dictionary: "The fact of many different types of things or people being included in something" (Cambridge Dictionary n.d.). However, the term 'things' should be altered to the categories of 'nonhuman animals' and 'natural entities', which will be discussed. Below are definitions of some of the key terms used repeatedly throughout this paper:

**Modern-day/mainstream human:**

Used to describe most humans, living a life not consistent with natural cycles but following (industrial) agriculture, consumerism, and capitalistic growth, according to Feeney (2019).

**Hunter-gatherer:**

Human who still lives in harmony with nature (Feeney 2019; Harari 2015).

**Food systems:**

The entire production, transportation, manufacturing, retailing, consumption, and waste of food. Includes impacts on nutrition, human health, well-being, and the environment (Benton et al. 2021)

**Nonhuman animal:**

Used here as synonym for 'animal' to stress the equality and interconnectedness of human animals and all other animals.

**Natural entities:**

Inanimate natural objects, such as rivers, mountains or forests (Kothari, Margil and Bajpai 2017).

**Biosocial complex:**

According to Kohler et al. (2019) all relationships and interactions between all living species on this planet.

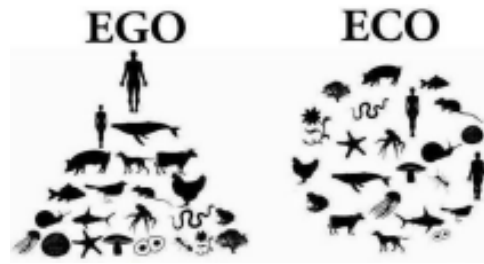
**Regenerative agriculture:**

Farming practices that protect and recover soil and essential micro and macro life-forms in a vegan and organic way (Grow-Biointensive n.d.).

### 3. THE CURRENT AND PROBLEMATIC CONCEPT OF DIVERSITY

Understandings of *diversity* need more holistic and inclusive discourse in social and natural sciences to enable necessary change both generally and within diversity education specifically. The effects of such a fundamental shift in understanding could help to address some of the most challenging issues of our time in radical ways: equality and peace, the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, degradation of arable land and ultimately the general question of the worth and meaning of human work. In contrast to the predominant reluctance in social sciences, study-fields like ethology, conservation biology, ethics, animal rights as well as agroecology, are increasingly pointing out and asking for a shift towards more equal rights for nonhuman animals and natural entities and hence the recognition of the worth of nonhuman diversity. This development also pays long overdue tribute to ancient indigenous knowledge (Papenfuss 2017), showing the somewhat hidden diversity within the human species itself.

Figure 1. Opposing concepts of human living. Retrieved on 23.12.2020, source: <https://notbuyinganything.blogspot.com/2012/04/ego-vs-eco.html>



If humans are divided into two simplified categories, there are those who understand themselves to be part of the ecosystem, interconnected with all other beings and those who are disconnected, seemingly ruling over others (see figure 1). The Western majority are leading a rather 'ego-based', disconnected life, following the story of consumerism and the socially constructed value of 'money' as the universal language in which we trust (Harari 2017b). In contrast, a few remaining humans lead a hunter-gatherer life, based on true sustainability, in remote areas such as the Amazon rainforest (Worley 2016). Recently there are increasing numbers of publications on awareness and empathy concerning all the diverse life-forms on this planet, such as the aforementioned publication by Kohler et al. (2019), the work of the International Association of Vegan Sociologists and Yuval Noah Harari . These publications question deep-rooted human beliefs and explore what *diversity* could mean, if it were not limited to current human cultures and societies, but encompassed the communities of all humans, nonhuman animals and natural entities alike. In harsh contrast to this ethical ideal of an equal and sustainable world community, the current agricultural system is one main factor which decreases diversity and destroys planet earth. Natural habitat is destroyed, soils depleted through intensive monocultures, tremendous pollution caused, and food varieties are systematically annihilated. Foremost the animal agriculture sector has become a destructive driver in this disaster (Benton et al. 2021). Globally, these issues are not openly discussed, or taught, within dominant discourses and educational curricula. In this system, nonhuman animals and natural entities tend to be portrayed as soulless things so modern-day humans can morally justify the destructive system of animal agriculture and human consumerist behaviour (Ebert 2021). Moreover, social disruption is happening, as small-scale farmers are forced to adapt to an economically brutal capitalist system, whereby they are left to choose whether to abandon their less destructive agricultural practices or quit altogether and potentially face displacement, thereby further destabilizing whole regions, as has been the case in Syria (Lund 2014).

Cumulatively these factors are leading to a massive loss in diversity in culture and nature, without the potential of fast enough regeneration, reinforcing the effects of the global climate crisis (Watson 2019). As stated by Benton et al. (2021) the big questions concerning agricultural practice and food systems must be addressed systemically within mainstream society. The outcome and insights of this systemic analysis subsequently must be taken to education, to further an all-embracing understanding and appreciation of diversity, in order to generate radical change and global stability for future generations.

#### 4. DIVERSITY IN THE LIGHT OF TWO SCIENTIFIC FIELDS

As established, there are conflicting definitions of *diversity*, depending on the field of study, connected to some extent also to a scientist's subjective view of the world. Humans tend to regard their own species' societies as culturally highly diverse, meanwhile overlooking the fact that any human society depends on the (functioning) global ecosystem and its biodiversity to provide for all needs (Herrmann 2019). Only about five percent of the world's human population today are indigenous people, who follow a significantly distinct and diverse ways of living compared to mainstream humans. It is indigenous communities who culturally value biodiversity, demonstrated in the way in which these communities are protecting 80 percent of the world's remaining biodiversity; of these remaining indigenous communities, many have been displaced and live in poverty, excluded from and unrecognised by mainstream society (The World Bank n.d.). The ancestral and highly sustainable hunter-gatherer life (Feeney 2019), uninfluenced by western consumerism, is presumably only being followed by a small fraction of those remaining five percent. Harari (2017b) states that about 94 percent of all humans follow the anthropocentric, capitalist idea of progress which tells the story of money, growth and profit, dictating the working of societies and the world's economy. Whether these people follow it devotedly or respectively, due to circumstances unwillingly, remains unanswered.

As already stated, there are challenging, deeply systemic questions, concerning the system modern-day humans created, especially in relation to agriculture. Agriculture has arguably had a highly negative outcome for humans in general, despite all technological advances, by causing more intense work, compared to the less labour-intensive traditional hunter-gatherer lifestyle (Harari 2015:86ff). However, living a sustainable life which reduces harm to the rest of nature has become almost impossible for most humans, due to the ever-increasing standard of living, ongoing expansion, and resource depletion. So far, industrialised countries have been the main driving force behind this, yet with more countries from the global south aiming for 'development', in addition to population growth, the need for even more space and resources increases further (Göpel 2020:26-33).

During the UN *Decade of Education for Sustainable Development*, which ended in 2014, sustainability was supposed to be integrated into worldwide educational schemes to help ensure a sustainable future (UNESCO n.d.). Currently, we are in the *UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration*, which is claimed to be "a chance to revive the natural world that supports us all" (UN decade on ecosystem restoration, n.d.), and again education is a key part of the strategy. Unfortunately, the intrinsic value and inclusion of the entire *biosocial complex* in preserving diversity is still not a clear and central part, despite what prospective recent publications like Kohler et al. point out:

To be effective, conservation policies and programs need to take a pluralistic approach and recognize cultural differences in what motivates people in their biosocial relations ... [it] is humanity's best chance to motivate and lead societies toward a more sustainable, equitably shared, and environmentally just future (2019).

#### 4.1 Diversity in Natural Sciences

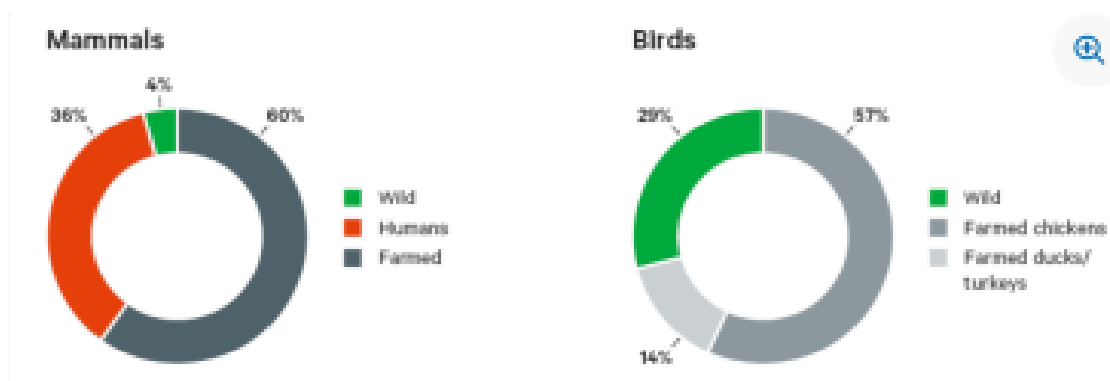
A closer look at the natural science community, which has been debating biodiversity loss for decades, reveals the stagnancy of change to be staggering. However, within the last decade an increasing number of studies concerning the destructive impact of human activities on the natural world and pointing out necessary and radical steps emerged.

The idea of 'sustainable development' to secure (bio)diversity was first widely articulated in the 1987's Brundtland Report (World Commission on Environment and Development). This report defines sustainable development as: "...development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". It also points out that the only truly sustainable form of progress is that which simultaneously addresses the interlinked aspects of the economy, environment and social well-being (Santillo 2007). After the first alarming report on *The limits of growth* had been published in 1972 (Meadows 1972), foremost wealthy, western societies continued their push for destructive 'development' as opposed to any form of radical change, developing an 'ethical' framework based on anthropocentric and materialistic commodification of nature (Kohler et al., 2019).

After five decades of debate, mainstream human interests seemingly remain at the centre of basically everything, leaving little space for the needs of nonhuman life-forms. Mainstream humans rule over other animals and nature in a generally ungentle, disconnected, unsustainable manner. One of the most smothering facts is the normalisation of anthropocentrism - planet earth is predominantly populated by humans and their farmed animals, and this is regarded as 'normality' (Harari 2017a:101-103). This 'normality' has caused the global biomass of wild vertebrate species to rapidly decrease, for wild mammals by 82 percent during the last five decades. Only four percent of total current mammal biomass consists of wild animals, whereas humans make up 36 percent and the animals humans farm constitute 60 percent (figure 2).

Figure 2. Current global biomass distribution of mammals and birds.

Retrieved 15.2.2021, source: Bar-On, Y. M., Phillips, R. and Milo, R. 2018. "The biomass distribution on Earth", *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 115(25): pp.



This is coupled with the fact that currently 78 percent of all agriculturally used land is used for keeping or feeding (Benton et al. 2021:9) farmed animals. Devastatingly, around 70 billion farmed animals are being bred and killed annually for global human food production, with demand rising (Compassion in World Farming 2013). There is something profoundly shocking about these numbers, considering the decades in which environmentalists, activists and many others have spent debating and protesting the tremendous destruction caused to nature, habitats, and wild species. As the FAO report *Livestock's long shadow* already established in 2006, food choices in favour of animal products cause the conversion of extended natural habitat into agriculturally used land in tropical and highly diverse rainforest areas in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia (FAO and LEAD 2006:90). Animal agriculture can, for example, be directly linked to 75-91% of Amazon rainforest deforestation, depending on the exact parameters of the cited study, and it has a very pressing political dimension (Butler 2020).

