



Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet
Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

Faculty of Natural Resources and
Agricultural Sciences

Vegans: from radical hippies to inspiring celebrities?

– A study on what influences vegetarian's decision when
considering veganism

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Credits: 30 HEC

Level: Second cycle (A2E)

Course title: Master thesis in Environmental science, A2E, 30.0 credits

Course code: EX0897

Course coordinating department: Department of Aquatic Sciences and Assessment

Programme/Education: Environmental Communication and Management – Master's Programme

Place of publication: Uppsala

Year of publication: 2019

Online publication: <https://stud.epsilon.slu.se>

Keywords: vegan, vegetarian, meat consumption, environmental communication, carnism, discourses, attitudes, cognitive dissonance, norms, perceptions, behavioural change

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Abstract

Meat consumption has a negative effect on climate change, making it important to increase more sustainable diets, such as veganism. This research has focused on understanding why vegetarians, who are so due to animal rights and climate benefits, have not become vegans. Through an interview study in Sweden with six vegetarians and six vegans, this research has aimed to gain knowledge of what might influence the decision when considering a vegan diet. By addressing the theory of Carnism to understand how norms and ideologies function and combining it with Theory of Planned Behaviour and Cognitive Dissonance Theory, this research tries to make sense of how discourses can influence behaviour. This research concludes that vegans are viewed as outside of the norm due to the dominant ideology of Carnism, where eating meat is considered to be the common sense. The general view of vegans is that they are radical, judgemental and blithering hippies and maintaining a vegan diet is too difficult and time-consuming. These strong discourses can lead to negative attitudes towards veganism and impact the decision of choosing a vegan diet. Moreover, it seems to result in cognitive dissonance where the vegetarians reinforce the benefits of vegetarianism by reducing the importance they put on their value of animal rights. Thus, the vegetarian's willingness to change diet is influenced by a complex, interactive relationship of discourses, norms and ideologies and their attitude, values and intended behaviour.

Keywords: vegan, vegetarian, meat consumption, climate change, Carnism, discourses, attitudes, cognitive dissonance, norms, perceptions, behavioural change

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1 Introduction

Today we are facing one of the biggest challenges in human history – the issue of climate change. This is due to our unsustainable exploitation of the Earth's resources, for example through food production (Steinfeld et al. 2006). During the last 50 years, the global meat consumption and agricultural sector have heavily increased and 30% of the land surface on Earth is now used by livestock production (Burney et al. 2010; Ritchie & Roser 2019). Worldwide, more than 70 billion land animals are killed for food every year (Sanders 2018) and a majority are living in conditions causing suffering and stress (World Animal Protection). This industry is responsible for 14.5% of the human-induced global greenhouse gas emissions (Gerber et al. 2013). Decreasing the emissions and changing into a diet of less meat and more plants is necessary to keep the temperature rise under 2 °C and avoid a dangerous level of climate change (Steinfeld et al. 2006; Burney et al. 2010). However, during the last couple of years, meat consumption has started to decline (Jordbruksverket 2019). Yet, vegans and vegan meals are not increasing in a rate that might be needed (GRAIN & IATP 2018; Gerber et al. 2013; Springmann et al. 2016). Some researchers argue that it is not necessary for the majority of the population to become vegans. Instead, the necessary difference would be if a majority of the population changed some of their meals from meat to vegan meals (Massow et al. 2019; Leenaert 2017). Massow et al. (2019) states that the recent decrease of meat is not due to more people becoming vegans, instead it is because omnivores have decreased their meat consumption. Nonetheless, in order to increase vegan meals and consider climate change, it is important to first understand why vegans and vegan meals have not previously increased.

With this at base, this research strives to provide more knowledge on the view of veganism through an interview study in Sweden with six vegetarians and six vegans. An aim is to see how they perceive veganism and how this might influence the vegetarian's choice of diet. Investigating the vegetarians who are so due to climate issues or animal rights, could the norms and ideologies in society have affected their choice of diet? Is it possible to gain further understanding of what have influenced their decisions? To study this, the vegetarian's and vegan's communication of how they experience veganism in society has been analysed by looking at the discourses used. Discourses are the social interaction where people communicate, interpret and reproduce different norms within society. Thus, communication is seen as discourses constituting, and are constituted by, society (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002). Three theories are addressed to examine how norms and ideologies might impact individuals' decision-making processes. One theory concentrates on the plausible influence on the interviewees from a dominant ideology where eating meat is considered to be the common sense, whilst the other two theories can provide knowledge on how their attitudes, values and behaviour might be influenced by this and the impact it can have on their decisions. Together, they can help in understanding and explaining the interactive relationship between norms, dominant ideologies and decisions.