For the few remaining indigenous communities, there are therefore numerous conflicts to tackle. The pacific coastal area of Colombia for example is home to indigenous and afro-Colombian communities who are trying to protect around 500,000 hectares of hyper-diverse rainforest with about 97 percent of this area being protected land. Yet the threat of illegal land grabbing, caused by industries such as mining, logging or agriculture is horrendous. The communities are aiming at sustainable agricultural practises, food security and self-sufficiency while trying to preserve their own culture by empowering younger generations (Stand For Trees n.d.).

People within such communities, fighting biodiversity loss and rainforest destruction, are being threatened and occasionally even assassinated for trying to rise against the interests of the powerful multinational corporations behind the illegal land-grabbing activities (The Guardian n.d.). These communities are not only trying to protect their livelihood but also the rainforest itself, recognising humanity's reliance on the rainforest's capacity to produce oxygen and regulate weather systems across the globe (BBC Bitesize n.d.).

An influential Oxford study points out: "(the) single most effective way to preserve our planet's and also our health is to stop animal agriculture and eating animals and change to a plant-based diet" (Springmann et al. 2016). In transforming our global food systems to a plant-based, organic, sustainable agricultural practice - and thereby preventing the further expansion of human-used land - we could take pressure away from nature. Large amounts of agricultural land could become available to nature and wild animals, to regenerate for global stability. These measures would also support indigenous communities and human cultural diversity.

So far, the potential of plant-based agriculture is under-represented and initiatives promoting veganism and plant-based living still experience defamation, with the tremendous transformative and preventative potential a change of diet could hold being overlooked and wasted (Morrison 2021). Concepts like *Grow-Bio-Intensive®*, a highly productive vegan organic growing method for healthy soils and produce, are essential models to aspire to. Water usage, energy and fertiliser usage can be reduced, whilst diversity and local and internationally connected community-knowledge, based on cooperation, are promoted (Grow-Biointensive n.d.).

At the end of the year 2020 and with a lot of uncertainty ahead in the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres urged humanity to protect nature in order to save us from climate disaster, biodiversity collapse and more pandemics. He stressed that “the continued encroachment of people and [their] livestock into animal habitats risks exposing us to more deadly diseases” (UN 2020).

#### *4.2 Diversity in Social Sciences*

The emerging shift towards a more holistic approach in natural sciences is dealing with the inter-relations of human and nonhuman animals, nature, our food systems and the political as well as societal dimensions. Social sciences seem still predominantly preoccupied with human-based, anthropocentric research and theories concerning ‘diversity’. Diversity is being discussed in terms relating to societal culture and traditions, with attention being paid to social hierarchies of ethnicity, age, social class, gender, disabilities, sexual identity, belief systems, values, and languages.

Current discourse surrounding diversity is becoming increasingly diverse, whilst also sparking controversy. An important question within this discussion speaks to how a society can grant equal rights to all humans, reduce discrimination and transform into an inclusive and democratic system, based on participation (Gregull 2018).

In the current system, there is a gap between reality and the stories society teaches us about itself. With industrial productions methods, mainstream humanity has not only pushed other human lifestyles to the brink of existence but also turned nonhuman animals into mere production units, who must suffer a horrific life - such suffering that is justified on the basis of maximum profit and production, despite all the insights gained on other animal's minds and feelings (Harari 2015:342). Vasile Stănescu, a scholar at the International Association for Vegan Sociologists, calls this paradigm a '*world on fire*' and demands a social justice approach, working against *speciesism* (discrimination or unjustified treatment based on an individual's species membership) as well as anthropocentrism and such an approach calls for us to establish solidarity between animal rights and other social justice (or diversity) movements to create change rapidly, as there is not much time left (Wrenn 2021).

Social sciences need to take a closer look into the connection between the tendency to devalue nonhuman animals in their right to live a life free of suffering and the thereby reinforced tendency for racist attitudes. Both ideologies have a pattern: that the suffering of others is too different to be considered (Cordeiro-Rodrigues and Mitchell 2017).

Shaikh (2020) critically assesses current power structures through pointing out the positive potential impact that around 1.2 billion Muslim people are and could further be having through their religiously motivated food choices, treatment of nature and animals, pointing at theological concepts that argue to grant rights to nonhuman animals and natural entities. Shaikh (2020) references Peter Singer in particular - a moral philosopher who argues for animal ethics and liberation. Singer (2015) describes *speciesism* as resembling other types of discrimination, such as sexism and racism, and points out that being part of a type of species is morally as irrelevant as other characteristics, such as sex and ethnicity. Arguably these



discriminatory thoughts can, according to Singer, be connected to religious teachings in Christianity and other religious belief systems. Harari (2015:359) points out that in society structures in premodern times, individuals and the state were rather weak, while families and (religious) communities were dominating and keeping power structures in place, while currently neo-liberal, capitalistic power structures create strong states, markets and individualistic individuals, thereby producing weaker communities (figure 3), threatening human cooperation and supporting alienation. Neither of these two identified systems (seen in modern and pre-modern society) have been able to create a peaceful and diverse global community for all beings. However, David Graeber and David Wengrow criticise these kinds of descriptions of human societies, pointing out that history was more diverse and simplified narratives can create access to power and hinder crisis intervention (Priestland 2021). David Nibert (2003) additionally criticises that sociology predominantly excludes the experiences of other species and is too narrow in approach, supporting the establishment of more oppressive systems.

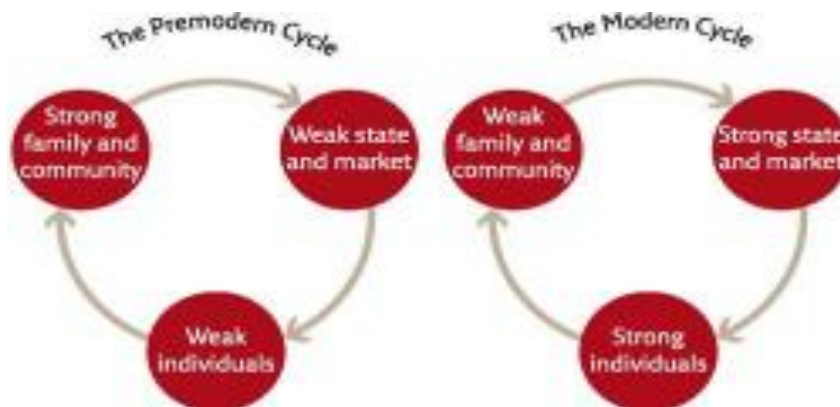


Figure 3. The premodern and modern cycle in human societies Harari, Y. 2015:360. *Sapiens: A brief history of humankind* (First U.S. ed.). New York: Harper.

Therefore, this paper proposes that it is time to critically reflect on the current state of 'diversity', and to grant nonhuman animals (Beauchamp 2012) and natural entities (Kothari et al. 2017) rights of their own, calling for unity despite religious and cultural differences, based on scientific insight, empathy and uniting narratives.

## 5. DISCUSSION

This paper illustrates the extent of our entanglement, as humans, with nature and other animals. Critically re-assessing understandings of diversity in mainstream society and altering educational content accordingly is key to creating the structural change we need to ensure a safe global future.

To address the highly emotional process of challenging narratives of human superiority and domination, it seems indispensable to specify what the term 'diversity' means by definition. It is highly problematic that *diversity* is being defined and understood in divergent ways, with even ecologists not agreeing on what the term 'biodiversity' entails in detail (Holt 2006). This definitional ambiguity does not help with the formation of effective strategies to tackle the (bio)diversity crisis. It

seems as though the COVID-19 pandemic has brought forward new critical awareness and research into the complex and dangerous global situation humanity has induced over the past decades. Benton et al. state that "our food system today is driving both environmental harm and deteriorations in public health. Its current design is also amplifying external risks to society, as COVID-19 has demonstrated. The pandemic has highlighted the high degree of risk..." (2021:24).

Furthermore, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres has stressed how the protection of nature and society from climate disaster, biodiversity collapse and more pandemics, is the top priority of the 21st century. This can be achieved by preventing further habitat destruction "through the continued encroachment of people and livestock" (UN 2020). While these are clear demands in line with the hypothesis of this paper, it seems as though the UN, yet again, fails to unapologetically name the massively destructive impact of animal agriculture and consumption of animal products and therefore the urgent need to fundamentally change the unquestioned dominance of this food system to achieve their aims. Despite this, the UN has demonstrated some commitment to this movement, particularly through supporting scholars such as Benton et al. (2021), who emphasise the need for a shift in the global food system towards a nature friendly, diverse agricultural system based on plant-based diets, produced, and marketed at community level (UN Environment Programme 2021).

If humanity, led by science and politics, was brave enough to create a shift towards a plant-based diet, give back large amounts of farmland to nature to regenerate and re-grow, and thereby help to stop biodiversity loss, putting life as we know it at risk could be prevented, or at least stalled. It has been discussed for years that changing our diet away from animal products would be the most efficient way of reducing the negative impact on our planet (Carrington 2018). However, defamation campaigns attacking vegan/plant-based initiatives are societally persistent; these must be stopped through reference to scientific findings in support of plant-based lifestyles, to create positive, inclusive and utopian stories for the future.

The current course of humanity must be re-evaluated as soon as possible to initiate the necessary global systemic changes before we reach a state of forceful emergency. This paper suggests that the measures of the past decades have not been nearly radical enough. By now, enough studies have been carried out, reports and papers published, to effectively understand the kind of change necessary to overcome the global ecological and social crisis. Now scientists, government officials, decision-makers, and society at large must all deepen and expand their understanding of diversity on this planet, as Kohler et al. (2019) point out. It is necessary to rethink neoliberal capitalist structures, which are destroying democratic structures, and are pushing degradation and destruction of nature (Fitchett 2018), instead of promoting a visionary, radical, and ecological democracy. There are leading fields of research within natural sciences that promote change towards an inclusive understanding of diversity and the acknowledgment of the intrinsic value of the entire biosocial complex (Kohler et al. 2019). In social sciences the urgency of the matter needs to be addressed intensively, daring to question the status quo.

Humans may, of course, have human-specific needs and to some extent fulfilling these needs is legitimate. Excessively harsh criticism of anthropocentric views is not constructive. The difference in the severity of negative impact, caused by individual

humans, should be acknowledged and inequalities challenged. Striving for self-love and fulfilment as an individual should be legitimate, while also raising awareness for direct personal benefits of protecting nature as a solidary collective effort (Kopnina et al. 2018).

The remaining indigenous communities, who value and enact the protection of nature, offer direction and inspiration towards novel approaches to societal structures; yet, thus far these have been widely ignored and undervalued. Indigenous communities are forced into a very uncomfortable position, existing in a state of tension between tradition and modernity, whilst suffering the consequences of mainstream consumerism. As the effort to protect natural land from illegal, destructive activities executed by corporations, has become a dangerous endeavour for local communities and individual activists (Ulmanu, Evans and Brown 2018), it is understandable that the main driver for most deforestation is rarely openly named or criticised, which allows ruthless destruction and profit making to carry on (Wasley, Heal and Phillips 2020). Apparently, The World Bank (n.d.) is now, supposedly, striving to support indigenous communities in their resilience and livelihoods, by making their voices and concerns heard and providing financial support. However, the motivations behind this remains unclear – if this is being done out of respect for ancestral traditions or yet again, due to financial interests concerning nature and the value of ecosystem-services.

Humanity has ancient indigenous, holistic as well as sustainable wisdom, which mainstream societies must first acknowledge and then value. Combined with technology and scientific insight a truly sustainable, healthy and fair global community could be built. To be able to start dismantling current power structures we must work to include all beings in discussions of diversity, and to grant nonhuman animals and natural entities basic rights (Kothari et al. 2017). As Blount-Hill (2021) argues, political power structures, which cause discrimination against human minorities also cause discrimination against nonhuman animals, enhancing anthropocentric privilege and speciesism. This is a challenge since granting rights to animals does not align with ideas deeply rooted in mainstream religious and social beliefs whereby humans are seen to rule over other animals and nature, who are seen as 'soulless' and inferior in relation to humans (Harari 2017a:129).

All these challenges and potential obstacles of the current paradigm considered, young people need to be educated on how to be compassionate, solve conflicts respectfully and be defenders of equal rights for all human animals, nonhuman animals and nature – the entire *biosocial complex*. For this to be achievable, we need to teach about moral emotions and bring the 'emotional' into academia, with a focus on proactive (self-) compassion (Latzko and Malti 2010:194-195).

We need to educate about science and critical thinking and challenge traditional education, which does not aim at creating an ecologically resilient future. Regenerative agricultural, ecology and plant-based diets need to be discussed in all educational institutions and hands-on experiences must be made possible. It is essential to create enthusiasm for ecological democracy, which unifies international ecological movements and local democracy in solidarity and teaches active participation as well as the intrinsic value of all beings (Peters 2017). We must reach a state in which a positive utopia is desirable and achievable (Maahs 2019). As long as influential scientific institutions are promoting the anthropocentric paradigm when referring to diversity in societies (as seen in the Max-Planck-Institute (n.d)),

changing the predominant story of humanity remains an illusion. The survival of objective entities, like nature and nonhuman animals, depends on the extent to which we can re-invent our stories to be more ecologically sound and inclusive (Harari 2017c).

The tendency of people to retreat into private life, away from political participation and creative co-creation, needs to be met with engaging and exciting new stories and ideals with the hope to be able to excite people for the potential of a thriving democracy (Maahs 2019:296). Bregman states that we should never underestimate capitalism's ability to come up with more ideas – but also that every milestone of civilisation was once a utopian fantasy. We just need to come up with new utopian, “crazy”, radical visions (Double Down News 2018).

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATION

The discussed topics should be urgently employed for constructive action with the aim of changing the general attitude of humans through education in order to grant, regardless of their culture or religion, basic rights to every being of the *biosocial complex*. The multi-layered interrelations concerning the *biosocial complex* need to be systematically and critically debated in social sciences, based on sociological findings combined with those of the natural sciences. The outcomes of such debates must then be translated into sound educational schemes.

Mainstream human societies need to acknowledge and support indigenous communities in their rights and their efforts of protecting nature by incorporating their teachings into curricula, as NGOs such as Amazon Watch (n.d.) have been demanding for a long time. Furthermore, humanity must start teaching about universal morality as well as ethics, change old paradigms and stop the further exploitation of nature through animal agriculture. Basic rights need to be granted to nonhuman animals and natural entities, to protect them from exploitation as they cannot effectively advocate for their own interests in a system dominated by human animals.

This paper proposes that open-source and easily accessible knowledge is the way forward, ensuring that local and international communities are able to access and contribute to such databases, empowering individual and community knowledge-generation and dissemination, as opposed to those based on the neo liberal capitalistic growth paradigm. To ensure the quality of education, teacher and educator training must be transformed into holistic, hands-on training, with self-reflection, empathy, solidarity, and a strong democratic and ecological framework at its core.

## 7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, on how we might change and widen the understanding of diversity through education, this paper has stressed the importance of bringing together insights from both the social and natural sciences in order to formulate new, brave and utopian stories, which can be incorporated into the education system.

Mainstream societies need to adapt their understanding of and teaching on *diversity*, to be able to address current and future challenges in a scientifically sustainable as well as morally and ethically sound way.

To be able to deal with ecological and societal challenges in a globally peaceful way, humanity must learn to be able to handle complex interrelations and to holistically include and value the whole *biosocial complex*. We need to grant equal rights to minorities, certain rights to nonhuman animals and intrinsic value to natural entities. Diversity in species, nature and agriculture facilitates cultural diversity and enables human life since our planetary system is a cyclic and interconnected one. If we destroy this basis for life, civilisation as we know it will vanish too.

So, what is needed in education to teach about *diversity* differently? This paper has proposed that we must find a way to integrate essential indigenous knowledges about planet earth in a way that positions them as equally important as other stories that are widely accepted as truth. Teaching about what exactly can be done for conservation and for protecting diversity, so everyone feels competent in their effort, is essential to be able to create tangible meaning for this discussion, and to establish a new ethical and moral framework inclusive of all living beings.

Highly qualified and enthusiastic educators are necessary all over the globe, who educate on how to grasp a very complex world, teach how to be compassionate (for oneself and others), how to be involved in the community and see value, which is not based on capitalistic ideas of ever-expanding growth. We need a shift towards an ecological democratic framework, which understands a healthy natural world to be the absolute highest good of all, aims at ecological functionality and grants basic rights to every being – and still, within its moral ecological boundaries, allows individual freedom of choice and coexistence with personal religious beliefs.

This paper has explored, and taken seriously, the scope of multiple published reports and papers warning us about biodiversity loss and the climate crisis, generating linkages between such findings to propose a foundational global transformation. If we are to maintain 'diversity' in all its forms, we must switch to regenerative agriculture and a plant-based diet, educating people as to why not eating animal products is morally, ethically and environmentally coherent and matters for every being.

Our future depends on a truly ethical, sustainable and resilient global framework. Of course, how to implement these conclusions could be discussed at great length. Powerful resistance and counterarguments hindering this kind of change must be expected and further research is necessary to explore how we can go about implementing such changes in tangible, effective ways.

### *7.1 Prospects*

There already are community initiatives out there, such as *Riverford* in the UK, the *Grow-Bio-Intensive®* movement, or *Plantage* in Germany, that are busy leading the way on how to organise food production in a socially and ecologically sound manner. They locally produce organic or vegan-organic vegetables incorporating community principles, through working with their members and nature in its flow, instead of forcing industrial methods upon natural systems. The work they are doing should be fairly paid, and their efforts to protect natural systems must be supported by politics and legislation, valued financially through agricultural subsidies, and backed by societal acknowledgement and appreciation.

Also, the increasing numbers of rewilding initiatives are to be mentioned here. The UK and other industrialised countries are trying to give back degraded areas to nature and wild animals to regenerate, whilst also aiming to educate people on the benefits of this.

*Amazon Watch* for instance is using its reach as an established NGO to educate on the connection of rainforest protection, our climate and the importance of solidarity with indigenous communities of southern America. This crucial message needs to be conveyed in education more intensely as mentioned before. Pedagogical concepts such as the *Ubuntu* philosophy from sub-Saharan Africa, encompassing interdependence, social awareness as well as the responsibility for all natural beings and the environment, the *13 teachings* on Indigenous pedagogy, extensively compiled by *The Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning* at the University of Manitoba in Canada, or projects such as the *8ways framework* on Aboriginal Pedagogy in Australia depict alternatives to the individualistic and consumerist thoughts mostly dominating the Western world (Bhuda and Marumo 2022). They can provide a starting point to learn about indigenous teachings and community values far-off (colonialist) stereotypes.

When we establish a culture of discussion and reflection, based on scientific evidence, and integrate this into educational frameworks targeted towards community action, it is likely that forms of systemic change will follow. John Dewey (1940) wrote in his essay *Creative Democracy* that truly democratic skills can enable humanity to overcome unjust power systems and inequality. Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire describes learning in his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as a transformational process of internalising knowledge through a dialogue between the individual and the social world (Freire 2020; Singer 1974). There lies tremendous power in combining these two statements, expanding them to include nonhuman animals and natural entities when we refer to individuals or the social world and speak of unjust systems.

Colourful, open-minded, project-based education supports the creation of new stories full of diversity, community, and compassion for all kinds of human and nonhuman animals, fostering courage to think and act differently - a kind of radical thought and movement that we are ethically and morally obliged to work towards.

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# **Veganism and the Social Identities of Race, Gender, and Sexuality: A Scoping Review**

Julia Russell<sup>3</sup>

## **Abstract**

A small but growing body of literature exists around social identities and veganism. Interest in veganism is increasing, thus it is important to understand how social identities may contribute to experiences of veganism. This scoping review seeks to report on the available literature as it relates specifically to veganism and identities related to race, gender, and/or sexuality. This is the first scoping review on this topic. Records were identified through databases (n=7), and hand searches of key authors, reference lists, and the author's personal library. This review identified 29 studies that fit the inclusion criteria. There were 27 qualitative studies (93%), and 2 quantitative studies. Both hegemonic masculinity and whiteness were challenges that vegans had to contend with but were also concepts vegans reinforced. Whether they challenged or reinforced these concepts often depended on the vegan's own social identities but was not limited to those. Thematic coding of the primary studies' content identified barriers (social disruption, accessibility, and representation), and facilitators (personal development, social relationships, good food, activism) of veganism. There were few primary studies (13, 45%) and of these studies each mostly considered only one of, gender, race, and sexuality. Therefore, more primary research in these areas should be conducted to strengthen the results of previous studies. Finally, veganism must be decolonized but it also holds decolonizing potential.

**Keywords:** vegan; social identity; hegemonic masculinity; whiteness

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Social identity has been defined as “part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel 1978:69). Social identities may include one’s racial or ethnic groups, gender groups, and groups related to sexual orientation. These groups are important to study because they are connected to power and privilege within society. Increasingly, people are making the case that social identities can influence one’s experience of veganism (Conn 2015; Greenebaum 2018; Harper 2012; Ko and Ko 2017).

In the *Sexual Politics of Meat*, Adams (1990) explores the relationship between gender and animal consumption, arguing that feminism and vegetarianism are interconnected. Lockwood (2021) estimates that 80% of vegans in the United States are women. This uneven gender distribution among vegans could be indicative of broader concerns. For instance, recent research finds hegemonic masculinity to be an issue within veganism (Brookes and Chałupnik 2022; Jones 2021). At the time this scoping review was undertaken there existed one systematic review on the intersection of gender and vegetarianism/veganism (Modlinska et al. 2020). This review explores, within the psychological literature, the sex and gender differences in perceptions of vegetarianism/veganism including the perceptions from both those who eat meat and those who exclude animal products from their diets (Modlinska et al., 2020). Since this time, an additional literature review of the psychological literature (Salmen and Dhont 2022), has been published, finding that vegan men are considered less masculine within society. Finally, regarding 2SLGBT+ people and veganism, Quinn (2021:265) suggests that “one seems to encounter more vegans within LGBTQIA+ communities than anywhere else.”

When it comes to race and veganism, authors such as Ko and Ko (2017) and Harper (2012) explain that mainstream media often present veganism as a white phenomenon. This stereotype is connected to the concept of whiteness. Whiteness is “the way that white people, their customs, culture, and beliefs operate as the standard by which all other groups of [sic] are compared” (National Museum of African American History & Culture, n.d.) Thus, people of colour have been marginalized and largely erased from the image of mainstream veganism due to the privileging of white vegan representation (Alvarez 2019). A seminal work that challenges this erasure is *Sistah Vegan* edited by A. Breeze Harper (2010/2020). Authors in the anthology focus on Black women’s veganism, and how veganism can be leveraged as a tool towards decolonization.