Because of the urgency of climate change and the need to reconsider the unsustainable food consumption, further research about this subject is required. According to Cole et al. (2009), research about the awareness of the impact animal-based food have on climate is needed. Further, Carlsson-Kanyama & González (2009) thinks research should investigate why changes in diets have not been a main issue on the climate agenda until now. Further gap in research is the focus on vegetarian's relation to veganism. Research tends to focus on omnivores' relation to vegetarians or vegans (Herzog 2011; Beezhold et al. 2014; Guerin 2014) but not as much on vegetarian's relation to vegans. Therefore, important knowledge of the process from vegetarian to vegan seems to be excluded. Further research about Carnism is necessary as well (Piazza et al. 2015) to see if it is a dominant ideology and if so, what impact it might have on everyday life.

So, because of the constantly changing world where today, both the climate and the perception of our food consumption might be on the verge of shifting, it is important to

understand what is happening and why. This research attempts to explain what has influenced the interviewees perceptions and decisions, and how. So, by investigating the communication used and the possible effect of it, the hope is to create useful awareness. Thus, the research questions will be:

1. *What perceptions do the interviewed vegetarians and vegans have of veganism?*
2. *What influence can these perceptions have on the interviewed vegetarian's attitude towards veganism? And how can this impact their decision when considering veganism?*

2 Background

2.1 The effect food consumption has on climate

Today, awareness of climate change is growing, influencing people's everyday lives. An increasing number of the Swedish population are thinking more on climate change and it has now become the societal phenomena Swedes worry about the most (WWF 2019). Further, more people are doing active choices to live climate smart, which can be done through choice of diet. Over a decade ago, FAO of the United Nations warned about the livestock sector's big impact on climate change because of the huge amount of land and water used in the production (Steinfeld et al. 2006). Today, the issue remains and 14.5% of the global human-induced greenhouse gas emissions are from animal agriculture (Gerber et al. 2013). New research from GRAIN and IATP (2018) states that the global greenhouse gas emissions need to decline from 51 billion tons to 13 billion tons by 2050 in order to limit climate change issues and avoid a 'dangerous' level of 2°C. If the livestock sector's emissions do not decrease, it will not be possible. From this industry, the productions that stands for the majority are from beef and cattle milk. Due to the strong projected growth, the emissions are expected to be higher (GRAIN & IATP 2018).

Worldwide, the meat production has increased rapidly during the last 50 years (Ritchie & Roser 2019), as well as in Sweden where 65% more meat is eaten today than 50 years ago (Jordbruksverket 2019). The increase of meat consumption has negative effects on both the climate but also the health, whilst a vegan diet can give health benefits, such as lower blood pressure. In the average household in Sweden, food stands for 30% of the emissions that affect the climate (WWF 2018). To have a sustainable food consumption, this needs to be reduced with 75%. Putting it differently, the average Swedes' food affects the climate with 1.8 ton carbon dioxide per year (Larsson 2015). Reducing beef consumption, it would decrease the emissions with one ton by 2050 whilst a vegan diet would reduce it to 0.3 ton. During the last two years, a trend has been detected where meat consumption has declined (Jordbruksverket 2019). This also shows in WWF's (2019) poll where 40% declares to have decreased their meat during the last year. In 2018, it was 35%. Moreover, 53% of the asked could consider eating meat maximum once per week to decline climate change (WWF 2019).

Due to this, it can be of great importance to increase meat-free diets. However, it is not happening as rapidly as might be needed (GRAIN & IATP 2018). According to an opinion poll in Sweden (Axfood 2018), only 1% of the respondents said they were vegans and 5% were vegetarians, a number that has not changed from 2016. However, the amount of people eating vegetarian meals at least twice per week has increased, from 19% 2016 to 24% 2018. Also, the amount of people said to never eat vegetarian meals has declined from 21% 2016 to 17% 2018. The number of vegetarians and vegans in Sweden however varies in different opinion polls. According to Djurens Rätt (2019), 8% were vegetarians or vegans in 2016, a number that had decreased from 10% from 2014 (Djurens Rätt 2019). However, according to a report by Global Data (2017), in USA, 6% said they were vegans, an increase with 500% since 2014. In the UK, vegans have increased as well, from 1% to 7% in three years. Moreover, people have searched three times more on Google for 'vegan' in comparison to 'vegetarian'. Another indication of people becoming more aware of veganism is due to the many celebrities who have changed into a vegan diet during the last years (Glamour Magazine 2019).

So, the amount of people calling themselves vegans seems to differ in both opinion polls and countries. What can be established however is a clear trend towards more vegetarian and vegan meals. However, is that enough to reduce climate change? Here, research differs. Some believe it is the number of increased vegan meals that will contribute the most to preventing dangerous levels of climate change, not more people becoming vegans (Massow 2019; Leenaert 2017). However, in order to understand today's situation of what

is happening in the consumption of food, previous research around veganism, the perceptions around it and how norms might be changed will be further developed.

2.2 Previous research - discourses and norms

Discourses around veganism

Veganism is a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose.