The research that has been undertaken on veganism and social identities comes from a wide range of disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, and communications studies, among others, so researchers may not be aware of the literature that exists beyond their academic field. Further scoping or systematic reviews that examine the intersection of veganism and social identities are needed because they may reveal insights related to the experience of veganism within different social groups. In addition to impacting people within that social group, different experiences may lead to differences in the uptake and maintenance of veganism. It is important to understand what the various disciplines have covered thus far in regard to veganism and social identity so that researchers, and advocates

of veganism, will begin to know where there may be gaps related to equity and veganism, at least as related to the social identities explored within this scoping review.

In this scoping review, I seek to report on the extent of the available literature as it relates specifically to veganism and identities related to race, gender and sexuality. Additionally, I will report on barriers to veganism and facilitators of veganism which are at times influenced by the social identities of identified populations. I aim to go beyond generating an overview of the body of literature found through the scoping review, to explore in depth, through thematic coding, the content of the studies identified through the scoping review (Arksey and O'Malley 2005). It was anticipated that studies had selected people who self-identify as vegan, which I accepted for this scoping review.

This scoping review is guided by the following questions: 1. What does the existing literature say about the intersections of veganism and race, gender, and/or sexuality? 2. What are the barriers or concerns of people in race, gender, or sexuality related population groups regarding veganism? 3. Are there any identified factors that facilitate the practice of veganism for people within race, gender, and/or sexuality related social groups?

In the sections that follow I will first describe the methodology used for this scoping review, followed by the quantitative and qualitative results. These results include major and minor concepts found within the literature. The major concepts were engagement with hegemonic masculinity and engagement with whiteness. The minor concepts were women's healing from disordered eating and queerness. Thematic coding revealed a series of barriers and facilitators to the practice of veganism. The barriers are social disruption, lack of accessibility, and representation, while the facilitators are personal development, improved social relationships, good food, and activism. The results are followed by a discussion, an overview of the limitations of this scoping review, and conclusions.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

In this review, I follow the Joanna Briggs Institute protocol for scoping reviews outlined in the *JBI Manual for Evidence Synthesis* (Peters et al. 2020). Vegans are the population under study, and the context is global. The inclusion and exclusion criteria include the type of resource among other factors. Please refer to Table 1 for more information.

TABLE 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Contains the key words in title and/or abstract	Review article
Engages with the concept of social identity and veganism	Veganism, or plant-based eating, is not the primary focus of the article.
Peer-reviewed literature or dissertations and theses	Results are purely medical or nutrition oriented.
English language	Results relate to vegetarianism only
Published in 2010 or later	Grey literature (except dissertations and theses)

In consultation with a librarian at the University of Waterloo (Consultation date: February 1, 2021), I chose seven databases based on their comprehensiveness: CINAHL, LGBTQ+, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global™, PsychInfo, PubMed, Scopus, and Sociological Abstracts.

After searching all databases, I uploaded results to Covidence, a tool for managing systematic reviews. Duplicates were automatically removed, except for one pair that was removed during full-text screening. Myself and another reviewer, completed the screening process. To supplement this process, I also searched the works of pre-identified authors of interest (A. Breeze Harper, Cory Wrenn, Carol J. Adams, Jessica Greenebaum, Laura Wright). Then, once all records were identified, myself and the second reviewer each reviewed a random selection of 25 records. When we agreed about the inclusion or exclusion of the records, we moved on to title and abstract screening of the remaining records. At the screening mid-way point, we met to discuss our progress. We determined there were no additional modifications to the screening criteria required, and each reviewer completed the set. I then scanned the reference lists of records that remained post-abstract screening for any additional records that could be added. Next, we each charted three records and the results were compared across reviewers. A high level of consistency was found, so I charted all records remaining after the abstract screening.

The variables used for data charting were: author name(s), year of publication, title, topic, country of origin, country of study, resource type (i.e. journal article), academic field, purpose, research questions related to veganism, definition of veganism, author reflexivity, social identity of participants, additional group characteristics, number of participants, methodology, methods, key results, themes, strategies for veganism, barriers to veganism, and facilitators of veganism. Any statement about an author's social identity was considered an element of author reflexivity. I then tallied or coded charted data by hand, using a deductive and inductive approach. Thematic coding was used for the inductive approach (Lam, Dodd, Skinner, Papadopoulos, Zivot, Ford, Garcia, IHACC Research Team, and Harper 2019) and was applied to the data in the categories of key results, barriers, and facilitators of veganism.

### 3. RESULTS

Following the process outlined above resulted in two forms of results, quantitative and qualitative. In the following section, I present the quantitative results of the scoping review first, followed by the qualitative results. Within the qualitative results are the results of the thematic coding and the minor and major concepts found within the literature. The minor and major concepts were identified based on frequency, yet I summarize them qualitatively.

**TABLE 2. Search Terms Used with the Database Search**

<b>"Vegan*" or "Plant-based" and Race</b>	<b>"Vegan*" or "Plant-based" and Gender</b>	<b>"Vegan*" or "Plant-based" and Sexuality</b>
Aboriginal*	"Female-to-male"	2SLGBT*
"African American"	Feminin*	Bisexual
"African Americans"	FTM	Gay
"African Ancestry"	Gender dysphori*	GLBT*
"Alaska Native"	Genderqueer	Homophile
"Alaska Natives"	Gender	Homophilia
Asian	Gender minorit*	Homosexual*
BIPOC	"Gender nonconforming"	LGBT*
"Black American"	Gender transition*	LGBBT*
"Black Americans"	Masculin*	Lesbian*
Caucasian*	Man	MSM
Ethnic*	Men	"Men who have sex with men"
"Ethnic group"	Non-binary	Non heterosexual
"Ethnic Groups"	"Trans female"	"Non heterosexual"
"Ethnic population"	Transgender	"Pansexual"
"Ethnic populations"	"Trans male"	"Polysexual"
Hawaiian*	Trans man	Queer
Hispanic*	Transman	"Same sex"
Indian*	Transmen	Sexual*
Indigenous	"Trans men"	"Two-spirit*"
Latin*	"Trans people"	"Women who have sex with women"
Maori	"Trans persons"	WSW
"Mexican American"	Transwoman	
"Mexican Americans"	Transwomen	
"Mixed-race"	"Trans woman"	
"Native American"	"Trans women"	
"Native Americans"	MTF	
"Pacific Islander"	"Male-to-female"	
Pacific Islanders"	Woman	
"People of colour"	Women	
"Person of colour"		
"People of color"		
"Person of color"		
Race		

### *3.1 Quantitative Results*

In total, 1232 records were found through the database searching (See Figure 1). Searching the papers of key authors yielded another 14 records. Searching reference lists and a hand search of my library of literature yielded 5 and 4 records respectively. After screening, 29 studies remained, as indicated in Figure 1. For a list of the included studies see Table 3.

**TABLE 3. Studies Included within this Scoping Review**

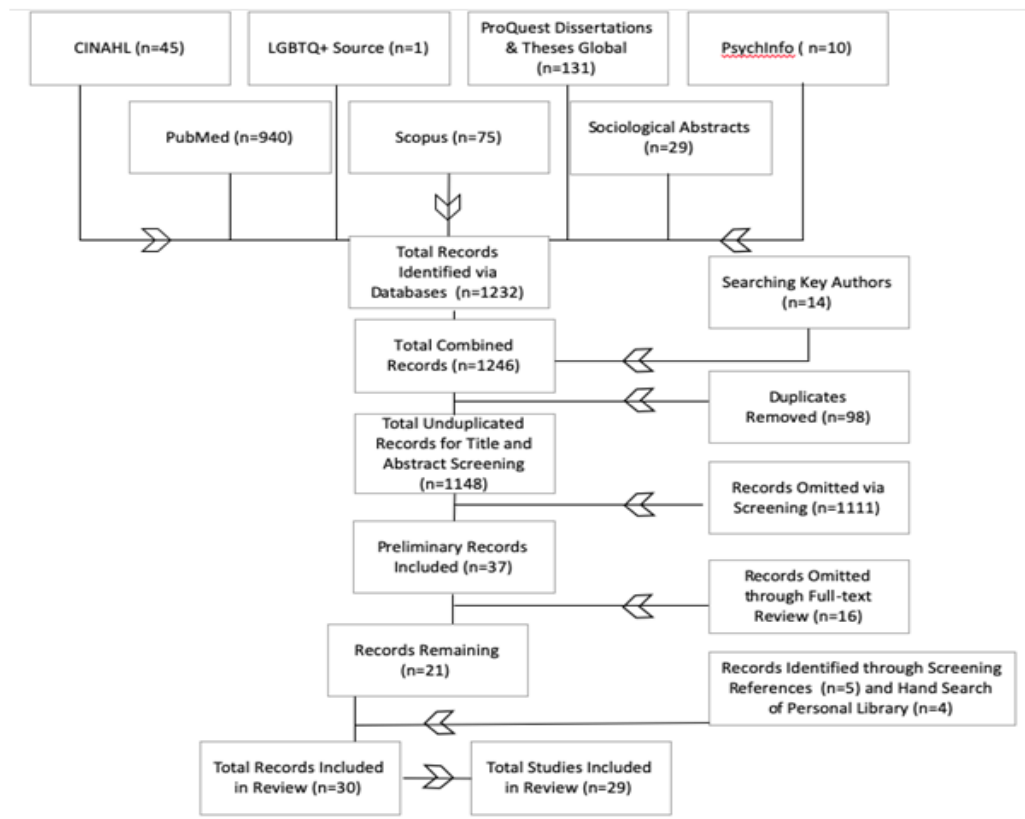
<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Topic</b>
Aguilera	2014	Gender
Avieli and Markowitz	2018	Race
Bartke	2019	Gender
Brady and Ventresca	2014	Gender/Race/(Class)
Brown	2014	Gender/Race/Sexuality
Costa	2019	Gender
Crimarco	2019	Race
Dean	2014	Gender
Doyle	2016	Gender/Sexuality
Dunn	2019	Race
Fegitz and Pirani	2018	Gender/Race/Sexuality/(Class)
Gambert and Linné	2018	Gender/Race
Greenebaum	2018	Race
Greenebaum and Dexter	2017	Gender
Harper	2010	Race
Harper	2013	Race
Hart	2018	Gender
Johnson	2011	Gender
Lindgren	2020	Gender/Race(Class)
Navarro	2011	Gender/Race/Sexuality/(Class)
Potts and Parry	2010	Sexuality
Quarles	2018	Gender/Race
Robinson	2013	Gender/Race
Simonsen	2012	Gender/Sexuality
Stenberg	2017	Gender
Stephens Griffin	2015	Gender/Sexuality/(Class)
Thill	2021	Gender
Thomas	2016	Gender
Wrenn and Lizardi	2020	Gender

Of the 29 studies, 7 (24%) (Aguilera 2014; Doyle 2016; Greenebaum and Dexter 2017; Johnson 2011; Lindgren 2020; Stephens Griffin 2015; Thill 2021) endorse a definition of veganism provided by the Vegan Society or by the founder of the vegan society, Donald Watson. Eight (28%) other studies describe veganism holistically as a way of life (Greenebaum 2018; Navarro 2011; Robinson 2013), a “worldview” (Bartke 2019) a form of activism (Costa, Gill, Morda, and Ali 2019), an ethic (Harper 2013b), while one expands the definition of veganism to incorporate a Māori worldview (Dunn 2019) and another the African Hebrew Israelite worldview (Avieli and Markowitz 2018). However, five (17%) studies have less fulsome definitions and describe veganism only in dietary terms (Crimarco 2019; Harper 2010; Hart 2018; Thomas 2016) or as a “consumption-based movement” (Wrenn and Lizardi 2020:1). The remaining nine studies (31%) do not provide a definition of veganism. The earliest studies were published in 2010 (Harper 2010; Potts and Parry 2010). From January 1, 2010 to March 1, 2021, there were between 1 and 5 studies published annually. The most recently published study, a dissertation, was published in January 2021 (Thill 2021). There was at least one study published each year from 2010 onwards, and there are more studies concerning gender in the second half of the decade of 2010-2020 than in the first half. The majority (16, 55%) of the papers’ authors are from American Universities, followed by Canada and the UK which each produced 4 (14%) studies, then Sweden with 3 (10%), Aotearoa (New Zealand) with 2 (7%), Australia and Israel with 1 (3%) each. Of note is that some studies have authorial teams with members from different countries, so the total exceeds 29.

Of the total studies, 17 (59%) are journal articles, 8 (27%) are master’s theses, and 4 (14%) are doctoral dissertations. Of these studies 13 (45%) are primary

studies<sup>4</sup> 16 (59%) are secondary studies and 1 (3%) is conceptual (Simonsen, 2012). In terms of engagement with the themes under investigation 22 (76%) studies include analysis related to gender, 14 (48%) include analysis related to race, and 7 (24%) include analysis related to sexuality. Some of the papers engage with more than one of these themes. While it was not under investigation in this scoping review it is worth noting that 5 (17%) papers include analysis around class as well.

FIGURE 1. Flow Chart



### 3.2 Qualitative Results

The quantitative results have helped provide context for the qualitative results. The qualitative results indicate major and minor concepts discussed directly by the authors in the literature in relation to race, gender, and sexuality. The major concepts include hegemonic masculinity and whiteness, while minor concepts include improving women’s disordered eating and queerness. Through thematic coding, several themes in relation to barriers to the practice of veganism (e.g., social disruption, accessibility, representation), and facilitators of the practice of veganism

<sup>4</sup> One study, (Navarro 2011), used both primary and secondary data



(social relationships, personal development, good food, activism) were found. I will present engagement with hegemonic masculinity and whiteness first, followed by healing from disordered eating, queerness, barriers to the practice of veganism, and facilitators of the practice of veganism. The barriers and facilitators are found within the primary studies that were included in the scoping review due to their focus on veganism and one of the aforementioned social identities. Therefore, while the barriers and facilitators may not all link directly to social identity, they are found within studies that focus on social identity and are therefore relevant to this scoping review. Only primary studies were analyzed because the secondary studies for the most part did not explore barriers and facilitators of veganism.

### *3.3 Major Concepts in the Literature*

#### **3.3.1 Engagement with Hegemonic Masculinity**

Of the studies that focus on gender, a common concept is hegemonic masculinity (9, 31%). Hegemonic masculinity is defined as “the pattern of practice (i.e. things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men’s dominance over women to continue” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005:832). Hegemonic masculinity is based on the concept of the ‘ideal man’, who is constructed as heterosexual, white, cis-gendered, able-bodied, middle-class, etc. (Johnson 2011). The studies that specifically included the topic of hegemonic masculinity draw on primary (Greenebaum and Dexter 2017; Stenberg 2017) and secondary data (Aguilera 2014; Bartke 2019; Brady and Ventresca 2014; Brown 2014; Gambert and Linné 2018; Johnson 2011; Potts and Parry 2010; Quarles 2018). There were a further 3 secondary studies that spoke of the reinforcement of traditional Western gender norms more broadly (Doyle 2016; Fegitz and Pirani 2018; Hart 2018). The concept of hegemonic masculinity manifests in response to veganism and from within veganism. Explanations for this include the idea that because meat is so linked to masculinity (Adams 1990) non-vegan men feel threatened by vegans (Potts and Parry 2010), while vegan men may either feel their masculinity is threatened or they may embrace an alternative masculinity. In the sections that follow, I will present these alternative masculinities and a brief overview of media and hegemonic masculinity. Alternative masculinities can exist outside of hegemonic masculinity and anti-hegemonic masculinity through what authors term either renaissance (Brady and Ventresca 2014) or hybrid (Greenebaum and Dexter 2017) masculinities. Vegans that reinforce hegemonic masculinity have been termed, ‘hegans’ (Johnson 2011). Greenebaum and Dexter (2017) state that the vegan men in their study do not qualify as hegans, rather the participants’ hybrid masculinity blends aspects of hegemonic masculinity with femininity. However, hybrid masculinity does not directly confront hegemonic masculinity. For example, Greenebaum and Dexter (2017:341) note that, “veganism did not shape their [participants’] definition of masculinity, it strengthened their identity as ‘good’ men”. In contrast, Stenberg (2017) finds that veganism shapes some participants’ views of masculinity, yet men in Stenberg’s work also reinforce hegemonic masculinity. Bartke (2019) also concludes that vegan men reinforced hegemonic masculinity

through the images they shared on social media, while also representing themselves as “good” men, through posing in photographs with domesticated animals. Bartke (2019) notes that through vegan men’s construction of hegemonic masculinity, they may create a veganism that is less threatening to mainstream men’s masculinity and therefore may attract more men to veganism. This increases the normativity of veganism, which could have implications for veganism as a queer practice. Referring to the insider-outsider representation of veganism, one outsider group of interest is the media. Cole and Morgan (2011:134) introduced the term “vegaphobia” in reference to the media’s treatment of veganism. Although a vegaphobic media could be presumed to represent hegemonic masculinity, the media’s portrayal of vegans challenges and reinforces hegemonic masculinity (Aguilera 2014; Brady and Ventresca 2014; Potts and Parry 2010). The media may, for example, choose to focus on the health over ethical reasons for why someone would become vegan, thereby preserving the masculinity of the vegan which would otherwise be threatened (Brady and Ventresca 2014).

As Brown’s (2014) analysis of a PETA campaign demonstrates, hegemonic masculinity can also be reproduced through organizations that create media. Brown (2014) finds the PETA campaign reinforced aggression, violence, and dominance. Hart (2018) also finds that vegan bloggers and commenters reinforce traditional Western gender norms through their casual banter on blogging websites. The average vegan man may challenge and reinforce hegemonic masculinity as well through actions as commonplace as posting to social media (Bartke 2019; Gambert and Linné 2018). Individually, a person may contest hegemonic masculinity and reassert it, regardless of their status as a vegan or not.

The studies in this scoping review found that high-status vegans, such as celebrities, can resist or reassert hegemonic masculinity through the media they produce. This is significant because celebrity vegans may have a large following and can be influential in the lives of their followers. For the studies included in this scoping review, media relates to celebrity vegans: Alicia Silverstone, Arian Foster, Beyoncé, Ellen DeGeneres, Queen Afua, and Stic.man. Of these celebrities, the authors’ analyses indicate that only DeGeneres “calls into question normative values, extended by her choice to become a vegan” (Doyle 2016:787). DeGeneres is notably an out lesbian.

### 3.3.2 Engagement with Whiteness

Within this section, I present whiteness as the second major theme that emerged from this review. Whiteness is an element of the colonial view of the ‘ideal man’. Thus, it is no surprise that whiteness emerged as a significant concept within this scoping review given the prominence of hegemonic masculinity. Of the studies that explored race and veganism, more than half included a specific examination of whiteness (Brown 2014; Gambert and Linné 2018; Greenbaum 2018; Harper 2010; Harper 2013b; Lindgren 2020; Navarro 2011; Robinson 2013). Harper (2010:5) has critiqued mainstream American veganism as having “epistemologies of whiteness” and called for “anti-racist and color-conscious praxis”. However, the issue of whiteness is not limited to the USA at the time of Harper’s writing, as Lindgren (2020) recently found whiteness to be an issue in Sweden. Non-vegans may try to reinforce whiteness and repress vegans, in particular vegans of colour (Gambert and

Linné 2018). White vegans themselves may also be guilty of reinforcing whiteness (Greenebaum 2018; Navarro 2011). Confronting whiteness is a challenge for all vegans, and Harper (2013b) writes that even vegans of colour who seek to decolonize can inadvertently perpetuate whiteness through their own actions and statements.

Vegans of colour may resist the whiteness associated with veganism (Greenebaum 2018; Harper 2013a). Greenebaum (2018:680) finds that the vegans of colour who participated in their research “engage in a process of differentiation and normalization from white veganism to destigmatize veganism to communities of color”. Navarro (2011) writes that vegans of colour may take up an intersectional approach to their veganism that may be missing from a white vegan approach. Robinson (2013) explains how there are associations between whiteness and veganism, but upon exploring the legends of her Mi’kmaq community, she finds that veganism is compatible with her Indigenous identity. Both Robinson (2013) who writes from Canada and Dunn (2019) from Aotearoa (New Zealand) find that veganism could be compatible with their specific Indigenous worldviews and is perhaps a way to decolonize. Harper (2013b) and Navarro (2011) wrote of decolonizing through veganism as well.

### *3.4 Minor Concepts within the Literature*

#### **3.4.1 Women’s Healing from Disordered Eating**

The first of the minor concepts that arose from examination of all 29 studies is women’s healing from disordered eating. Some of the studies engage exclusively with women’s narratives, or with participants who identified as women, and had experienced disordered eating patterns (Costa et al. 2019; Dean 2014; Thill 2021). The women in these studies were reported to generally have seen a reduction in their disordered eating patterns, which they attribute to veganism. The authors connect this to the deeper reasons for veganism such as ethics.

#### **3.4.2 Queerness**

Queerness is the final minor concept that emerged from this scoping review. Two studies engage with the notion of queerness in substantive ways. First, Simonsen (2012) explores the notion of queerness, which was defined as outside of sexuality and conceptualized as a form of deviance so that in becoming vegan, one effectively becomes queer. Simonsen (2012) asserts that not eating meat is a way to resist heteronormativity. Second Stephens Griffin (2015) self-identifies as queer and explains his attempt at showing what the 2SLGBT+ community may have in common with veganism whilst not equating the two. Similarly, Wrenn and Lizardi (2020) contrast older adult 2SLGBT+ people’s experiences with older vegans’ experiences particularly as it relates to social relationships. Although some studies identified having participants who were 2SLGBT+ the studies did not explore these participants’ experiences to learn about how they may differ from non-2SLGBT+

people (Greenebaum and Dexter 2017; Stephens Griffin 2015; Thill 2021; Wrenn and Lizardi 2020).