- The Vegan Society

This is the definition of veganism used by The Vegan Society. However, defining and understanding veganism can vary due to the different levels and the varying reasons for it, such as health, environmental or ethical reasons (Greenebaum 2015). In media, it often has been attributed with certain personality traits or a certain lifestyle and not only as a change of diet according to Möller and Ståhlberg (2016). They conducted a study by examining how Swedish media used the word 'vegan' during 2015. By doing a critical discourse analysis, they examined all articles with the word 'vegan', except pure recipes, from Sweden's four biggest magazines to identify the discourses used to see how veganism was portrayed. When doing discourse analyses, a believe is that the way people talk do not neutrally reflect the world, rather it plays an active role in creating and changing it. Language is structured according to different patterns which people both follow and reinforce when they are interacting with each other. Therefore, discourse analyses are commonly used to analyse these patterns for the possibility of social change (Möller and Ståhlberg 2016; Jorgensen and Phillips 2002).

Möller and Ståhlberg's (2016) result showed that 76% of the articles portrayed vegans or veganism as negative and 24% as positive. The positive highlighted the advantages of a vegan diet when it comes to health, moral and environmental aspects. However, there was a collision of discourses regarding health. A vegan diet could decrease the risk of cancer, but the negative discourse was that a vegan diet without food supplement would make you sick. Other negative discourses were the image of them as radical, militant and aggressive. They were being ridiculed by associating veganism to hipsters, as a way of losing weight and not for everyone due to the time-consuming and difficulty with keeping a vegan diet. It was also portrayed as a trend and as deviant from the norm.

Another study done on the discourses around veganism is by Cole and Morgan (2011), who investigated British media during 2007. In similarity, they found 74% of the articles had negative discourses. It was described as a fad and a time limited lifestyle due to the difficulties and impossibility with maintaining it. Vegans were portrayed as over-sensitive, self-tortures and as hostile against the norm omnivore.

Fairclough (1992) states, through his research, that discourses determine and reproduces social structures but through social struggle, there can be a shift in power relations where the orders of discourse can be transformed. They might also change since the world is constantly shifting. Thus, due to the rapid changes in this subject during the last couple of years, these researches might seem out-of-date and not compatible. However, they are highly relevant for this study. When looking at norms and ideologies, it is essential to view the discourses within the society. Fairclough (2001) has conducted research about power in relation to ideologies. He means that practices that appear to be common sense, universal and embodies assumptions that legitimize existing power relations are functioning ideologically. So, ideological power is to project one's practices as 'common sense' and universal. This is the key mechanism to rule through consent and he states that it makes it essential to look at discourses since this is the binder of ideology. Further, Fairclough (2001) argues that people are not always aware that they, through their discourses and practices, are legitimizing or delegitimizing power relations. Therefore, it is important

when striving for social change to raise people's awareness of the 'hidden' discourses and their impact when reproducing them. Thus, to understand today's situation and if social change might be on the way, it is necessary to understand what could cause it. Even though the new trend of decreasing meat consumption probably has changed how media talks about veganism today, how it previously was portrayed may still have played an active part in constituting people's perception on vegans.

Changing of norms

Since veganism was viewed as outside of the norm (Möller & Ståhlberg 2016; Cole & Morgan 2011), additional previous research can give some explanations for how a norm is changed in society. Centola et al. (2018) have done experiments to understand how and when norms can be changed. They say that when committed minorities reach a group size of 25% of the population, the social system reaches a tipping point. They can then overturn societal norms which results in a cascade of behaviour change, making the minorities view rapidly more accepted which enables for a social change. Their experiments show that if the minority group size is under 25%, only 6% of the non-committed population tends to adopt the behaviour, resulting in the dominant social convention remaining stable. However, they note that in the real world, resistance to behavioural change can occur due to individuals' psychological and emotional commitments to the established behaviour. Continuing, Sparkman & Walton (2017) talks about the importance of looking at dynamic norms if wanting to alter them. People are influenced by others, which eventually can result in a change of norms. Learning that others are changing can impact people to believe there is new information or reason to change or that it is not too difficult. Moreover, seeing others who did not change behaviour in the past but are doing it now can lead people to believe their identities more compatible with their own. It can then make the behaviour more compatible with oneself, resulting in them changing behaviour as well. Smil (2014) also talks about the changing of society but from a different viewpoint. He examines the market's influence on changing societal behaviour. He stresses the need to decrease meat consumption and believes that for the coming four decades, there will be a shift in food consumption, either due to new prices or by force due to the changing circumstances. The different explanations for how norms might change can provide important knowledge of the plausible changing of norms where the meat consumption is decreasing.

3 Theoretical framework

In this chapter, the theories used for a deeper understanding are presented. There has been a method of going back and forth between the data and theories in order for them to complement each other. The material has guided the direction of the study and the theories has been used to get a deeper understanding of the result.

For an understanding of how dominant ideologies and norms might impact decisions and what the effects might be, three theories were at hand. Firstly, to investigate and understand perceptions of veganism, Carnism by Joy (2011) was used. This theory explains common patterns in the communication around meat which have enabled for eating meat to be the dominant ideology in Western Societies. Studying the material in relation to these patterns might have provided an understanding of how the interviewees view veganism in relation to the norm of eating meat. After analysing the interviewees communication around veganism, it was relevant for this study to further examine how their perceptions might have impacted their decisions when considering veganism. Therefore, two additional theories were used. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) provides a comprehension of how social norms and attitudes can impact one’s behaviour, thus making it possible to investigate possible influences on the decision from ideologies. Cognitive Dissonance Theory (CDT) on the other hand helps in understanding how values, attitudes and behaviour can interfere with each other, thus providing a further explanation on how norms interact with one’s attitudes and behaviour. How the theories complement each other is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

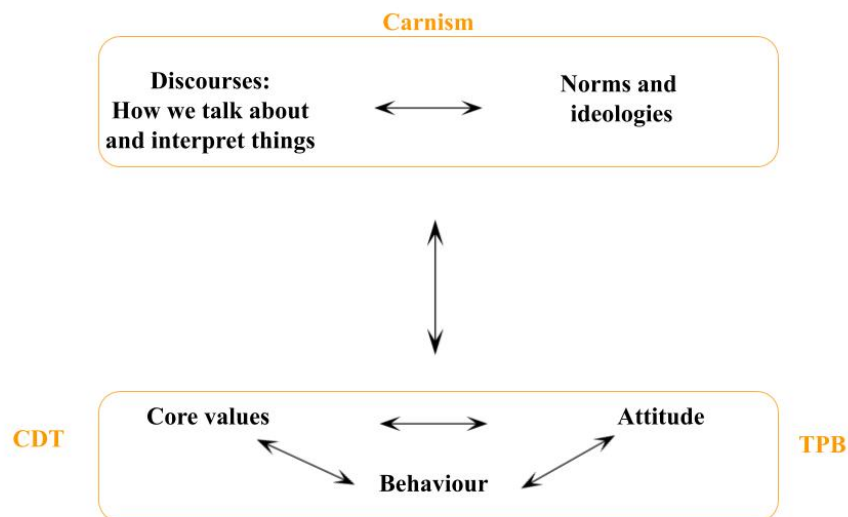


Figure 1. The figure shows the interactive relationship when making a decision between norms, ideologies and how we talk with attitude, behaviour and our core values. The theories (in orange) roles are also shown.

3.1 Carnism and the 4N's

To understand plausible dominant norms in the Western society where the interviewees are living, Joy’s (2011) research will be addressed. She has identified a dominant ideology called Carnism, where eating meat is viewed as the common sense. It conditions people to eat certain animals without reconsider it. She states that due to unnecessary violence against animals which people normally would think of as unethical, Carnism has a set of defence mechanisms which allows us to unknowingly make exceptions. The three defence mechanisms are denial, justifications and cognitive distortions.

The first, *denial*, works by concealing the ideology, the system and the farmed animals, making them invisible for the people. By not naming the system, it is easy to keep eating what we have been taught and not being aware of the invisible system, making it difficult to challenge. Further, by keeping the animals out of people's consciousness, it is easy to deny and ignore the problem of meat consumption. So, by keeping this ideology hidden and denied, it can remain unchallenged.

The second is *justification*, where common myths are considered to be facts, functioning as rationalizations for people to motivate their meat consumption. Joy (2011) has proposed *the 3Ns of justification*, which are reinforced through social channels in society. These beliefs are that eating meat is *natural*, something our species are evolved to eat, it is written in our biology and it is what we naturally crave; it is *normal*, what people expect from us because it is what most people in civilized societies do, and; it is *necessary*, we need it for our survival or to stay healthy and strong, something a meat-free diet cannot provide. Piazza et al. (2015) identified a fourth N frequently used, where a common justification for eating meat is because it is *nice*, meaning tasty.

Cognitive distortion is the third defence mechanisms to maintain a meat-eating society, where our perceptions of the animals we eat are distorted to make us feel comfortable enough to consume them. This is done by culturally learning to view farmed animals as objects, such as a chicken is something and not someone, and as abstractions without any personality or individuality, like all pigs are the same. It is also done by categorizing different feelings and behaviours towards different animals, for example stating that cows are for eating and dogs are our friends (Joy 2011).

Since this study wants to investigate what perceptions the interviewees have of veganism, the themes from the defence mechanisms can be used to analyse signs of this dominant ideology. Thus, by looking in the material at how the view on meat consumption have been talked about, how eating meat have been justified or not and how animals are viewed. By examining patterns of strong discourses, a possible dominant ideology like Carnism might be shown. However, it is necessary for the aim of this study to see if, and how, this might influence the vegetarian's decision. Therefore, additional theories will be used.