### *3.5 Results of Thematic Coding*

#### **3.5.1 Barriers to the practice of Veganism**

There are a few barriers to the practice of veganism that were identified within the primary studies. These barriers are social disruption, lack of accessibility, and representation and they will be elaborated upon in the following section. Social disruption involves participants feeling disconnected from others due to their veganism (Costa et al. 2019; Greenebaum 2018; Stephens Griffin 2015; Wrenn and Lizardi 2020) as well as challenges with cultural differences between a vegan diet and the participants' original way of eating (Crimarco 2019; Greenebaum 2018; Stenberg 2017). The results indicate that participants feel judged by non-vegans (Wrenn and Lizardi 2020) but at times by vegans too (Thill 2021). Lastly, vegans of colour face microaggressions from the white vegan community (Lindgren 2020). A perceived lack of accessibility of veganism is related to a lack of knowledge (Avieli and Markowitz 2018; Crimarco 2019; Stenberg 2017), including on the part of healthcare professionals, (Wrenn and Lizardi 2020). Another concern is the expense of healthy food in general (Crimarco 2019; Greenebaum 2018). For example, Crimarco (2019:108) finds that "[B]lack neighborhoods in particular lacked quality healthy meals". Some vegans also report that ideas of purity in veganism are a barrier (Thill 2021) and some vegans consider themselves to have "broken" their veganism if they ingested medicines or underwent medical treatment that was not vegan (Stephens Griffin 2015; Wrenn and Lizardi 2020).

The representation of veganism is also a barrier because of the negative portrayals of vegans through stereotypes, including whiteness (Greenbaum 2018; Lindgren 2020; Navarro 2011) which links to one of the identified major concepts. Other stereotypes include vegan men being seen as weak and effeminate (Greenebaum and Dexter 2017), linking to the other identified major concept of hegemonic masculinity. In contrast, women are seen as thin and healthy (Thill 2021). These stereotypes may have negative implications for the wellness of vegans of different body types, abilities, and health statuses. Finally, older vegans report a lack of representation within the vegan movement (Wrenn and Lizardi 2020).

#### **3.5.2 Facilitators of the practice of Veganism**

The facilitators of the practice of veganism that appeared in the primary studies include personal development, improved social relationships, good food, and activism. First, personal development, which came from realizing one's ethics (Costa et al. 2019; Thill 2021) and finding a sense of purpose (Costa et al. 2019; Wrenn and Lizardi 2020) as well as setting personal boundaries (Wrenn and Lizardi 2020), gaining control (Costa et al. 2019), and enhancing masculinity<sup>5</sup> (Greenebaum and

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<sup>5</sup> Enhancing masculinity may have been perceived positively by the vegans who were performing their gender in this way, although it may have negatively reinforced hegemonic masculinity.

Dexter 2017; Stenberg 2017). Second, improved social relationships includes making connections (Costa et al. 2019; Lindgren 2020) and love (Thill 2021). Third, good food reflects eating flavourful food (Crimarco 2019; Thill 2021) food that contributes to health (Greenebaum 2018; Navarro 2011; Thill 2021), and eating culturally appropriate food (Crimarco 2019; Greenebaum 2018; Navarro 2011). Finally, activism came in the form of fighting stereotypes, (Greenebaum 2018) providing education (Crimarco 2019; Thill 2021), normalizing veganism (Greenebaum 2018; Stephens Griffin 2015), updating images of veganism to represent vegans of colour, and fighting oppression (Greenebaum 2018).

#### 4. DISCUSSION

In this scoping review, I identified two major concepts: hegemonic masculinity and whiteness. Importantly, this review has shown that hegemonic masculinity and whiteness are challenges within veganism as well as social constructs that vegans can contest. These concepts respectively answer the research question related to the intersection of veganism and gender and veganism and race. There were also two minor concepts. The first related to women's enhanced relationship with food and decreased disturbances in their eating patterns due to veganism, (further addressing the intersection of veganism and gender). The second, queerness, addressed the intersection of veganism and sexuality. Together these major and minor concepts reveal what the existing literature says about the intersections of veganism and race, gender, and/or sexuality. These social identities do intersect with veganism and their intersections demonstrate both limitations to veganism and opportunities for resistance. The concepts of whiteness and hegemonic masculinity (which include heteronormativity as a component) are tied to the ideals originally brought from Europe to the world during the colonial era. Therefore, the way to combat whiteness and hegemonic masculinity is decolonization. Indeed, Polish (2016) explains how critics of veganism have labelled it as neocolonial. However, recent works have challenged this notion, often by decentering whiteness (Deckha 2020; Dunn 2019; Ko and Ko 2017; Robinson 2013; Robinson 2014). Decolonization is an ongoing, daily process (Grey and Patel 2015), meaning diet is a particularly potent way to demonstrate commitment to decolonization given the frequency and regularity with which people eat. Authors have recognized the decolonizing potential of vegetarianism (Calvo and Rueda Esquibel 2015) and veganism (Harper 2020/2010). Several studies in this scoping review have labelled veganism as potentially decolonizing (Dunn 2019; Harper 2013b; Navarro 2011; Robinson 2013), while others have pointed in this direction (Avieli and Markowitz 2018). While there are limitations within veganism, as shown through the studies included in this scoping review, there is also fertile ground for resistance and decolonization. Future work should continue to explore the potential decolonial nature of veganism and the ways in which this can have an impact beyond individuals, extending to communities.

The first of the minor concepts was women's healing from disordered eating. The research included in this scoping review found for some women ethical veganism can be a mechanism through which lessening of their disordered eating occurs. Therefore, veganism should not be automatically dismissed within the lives of women experiencing disordered eating. Rather it will need to be explored on an individual basis, all the while recognizing that a person's motivations for veganism may change with time. As the studies on disturbed eating behaviours indicated, and Modlinska et al. (2020) have suggested, future research could focus on the intersection of mental health and veganism to determine the linkages that may exist. The second minor concept was queerness, which may or may not relate to sexuality. Overall, within the literature there was limited research around sexuality, with one major exception being Potts and Parry (2010) who studied the notion of vegan sexuality. When Stephens Griffin (2015) explored the concept of vegan sexuality, he found the idea did not resonate with his participants. However, of the 13 primary studies that were included in this review, nearly half identified having 2SLGBT+ participants. It is possible that there were additional studies with 2SLGBT+ participants but the authors simply did not screen for this when collecting participant demographics. Although it is believed that veganism is common among the 2SLGBT+ community (Quinn 2021), I was only able to identify one study for which the queer experience was a focus (Stephens Griffin 2015). Within this study the author called for 2SLGBT+ specific research related to veganism (Stephens Griffin 2015). While recent texts have explored queerness and/or 2SLGBT+ identity and veganism (Ó Baoill 2023; Russell 2023), they are not primary research and thus do not contribute to filling the identified gap. However, this literature may point towards a rich avenue for future research. While the research on veganism and gender in particular, seems to be increasing, it appears to be limited to research on men and women, with the experiences of people who are non-binary, or identify with other genders, so far not having been explored. This is an additional area for future research.

Simonsen (2012) posited that the experience of coming out as a vegan may resemble in certain ways the experience of coming out of the closet for 2SLGBT+ people. While these two experiences cannot be equated, it would be worthwhile to investigate this further. As indicated by the studies included in this scoping review, individuals have found that the shift in identity to becoming a vegan led to disconnection from community, but this is an experience many 2SLGBT+ people have had when coming out as non-cis and and/or non-heterosexual. It would be important to know if 2SLGBT+ vegans faced further marginalization or were more readily able to navigate the vegan coming out process because of their experiences related to gender or sexuality. For instance, Modlinska et al. (2020) argue that a gay, vegetarian man may challenge societal norms in two ways, through vegetarianism and sexuality, and he may therefore face a double burden of stigma within society regarding perceptions of his masculinity.

This scoping review also identified a series of barriers and facilitators to the practice of veganism that are present in the lives of vegans as identified through studies on gender, race, sexuality, and veganism, thus answering the second and third research questions. The barriers were social disruption, accessibility and representation, while the facilitators were personal development, social relationships, good food, and activism. The barriers and facilitators of veganism were largely

connected to social identity and suggest mental, emotional, and physical ways in which veganism could impact vegans. As in this scoping review, past research has found that vegetarianism and veganism may be associated with social disruption or discord (Asher and Cherry 2015; Jabs, Devine, and Sobal 1998; Torti 2017). The facilitators of veganism identified through this scoping review were like those found by Torti (2017) regarding ethics and Jabs et al. (1998) generally. These results suggest that there may be similarities in the experiences of vegetarians and vegans.

As with other identity categories there are insider and outsider views that are constructed about the identities of vegans (Wright, 2021) which can have implications for the wellbeing of vegans. On one hand, vegans may experience social disruption or lack of representation (both barriers identified within this scoping review). On the other hand, vegans can experience wellbeing through emotional, mental, and physical realms. The specific benefits or challenges vegans experience can be connected in part to their social identities (Ko and Ko 2017). For example, vegans of colour are negatively impacted by whiteness. There is a dominant "white narrative" (Alvarez, 2019:8) in American veganism, and while this message came through within the scoping review as a major concept, studies that highlighted resistance to whiteness were also found (Greenebaum 2018; Navarro 2011). As I demonstrate, social identity can have significant connections to veganism through concepts that influence how social identities are experienced. Social identities shape barriers and facilitators of veganism. For example, in, *Aphro-ism*, Aph and Syl Ko (2017) explain that one's identity shapes their experience and understanding of veganism. Within this chapter, the authors advocate for connecting one's identity to their veganism as a mechanism through which to illuminate how their perspectives have shaped their veganism (Ko and Ko, 2017). This is a way to combat whiteness. However, there is a danger in this as well. For example, there may be implications for safety for 2SLGBT+ people outing themselves or for discrimination towards people who reveal they have a mental illness or a disability. These aspects of identity may be argued to inform people's veganism, but disclosure should not be necessary in order to legitimize one's veganism.

#### *4.1 Limitations*

This scoping review was limited to studies in the English language. Therefore, it is possible that articles of significance in other languages were excluded. Furthermore, the term vegetarian was possibly used as an umbrella term in some studies. Lacto-ovo vegetarianism and veganism are both different types of vegetarianism. While referring to both groups together as vegetarians is not incorrect, it does lack specificity and may have resulted in the elimination of studies that were referring to veganism and not lacto-ovo vegetarianism.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In this scoping review, I included both primary and secondary studies that considered gender, race, and/or sexuality. There were few primary studies (13, 45%) and of these studies each mostly considered gender, race, or sexuality alone. Therefore, more primary research in these areas should be conducted to strengthen the results of previous studies. The currently existing research points to important areas for further investigation. While there are different barriers and facilitators of veganism several of them are related to the prominent concepts of hegemonic masculinity and whiteness, which suggests that decolonization of veganism is required. However, the results of this scoping review also suggest veganism has potential to contribute towards decolonization.



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## **Three Sociological Paradoxes of Eating Animals**

Nathan Poirier

### **Abstract**

The practice of eating has both personal and social components that are inextricably connected. Eating animal products presents patterned human behavior in a particularly striking light. This paper discusses how three paradoxes become inherently manifest within the practice of eating meat. These are: (1) while meat eating is often associated with being “civilized,” it actually is related to the destruction of civilizations, (2) the speciesism which enables humans to farm nonhuman animals with impunity ends up hurting ourselves, and (3) while “humane” approaches to animal agriculture may seem like ways to combat the ills of factory farming, they actually strengthen the factory farming system. I assert that only through a vegan perspective could these paradoxes be challenged in a way that might ethically address them.

**Keywords:** civilization; human farming; speciesism; sociology of food; critical animal studies

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Food and the action of eating are multidimensional and the choices we make about what (or who) we eat are shaped by multiple variables. While the choices people make are often personal, how an individual arrives at a particular choice is influenced by their social environment. Not only are our food choices impacted by society, but the consequences of these decisions are also driven by social factors. This paper focuses on three broad social aspects of eating animals: violence, speciesism, and alternative farming practices.