3.2 Theory of Planned Behaviour

A theory connected to ideologies and norms and their influence on attitude and behaviour when making a decision is TPB by Ajzen (1991). The theory states that performing a certain behaviour depends on the intention to perform that behavior. The intention is influenced by three kinds of considerations, which are the attitudes toward the behaviour and the expected outcomes, the perceived norms and the perceived control over the behaviour. Going further into these, the first being the beliefs about the likely consequences of the behaviour. Depending on these beliefs, it will produce a favourable or unfavourable attitude toward the behaviour. The second are the beliefs about the normative expectations of others, also called the subjective norm. According to Ajzen (1991), norms are individual's beliefs of how to act, which are from either personal values, values of important others or values held by a specific group or society, so it is the perceived social pressure to do the behaviour or not. For example, if a person believe that important others think they should perform the behaviour, it increases their own willingness to actually perform it. Continuing, the third consideration is the believed control. It is the belief about the presence of factors that may further or hinder performance of the behaviour, so the perceived difficulty or ease of performing the behaviour. The believed control depends on how strongly one thinks they have the resources, skills and capability to perform the behaviour. Together, these three considerations contribute in shaping the behavioural intention. Often, the greater and more favourable these beliefs are, the stronger the intention is to perform the behaviour (Ajzen 1991).

This theory helps explain how attitudes, norms and beliefs about control can impact the intended behaviour. Since this study tries to see if the perceptions of veganism might have influenced the interviewees behaviour, it is of relevance. By supplementing Carnism with TPB, the purpose is to include how norms and beliefs in society can impact on the behaviour. However, to understand if the interviewees have intended to change behaviour, it is important to also look at their values. By addressing CDT, the interactive relation between values, attitude and behaviour is treated. Also, this theory can help in examining and understanding possible changes of discourses when the vegetarians talk about veganism.

3.3 Cognitive Dissonance Theory

People's choice of diet can create a conflict within themselves. Piazza et al. (2015) argues that omnivores are confronted by a "meat paradox", meaning there is a conflict that their behaviour of eating meat harm animals whilst they are enjoying meat and sees it as desirable. It is explained by CDT by Festinger (1957). He says that cognitions, which are elements of knowledge about one's attitude, behaviour and environment, can either be unrelated, consonant or they can be dissonant with each other, meaning they are contrary to the other. This will give discomfort and a need to reduce the dissonance. For example, if someone knows their behaviour of eating meat does not match with their attitude of not wanting to harm animals, they can either change one of them or both. Thus, one alternative is to stop eating meat. However, people tend to change their attitude rather than their behaviour, unless the attitude is strongly connected to their identity and is a core value for them. This because changing behaviour can be harder as it would mean people must admit they have not been living according to their values (Cooper et al. 2005). In this case, admitting they knowingly have contributed to harming animals. Instead, it is easier to change what they think about it. This can be done by either adding cognitions that fits with one of the cognitions, like people need to eat meat, there are no good alternatives etc., or to reduce the importance they place on their attitude, such as eating nutrient food is more important than animal rights, or their taste and time are more important.

This process explains why people tend to highlight the positive aspects of their chosen option and highlight the negative aspects of the options they did not choose. It is because people need to reduce the discrepancy and 'convince' themselves it was the right option. Decreasing the discrepancy and discomfort are important psychological manoeuvres when trying to maintain an image of oneself as a good, moral person and in order to continue in a practice they might feel guilty about otherwise (Festinger 1957; Piazza et al. 2015).

The meat-paradox focuses on omnivores, but the interviewed vegetarians might still experience it, which this theory will help in examining. They tried to avoid contributing to animals suffering by stop eating meat but by keep consuming animal products, they still contribute to it and therefore might experience cognitive dissonance. Thus, this theory shows how behaviour can be shaped by the attitude but foremost, how attitude can be shaped by the behaviour. However, a critique is the view of this process as internal, out of the influence from society and social interaction (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002). However, by combining it with the other two theories, a hope is to avoid this isolated view.

Combining these three theories can give a perspective of how dominant ideologies and norms in society might impact the decision when considering a behaviour. Since ideologies and norms steer how people communicate, which in turn can affect individuals' image of reality, the hope is to get a better understanding of how this might have impacted the vegetarians. Carnism will help in getting an understanding of the dominant ideology and hidden discourses around food consumption whilst the other two will help in explaining how it might impact the decision. By keeping these theories in mind when making sense of the material, the hope is to view the data from multiple levels.

4 Methodology

4.1 Data gathering and analysis

4.1.1 *The choice of method*

One way to get an understanding of a social phenomenon is through interviews. Thomsson (2010) states they can be used to search for deeper meaning of everyday phenomenon than the immediate and obvious. She continues arguing it can be useful when wanting to get qualitative based data about people's experiences, thoughts, feelings, behaviours or attitudes. Further, to find out how people think, feel and act in different situations, it can be an effective tool, as well as to understand how individuals and groups constitutes their social world (Alvehus 2013). Because of this, semi-structured interviews have been used in this research. Thomsson (2010) argues that by doing multiple interviews, it can be possible to get many detailed descriptions of general or typical experiences, like the perception of veganism in this case. To get an understanding of vegetarians' thoughts and how they perceive vegans, six vegetarians were interviewed. Further, to get an understanding of how vegans had perceived veganism previously and now, six vegans were interviewed as well. They were included in order to gain a broader view, both to see if the perceptions they had before and after had changed but also to get insight in perceptions they faced from others, which might have been missed out otherwise.

4.1.2 *Gathering of data through interviews*

Since there are clear questions for specific groups, one way to choose the interviewees is through snowball selection (Ahrne & Svensson 2015). The interviewees were found by asking friends who are young women if they knew someone who wanted to be interviewed who fitted the criteria's of being vegetarian or vegan due to animal rights or climate change and considered herself as a young woman. The ones who were interested were contacted by me over Facebook or e-mail with further information, such as a brief description of the themes of the interview together with information about the process, such as during which weeks I wanted to conduct the interviews, that it would take between 30-60 minutes and they could choose if they preferred meeting at their or my home, at a cafeteria or at a group room at a university campus. If they still were interested in meeting after this, a date, time and location were agreed upon together.

The selection of only focusing on women who were young adults were due to statistics and research about this group which states they care more about climate change and animal rights. For this study, I wanted people who really cared about the question in order to understand what held them back. For the vegans, it was important to know what had held them back before becoming vegans and for the vegetarians, it was relevant to understand what made them not choose a vegan diet today. Focusing on those who probably had experienced cognitive dissonance was a relevant factor for this study because people who act against their core values tend to change either their behaviour or their thoughts about the behaviour. So, seeing if their thoughts about environmental issues and animal rights might have changed since becoming vegetarians was an interesting explanation to analyse. If interviewing people who might not have been as engaged in these questions, the result probably would have differed since them experiencing cognitive dissonance might not have been as likely. Further, Ojala (2012) highlights the importance of conducting research about climate change on young adults since those are heavily affected by it. Also, because they might be able to get engaged more, something McCright (2010) coheres to young women as well, making it an important reason to study this group. Furthermore, since inquiries in Sweden have found that young women tend to care more about these questions, it was of relevance to interview people from this group. Inquiries have found that young women

have the highest climate change anxiety. 97% of women in the ages 16-29 thinks it is important to live climate smart and 63% worries about climate change, which can be compared to the population overall where that number is 30% (WWF 2018). In Ica's (2018) inquiry, they found 80% of women in the ages 18-29 worrying about climate change. 89% of this group wanted to be better at shopping groceries that decreased their climate impression. Young people overall were aware of how their groceries affects the climate, more precisely 63% (Ica 2018). So, by choosing a group who tend to experience climate change anxiety and a higher level of awareness of their consumptions impact, they might meet with cognitive dissonance on a more frequent basis.

The interviews were conducted during a period of four weeks and two interview guides were used, one for the vegetarians and one for the vegans. Many questions were the same but with some changes depending on their diet. The interview guides were constructed with the research questions at base and with important themes from the theories. The themes were their process of changing diet, their view and perceptions of veganism, their values regarding climate issues and animal rights and reactions from their surrounding and identified norms. The interviews were between 30 to 60 minutes each and were conducted in Swedish since it was the interviewees mother tongue. The quotes have been translated with great caution to not change the meaning of them.

4.1.3 *The interviewees*

All interviewees had been vegetarian or vegan for more than two years. Two of the vegetarians sometimes ate seafood and said they did not want to be vegans right now (vegetarians 3 and 5), two were sometimes thinking about being vegan and tried to eat more vegan food (vegetarians 1 and 2). The other two were sure they would become vegan and strived towards it (vegetarians 4 and 6). Two of the vegans had been vegetarians since they were kids (9-10 years old) and could eat vegetarian food if necessary (vegan 5 and 6) and one were vegan only in her diet (vegan 5). The other four did not buy any new animal products, except medicines (vegan 1, 2, 3 and 4).

4.1.4 *Analyzing the material*

After being transcribed, each interview was analysed by categorizing sentences into themes and patterns. The themes were originated from the interview guides and theories presented above. When coding, the themes were further divided and broken down into additional subthemes in order to go deeper into the material and not just stay at for example their values towards animal rights. Instead, to divide that theme into when they had started caring for animal rights, why, how they viewed it now versus before, how they believed others viewed it and what they thought about it. By doing this, more information about their core values, about hidden norms and ideologies, social pressure as well as behavioural change and change of attitude could be gained.

The interviews were then compared with each other to find recurring themes and patterns. For example, the sections where the interviewees talked about norms were gathered in one document to get an overview and to further dissect the theme about norms. In the process, it is important to consider the difficulty with generalizing the result. Thomsson (2010) argues that it can be difficult to draw generalizations from research. However, when the researchers strive to find hidden mechanisms and patterns, it is desirable that these can be identified in a larger context than the investigated group. If so, by reasoning, arguing and theorizing, one can bring forward an understanding of the phenomena which can make a generalization reasonable and relevant to reflect upon. When analysing and discussing the material, this will therefore be taken into consideration.