While what we eat and how it is prepared are shaped by culture, consuming food is a largely social process. From family dinners to banquet receptions, food is nearly always a component of social events. Thus, there is much sociology can offer to the study of food, particularly when it comes to the study of animal products in current food systems. Sociologist Kay Peggs (2012:3) encourages the use of the sociological imagination in order to “question and criticize conventional understandings of what sociology is.” To that end, this paper takes an interest in the human dimension of animal farming and consumption, as any problems that arise from eating animals ultimately have to do with human behavior. Both people and animals are affected though, and so leaving either side out paints an incomplete picture.

As an example of sociological implications in food choices and their social impacts, consider the experience of “fine dining” as detailed by Guptill, Copelton, and Lucal (2013). For most people, this is a special occasion and often celebratory. Meat is often considered the quintessential fine dining component, as the consumption of animal flesh has been closely linked with status through the history of human societies (Nibert 2013). The clothes worn, anticipation, and stories retold afterwards can all convey a sense of prestige or entitlement. The choice of clothes establishes presentation as a member of the “upper class,” and relaying the experience to others can be a way to “fit in” or “keep up” with people who have had similar experiences. There is also much invisible labor behind the scenes of the experience of fine dining. Valets, busboys, wait staff, and chefs all work hard in order to serve the customer to their satisfaction. In the food procurement process, both humans and nonhumans participate in this undertaking, although some do so more willingly and purposefully than others.

The above discussion exemplifies “the hard work of leisure” given all the work and worry that goes on for someone to enjoy a good meal. It is an example of how the sociological study of food can be viewed through the optic of paradox (Guptill, Copelton and Lucal 2013). This paper presents three further paradoxes of eating animals, particularly those of violence, speciesism and “humane” farming. To do so, I take what I consider to be a vegan perspective of farming animals and eating animal products. Instead of a misguided attempt to reduce veganism to only a diet (Dutkiewicz and Dickstein 2021)—a stance that flies in the face, and overrides the voices, of many vegans of color—I take veganism to be “more than a diet” (Giraud 2021). While veganism should focus on nonhuman animals (Feliz [Brueck] 2017:3-6), it must necessarily include all social justice issues if it is to be effective in its fundamental goal of abstaining from all animal exploitation as far as is practicable. This more radical stance is known as “consistent anti-oppression” (Feliz and McNeill 2020). With this understanding of veganism, the remainder of this essay interrogates paradoxes of animal farming and animal product consumption.

## 2. VIOLENCE: THE BARBARITY OF "CIVILITY"

To look at violence associated with consuming animal products, it is useful to briefly look at different forms of violence. Johan Galtung (1969) distinguishes between what he calls personal (or direct) and structural (or indirect) violence. The distinction is based on the presence or absence of an agential subject. Specifically, *personal* violence is "where there is an actor that commits the violence" and "violence where there is no such actor" is referred to as *structural* (Galtung 1969:170). On structural violence, Galtung (1969:170-1) elaborates: "The violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances." To this, Dinesh Wadiwel adds a third type of violence termed *epistemic*. Epistemic violence "determines the terms by which the subject can know itself, and speak about its own position" (Wadiwel 2015:33). Whereas structural violence is part of social structures, epistemic violence is built into the collective consciousness and is ideological. Epistemic violence is a knowledge system that reifies hierarchy and subsequent domination through the understanding that one group is intrinsically "better" than another. Epistemic violence lends itself to dualistic thinking and separating, and hence, racism, speciesism, sexism, etc., constitute forms of epistemic violence.

The violence of animal agriculture stretches far beyond the farm or our plates. Widespread, unnecessary and relentless violence might be the only thing that distinguishes humans from other animals. Our violence is essentially nondiscriminatory, has defined our species' history, and is escalating (Goldhagen 2010). Yet, the domestication of animals generally, and for food in particular, has often been touted as the crowning achievement of civilization. This is because animal domestication allowed populations to grow, societies and economies to form and cities to be built. But with these developments also came disease (Hurn 2012:62), hierarchy in the form of social stratification (Bookchin 1982), and warfare (Nibert 2013). It has been said that without the domestication of animals for food that "the European conquest of the Americas very likely could not have occurred—and even if it had, there would not have been the relentless expansion for grazing areas that caused so much conflict" (Nibert 2013:67). A very similar remark has been made about the ancient Middle East: "An Islam that banned camel flesh would never have become a great world religion. It would have been unable to conquer the Arabian heartlands, to launch its attack against the Byzantine and Persian empires, and to cross the Sahara into the Sahel and West Africa" (Harris 1985:75).

The violence involved in animal agriculture ranges through many forms such as creating or contributing to "damage from the need to expropriate the land and water necessary to maintain large groups of animals, the amassing of military power resulting from animal exploitation, and the pursuit of economic benefit from the use or sale of animals" (Nibert 2013:5). When new land is acquired, military power exerted and economic boons enjoyed, the insatiable thirst for resources is not quenched. Instead these effects contribute toward perpetuating violence in an endless cycle (Nibert 2013:68). Indeed, Nibert asserts that the acquiring of resources for domesticated animals was the impetus for much of the violence in the Americas and Africa (Nibert 2013:67, 154).

In the United States, violence due to expanding range lands and acquiring resources was not confined to only farmed animals; it:

not only necessitated wars on Mexico, Native Americans, and buffalo but also led to the killing, in large numbers, of any free-living animals perceived as having the potential to decrease ranchers' profits. Among these animals, the wolf was seen as the greatest threat (Nibert 2013:109).

Wolves are still perceived as a major threat to "livestock" and ranching profits and several states have tried to have them de-listed from the endangered species list in order to make it legal to kill them in large numbers. In the late nineteenth century in Australia, the same violent outcomes arose from the same sources:

Kangaroos were hunted and killed so extensively that they became endangered, and several subspecies were completely lost. Dingoes were baited and poisoned in large numbers. These destructive patterns continued throughout the nineteenth century as the ranching industry, based on oppressing captive sheep and cows, exterminating and displacing indigenous people, and killing other 'pest' animals, continued to profit from providing animal skin, hair, and flesh to the British market. (Nibert 2013:136)

These examples provoke a curious paradox in the form of a link between civility and barbarism. Rachel Carson (1962/1994:99) noticed this apparent contradiction more than fifty years ago and bravely put this irony out in the open by asking the question as to "whether any civilization can wage relentless war on life without destroying itself, and without losing the right to be called civilized." While Carson was more concerned with the irresponsible spraying of pesticides, her question is relevant and applicable in light of the above examples regarding animal farming. Furthermore, her question and implication applies to the violence aimed at both humans and nonhumans. In reference to this shared victimization, Pedersen and Stanescu (2014:272) observe that "humanity [is] at war not only with other species, but also with our own."

The violence inherently contained in eating animals thus has paradoxically been both the foundation of many "great" civilizations, but also introduced some of civilization's greatest impediments to progress, and may also lead to its ruin.

### 3. SPECIESISM: FALLING ON OUR OWN SWORDS

A means by which violence is frequently justified is speciesism, an ideology of socially sanctioned violence toward (primarily) nonhumans. Speciesism was coined in 1970 by Richard Ryder to refer to harming nonhuman animals because they are not human and therefore less worthy of consideration (Hopster 2019:see fn 1). Embedded within this ideology which proclaims that humans are automatically superior to nonhumans based on our species membership, is an irony that exposes the hollowness of the speciesist claim.

Speciesism creates a social arena where prejudice, discrimination, and oppression are allowed to be played out. Speciesism is itself an act of epistemic violence. It allows for violent organizations such as slaughterhouses to be constructed by virtue of their justification as natural, humane or even a non-event. Such formations provide a place where both structural and personal acts of violence can be carried out essentially unquestioned. Nibert (2002:8) makes a distinction between ideologies and prejudice, with ideologies being "socially shared beliefs," whereas prejudice applies to an "individual predisposition." Ideologies, in turn, arise from a given or desired social order that privileges certain groups. Members of those groups construct ideologies to legitimate their status (Nibert 2002). With this understanding, Nibert asserts that "various types of prejudice and discrimination are outgrowths [of ideologies that] are created to protect privilege" (Nibert 2002:9). What is curious here is that (individual) prejudice is not the cause of an (institutional) ideology. Instead, the implication lies in the reverse direction. That is, ideologies give rise to prejudice which serve to reinforce an overarching belief system. As an example, individual food choices are largely influenced by the widely held and socially shared belief that humans are more important than animals, reinforcing speciesism.

Such stratification of humans and animals, however, ignores the myriad emotional, psychological, and even spiritual connections humans have to other animals. While these connections are sometimes invoked to justify animal farming practices (Stanescu 2014), they have also been used to construct veganism as anti-exploitation (Cole 2014). Regardless, both sides argue that these connections cannot be adequately severed without the risk of serious consequence. Speciesism functions as a blinder to what might otherwise be considered unethical and damaging. Taya Brooks Pribac (2016:197) remarks that if we

Allo[w] society, of which we are agent constituents, to attempt to 'protect' our fragile selves by promoting safety based on disguise and denial of what a large majority may intrinsically perceive as ethically deeply compromised principles and practices (which is reflected, for example, in people's resistance to witness procedures in slaughterhouses...), we are not growing safer and stronger, but more fragile and more vulnerable, both as individuals and as a society... .

This quote highlights another paradox, namely the vulnerability of over-protection. In an attempt to shield ourselves from and not acknowledge that which we deem negative, we actually expose ourselves to something worse, a dysfunctional state of social existence. Pribac likens this to insanity (2016:197) because "[t]he weakness that motivates people to conform to societal expectations ... is perceived as sanity and strength." On the other hand:

To deny [an] innate vulnerability and attempt to disguise it even from ourselves by turning a simple and natural phenomenon like group formation ... into a system so oppressive to nonhuman animals and so fragile in itself that its very survival relies on most people's inability to look at what underlies it out of fear... is not strength.



Thus, what we think of as safety, sanity and strength could be viewed as none of these, or even as undermining all of these. In fact, one may wonder if such denial may prevent humans from developing emotionally and cognitively in positive ways.

Another version of this paradox is found in the concept of the "Anthropocene." This unofficial but increasingly used term meaning "the age of humans" could suggest hubris. But there is more to it than that. Humanity's faith in itself to innovate continually and technologically has given rise to the modern period of time, roughly since the industrial revolution, of an age where humans' presence has rivaled geological forces. This has manifested itself within the concept of the Anthropocene characterized by the dominance, subordination and mastery of humanity over nature. However, just as Pribac noted above, whatever "security" this provides has actually left us exposed and vulnerable. Following a catastrophe, humans would be one of the most ill-suited species to survive due to how much we have domesticated and separated ourselves from the rest of nature in the pursuit of securing our own survival. Thus, Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw (2015:510) note that within the concept of the Anthropocene and the human takeover of Earth:

Lie a number of potent paradoxes... this same belief in human exceptionalism is self-sabotaging.... It also leads us to disavow our own mortal entanglement in the same earth systems we so radically disturb. In other words, it is the fatally flawed belief in human exceptionalism, in the guise of omnipotence and radical nature/culture separatisms that has unhinged us and produced the imbroglio of disorderings that are now being named the Anthropocene.