4.2 Ethical Considerations

Anonymity and free will are important to consider (Creswell 2014). The interviews were optional and therefore the free will was respected. Also, the data from the interviewees was treated anonymous and confidential (Kvale 2007). They are referred to as 'Vegetarian x' and 'Vegan x', depending on the interview order. By knowing they were anonymous, it might have led to a safer atmosphere which might have given more honest data.

Another consideration is the point of departure for this study. It derives from my own interest as a vegetarian to understand the process of becoming vegan. Me being a vegetarian analysing other vegetarians makes it seem relevant to be transparent about my point of departure. So, during the process, it was important for the validity to be objective and not let any preconceptions steer the research (Creswell 2014). By going through the material multiple times and having an interaction between theory and data opened for further discoveries and findings of new important subjects outside of the original theories and themes, which for example resulted in implementing TPB. To avoid originating from presumptions, the material was carefully followed.

When connecting with the interviewees, my basis as a vegetarian wanting to be a vegan might have been helpful. I tried to create a safe space where they would not feel uncomfortable when asked about prejudices and why they had not become vegans. By explaining I was not a vegan even though I thought I should be and everyone, including myself, have prejudices, it could have helped for them to open up and be honest about their feelings and thoughts. There is a risk in interviews of people presenting appropriate image of themselves (Alvehus 2013), but by being on the same level, it might have prevented it. Now, I could relate to both the vegetarians and the vegans, since I explained I strived towards becoming vegan.

Another factor worth mentioning is the homogeneous group of interviewees. Almost everyone were white middle-class women who had studied on university. They all lived in bigger cities like Uppsala or Stockholm, however, where they had grown up differed. Some had lived in rural areas and some had lived outside of Sweden. However, it is important to be transparent about the homogenous group studied in this research. The result might not be applicable to everyone because of the lack of difference on social class, ethnicity, gender and place of residence.

5 Result and analysis

In this chapter, the result and analysis are presented by introducing several identified themes from the interviews and putting them in relation to the theories.

5.1 The perceptions of veganism

In the first section, the discussed perceptions such as prejudices and the view on veganism are presented and analysed to see what recurring discourses are being used and reproduced.

The stereotypic vegan: a judgemental, radical hippie

You're like active within environment and societal questions, you should be an anti-racist, [...], you're a bit left-winged, you shop at flea markets, you're like, maybe you'll have an ear or nose piercing, you're a bit bohemian slash hipsterish.

- Vegetarian 2

The recurring image of vegans was them being a certain kind of people, a prejudice often connected to hipsters and hippies. Also, a radical animal rights activist, a prejudice almost every vegan had experienced. Many also experienced vegans being ridiculed in media, such as TV-series, and social media. Not many positive personality traits were mentioned, but some vegetarians talked about vegans as strong people with strong values. A negative personality trait was them being judgemental and blithering. Despite the vegetarians described this image being disproved and knowing it probably was not true, they kept referring to it throughout the interviews, which indicates it being strongly rooted. An additional perception was that mostly women were vegans. This can relate to the opinion polls (WWF 2018; 2019) where women were more willing to do active choices in their everyday life to decrease climate change, such as stop eating meat.

The difficulties and benefits with being a vegan

The vegans said that before becoming vegans, their biggest concerns were to not get enough nutrition and that it would be too difficult to maintain. Thinking of veganism as difficult was a dominating prejudice for all the vegetarians as well. They worried they would need to plan everything and not be able to be spontaneous. Also, being 'that person' who complicates things when eating with friends and families was a big concern. According to the vegans, perceptions others seemed to have were that it was demanding to be a vegan, it was extreme, exaggerated and unnecessary, that every product needed to be vegan and there was a risk of getting malnutrition. The vegans also experienced an ignorance in society where they got questioned of what veganism was and met with scepticism.

Since the way we talk and the discourses used both constitutes and are constituted by the social world (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002), the discourses found in previous research (Möller and Stålberg 2016; Cole and Morgan 2011) seems to be reproduced in the interviewee's communication about vegans. Images, which they had seen in different channels in society, appears to have been strongly rooted. For the vegans however, the prejudice of radical hippies had diminished after changing diet. It is interesting to see how descriptions of vegans found in the previous discourse analysis studies were some of the most common in this material. They found most of the discourses to be negative, which corresponds with this result. So, because of the recurring images in all interviews, it is reasonable to believe these are strong discourses being reproduced.