A side effect of a speciesist Anthropocene is manipulation of animals and rendering their bodies and products as food, supposedly out of humans' "unique" abilities of complex rationality and ingenuity. The responsibility of reason and intelligence cuts two ways; we can reason our way to certain conclusions, but then it stands to reason that we will make informed intelligent choices. If anything, our "higher" capabilities oblige us to step back and refrain from using animals as we do and treat them compassionately instead of constantly violating their realities. If we do not, we fail ourselves and must discard unique abilities as something that makes us exceptional. This, though, would force us to acknowledge that our practice of consuming animals is violent. This would cut to our very core because as Wadiwel (2015) argues, our societies are designed to incorporate animal violence as a way of invisibly reinforcing human privilege. With consequences this high, it is not surprising that the dominant viewpoint does not question the placement of humans in the most privileged position in "the great chain of being."

Speciesism, then, functions as a mechanism to rationalize anthropogenic violence. Human exceptionalism erases doubt and guilt—and much thought—about everyday "harmless" activities. Through speciesism, every act of harm incurred by eating animals is always and already perceived as justified. And veganism would also assert that it is not just meat eating that is a problem, but other animal products also (see Narayanan 2023).

#### 4. NON-INDUSTRIAL ANIMAL AGRICULTURE: THE INVISIBILITY OF UBIQUITY

In this last section I look at how alternative animal agriculture reinforces speciesism. Although much violence ensues when animals are raised for consumption, humans continue to justify the practice. A common thread of thought is not that the raising of an animal for human consumption is morally repugnant, but that the animal should be allowed to have a good life before their death. If this is accomplished, the consumption of animal flesh is justified. Many people agree that industrial farms are a “bad” thing. But the one argument that seems to underlie such critiques is that industrial animal agriculture treats animals horribly. Thus, alternatives have been proposed as countermeasures to industrial agriculture. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of non-industrial farming practices that aim to improve animal welfare. Concepts like “humane farming,” “locavorism,” “real food,” or “organic meat” have permeated popular media (McWilliams 2015). Yet, alternatives to the industrial approach, as well as the underlying ideology, which I collectively refer to as “humane farming,” is a manifestation of a contradiction in terms, for “it is impossible to kill one’s way out of anthropocentrism and human chauvinism” (Pedersen and Stanescu 2014:271).

The paradoxes that arise from alternative farming come from the very nature of animal farming. Firstly, most suggestions for alternatively (as in non-industrially) raised animals for meat are based on welfare concerns for the animals involved. However, the underlying assumption is that breeding, confining, and slaughtering sentient beings for meat is benign at worst, and some believe that the animals themselves even consent to this arrangement. Ultimately, alternative farming methods, regardless of how “humane” they are, or how good the animal’s welfare supposedly is, view animals as commodities. The sole reason for an animal’s existence is to be sold at the most profitable price and consumed. Perplexingly, the goal of improved welfare appears to be premised on the guarantee of continued suffering (Poirier 2022).

While humane farming proclaims improved welfare—and on this point alone it is impossible to argue against—the larger process at work is a further entrenchment of eating animals as a normal practice (Stanescu 2014:14):

Humane farming ... serves the purpose of helping to render the power relations themselves both more normalized and more invisible, a fact that is, in essence, the basis of their continued justification and support. As such, humane farming not only can never mount an adequate critique of the factory farm system, but it in fact primarily serves to defend institutional practices and deflect criticism.

An additional paradox is found in James McWilliams' (2015) book *The Modern Savage* which outlines the inherent contradictions of non-industrial animal agriculture. One of his main points throughout the book is that these alternatives which were created to combat factory farms, actually end up strengthening industrial farms because they introduce a choice between cheap or expensive meat, a choice which will surely make almost everyone choose the cheap (factory farm) option. Indeed, alternatively raised “meat” is markedly more expensive, creating a niche market for those willing and able to pay more, as evidenced by the fact that ninety-

nine percent of meat continues to be bought from industrial sources (Pedersen and Stanescu 2014:268). As long as eating animals is the goal, the mentality of viewing animals as commodities will remain strong which is the exact principle factory farms are premised and thrive on.

So, eating "humane" does not solve the purported problem but further entrenches it. Pedersen and Stanescu (2014:269) put it thus:

if the entire 60 billion land animals currently raised and killed could be transferred from CAFOs to local, free range, and 'humane' farms, such a practice would only serve to help render the staggering level of speciesist violence even more naturalized and therefore "invisible."

With all food animal facilities labeled as "humane," we would run a serious risk of experiencing a "cultural spillover" of violence: "The more we harm animals in ways that society deems acceptable, the more likely individuals may be to engage in animal cruelty and the less likely individuals and social institutions may be to seriously sanction it" (Fitzgerald et. al. 2013:299).

Another misconception is that eating local somehow legitimizes murdering innocent lives. With respect to this, "local" is not a well-defined term and says nothing about how the animals are raised or killed, so it may still be the case the animals are obtained from and slaughtered at industrial sites. Besides that,

Transporting food from the producer to retailer is responsible for only four per cent of all fossil fuels used and all [greenhouse gasses, GHGs] emitted in the entire food production process. Eating a totally local diet reduces GHG emissions per household equivalent to 1,000 miles per year driven, while a nonlocal vegan diet reduces GHG emissions equivalent to 8,100 miles per year driven. (Oppenlander 2013:182)

In other words, while it is in one respect quantitatively better than ignoring locality, eating local is not necessarily qualitatively better overall and equates to going out of the way to change buying and consumption habits for perhaps negligible benefit, especially when vegan alternatives exist that better achieve the purported goal(s). However, there are likely social benefits to eating and shopping local. People may have more options for social encounters at farmer's markets, community gardens, or as part of a community supported agriculture program (Guptill et al. 2013:165-7). However, this could become more about the personal gains that individuals receive instead of taking a stance on environmental, animal welfare or other social justice issues. The same can be said for organic animal products:

Organic standards do not insist on non-poverty wages for farmers and farmworkers or on practices to combat gender, racial, or ethnic inequality ... incomes are determined largely by the market and, as a result, consumers are encouraged to confine their focus to the qualities of the food product itself rather than the web of relationships that creates that product" (Guptill et al. 2013:172).

Consequently, there is evidence within every non-industrial animal-centric food choice that such alternatives do not challenge the status quo, but instead make it easier to be complicit in the hegemonic practice of meat eating. The individual can continue participating in the dietary norm while feeling good about their decision. This is because they have considered “ethical” alternatives and feel that they have arrived at their decision autonomously. This is an illustration of how being autonomous can actually result in conformity, and also how autonomy is shaped by social forces. Therefore, alternatives to industrial animal agriculture raise questions as to who actually benefits from such industrial substitutions, and what are the impacts on real lives as a consequence, questions sociology is especially well-suited to investigate.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing set of paradoxes, it is concluded that veganism is the best perspective from which to minimize problems associated with such paradoxes. Admittedly, veganism may not be able to resolve these paradoxes, and this may not even be desirable. For instance, if consistent anti-oppression veganism were to become so ubiquitous that it became the norm and unextraordinary—essentially invisible—it would reproduce “the invisibility of ubiquity” paradox but in an arguably positive way. While nonviolence is often part of the motivation and goal for vegans, there is still some violence involved in eating plants such as unintentionally killing insects and bugs in the process. One could also debate the ethics of killing plants (Gaard 2016). However, while this must be acknowledged, all living beings must eat to live and something must cease to exist for us to do so. Gaard (2016) questions whether or not plants are assumed to be an inferior form of life by those who problematize, blur, or work to deconstruct the human-animal boundary. This calls into question a possible blind spot regarding plant-based food when it comes to sociocultural ethics. Nevertheless, veganism is often entered into with an explicitly anti-speciesist orientation and as such, challenges speciesism as it has been discussed in this paper and can include ethical deliberation over plant life. Finally, it is also well known that a vegan diet is the healthiest diet for the environment and human health (Aleksandrowicz et al. 2016).

Given the nature of these paradoxes, it is sometimes difficult to fathom why people would continue to eat animals. But upon closer examination, it should be understood that the individual should not necessarily receive the full blame; given that the animal food processors and producers (Fitzgerald and Taylor 2014), the education system (Pedersen 2019), and family (Asher and Cherry 2015), tend to normalize consuming animal flesh, and dismiss or disparage subversive discourse, it remains difficult for a conscientious citizen to find the honest effects of eating animals in the first place, and then to have the fortitude and ability to resist this omnipresent social pressure. Perhaps, then, the most productive members of a society are those who critique its very values and norms. By the ironies and contradictions of many arguments to continue eating animal products, to unwaveringly stand behind a rationalization that has been shown to be inadequate is

a statement of ignorance and/or irresponsibility and is potentially prejudicial. Thus, it may be more productive to critique this practice than to conform to it.

An unwillingness to go against or challenge norms could be referred to as “social inertia,” the meaning of this term being derived from the physical property of inertia which is the ability of a body to resist influence from external forces. Extrapolating from inanimate bodies to people, humans tend to be willing to spend a considerable amount of effort resisting the influence of others who advocate for counter-culture lifestyles or practices. This may be due to the power social groups exert on individuals which induces a want of membership for a sense of belonging or because socialization can conflate exploitation with care (Poirier 2021). Social inertia may also result because such suggestions could be viewed as threatening to or an attack on personal identity.

Which animals people eat is influenced by socialization that paradoxically begins in childhood amidst a parallel ethic that says children should learn and care about animals. It is a fascinating paradox indeed how society can inculcate polarized thinking about similar animals (Dhont and Hodson 2020). This is epitomized when humans “split” animals of the same species, such as when pigs are sometimes considered beloved pets of “owners” who eat pork (Korimboccus 2020). Once a person has surpassed childhood (also a socially constructed category), it can become even more difficult to foster an attitude of compassion towards nonhuman animals due to the cumulative effects of socialization (Poirier 2021). This is especially true of opinions regarding farmed animals due to long-term conditioning and an increased awareness of and concern for fitting in.

The overall point of this essay is that a vegan perspective—which includes but is not reducible to a vegan diet—is the best way to expose paradoxes of eating animals, and to minimize structural and epistemic violence and overall harm if and as practiced as part of consistent anti-oppression (Feliz [Brueck] and McNeill 2020). In the current political climate and environmental crises, the scope, scale and richness of the topic of eating animals within the sociology of food combine to make it an interesting time to be a sociologist examining human-animal relations.

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## **About the International Association of Vegan Sociologists**

The International Association of Vegan Sociologists (IAVS) is proud to publish the inaugural *Student Journal of Vegan Sociology*.

The Association is a scholar-activist collective putting sociological theory and practice in the service of animal liberation and veganism. It was formed to provide a platform for sociologists from a Critical Animal Studies background, who recognise veganism and anti-speciesism as an ethical imperative in the discipline.

Founded in May 2020 by Corey Wrenn, Chair of the Animals & Society Section of the American Sociological Association, and Zoei Sutton, Co-Convener of the Australian Sociological Association's Sociology and Animals Thematic Group, IAVS is now recognised by these and other major sociological associations across the world.

Our aim is to increase the visibility and legitimacy of vegan sociology, and this Journal is an important part of that process, allowing students a voice within this context. IAVS and the Student Journal of Vegan Sociology are both completely volunteer-led.

For more information, including our guiding principles, lectures, blog posts, and details of our Annual Conference, visit: [www.vegansociology.com](http://www.vegansociology.com).