How the image might be reproduced and changed

When asked where their image came from, few people referred to a person they had met. Instead, everyone said society, such as movies, TV-series, social media and mass media. Many described how veganism had been made fun of in those channels and portrayed as extreme. All interviewees also talked about how vegetarians used to be considered extreme as well, which during the last three to five years had changed. Now, it was considered quite ordinary since a lot of people ate vegetarian food. Vegan food however, was not yet viewed the same. However, the stereotypic image of vegans as hippies seems to be in the process of changing according to the interviewees, foremost the vegans. They said more people seemed to be aware of what a vegan was, and they did not need to answer as many questions about their choice of diet anymore. However, it was still considered as extreme according to most of the interviewees.

A reason for the changing view mentioned by many were more celebrities, such as artists and athletes becoming vegans and talking about it differently.

I had a very prejudiced image one can say. It has to be a hippie, it has to be a person who isn't using make up haha. [...] And the more I read about it and saw that athletes or people who are very strong and actually are vegans and all celebrities and politicians, I was like 'Oh, so it can be anyone basically'.

- *Vegan 1*

Seeing people who contradicted with their previous image gave an alternative image of what a vegan was and it also normalized the diet. Some interviewees believed this plausible change of image and awareness might be due to climate change.

I feel like this is not a trend that will just be here and then disappear. If we hadn't had the climate effects it might have passed but now there's a reason that people have grasped this trend. It's not because you want something new in your life but because you actually want to make a change [...]. So it has become more positive and less prejudiced since more people are doing it and yeah, like big celebrities like Beyoncé [...]. So a lot has changed.

- *Vegan 1*

In coherence with what is being discussed in the quote, veganism might be seen as a way of contributing to making a necessary difference in society for some. As discussed in the introduction, more research has shown the somewhat urgent climate benefits of veganism. People might then be more aware of, and accepting, the reasons behind it. Moreover, celebrities who stand in contradiction to the stereotypic picture of a vegan as a radical, undernourished hippie might help in changing the image. This might result in the discourses around veganism to shift as well as to increase, explaining a plausible change of image.

5.2 Signs of a dominant ideology

After presenting the discourses used by the interviewees around veganism, their discussions about norms ideologies is presented which is analysed with an understanding of Carnism at base. This plausible dominant ideology has three defence mechanisms for maintaining meat consumption as the common sense, which are denial and invisibility of the ideology and animals, justifications for eating meat and cognitive distortions which affects people's view on animals. The result is analysed with these as themes in order to examine if, and how, this dominant ideology might have shown and influenced the interviews.

5.2.1 *The norm of eating meat*

So both ignorance and prejudices did that they [her family] tried to stop me or question me every time.

Interviewer: And how does it feel now when they see that you are doing fine?

Yeah, they see that I'm doing fine but still they're trying to 'but aren't you done with that? [a vegan diet]'

- *Vegan 1*

That eating meat has been, and still is, the norm shows when analysing the interviews. A quite common reaction interviewees got from families were questioning what they would eat, if they would be full and how long they would continue. The knowledge of what meal options exists which does not include meat has been inadequate according to the interviewees. They saw it both in the reactions from others but also through their own lack of knowledge. As kids, meat was the only source of protein they knew of. To reconsider the image of what a proper meal should include was difficult for most of them so the option to exclude meat did not occur to them when growing up. Instead, they ate what they had been told out of habit. First when someone told them why they were vegans they started thinking about it.

Further, several interviewees mentioned challenging situations, such as omnivores believing a vegan diet did not include enough nutrition without reflecting on how much nutrition their own food had. This questioning was a common experience for the vegans but the vegetarians had also experienced it when talking about veganism with others. Additional challenging situations were when eating at restaurants.

I'm just very impressed over the ones who can be vegans... It's like it becomes a very big norm-breaking and it really shows. For example, if you're out on a restaurant, yeah it shows everywhere that, yeah when you're going to eat, that you're a little bit different from the norm.

- *Vegetarian 4*

Getting noticed when ordering food and having limited meal options was believed to make it difficult to eat at restaurants, whilst the options for vegetarian meals has increased during the recent years, making vegetarianism more normalized. Thus, it is clear veganism is perceived as outside of the norm because they got questioned for their choice, there is a gap of knowledge and it is not considered as a nutrient, legit, long-term diet one should have. Fairclough (2001) defines ideological power as practices that appear to be common sense and universal which direct or indirectly legitimize existing power relations. Since the result indicates eating meat being the norm and common sense one ought to follow in order to not get questioned, it points towards it being a dominant ideology. This correlates with what Joy (2011) states, that Carnism, the ideology where one ought to eat meat, is dominant.

5.2.2 *The denied industry and the invisible animals*

All interviewees believed the animal industry was wrong and considered themselves to be animal lovers. Also, everyone had experienced similar feelings of chafe when being reminded that they ate animals. Most of them had never really liked meat since they felt a disgust towards it, yet they had kept meat in their diet. The turning point for many were when realizing their behaviour did not match their values, thus they could not consider themselves as animal lovers as long as they kept eating them. Some came to this realization

through media, like documentaries or YouTube films, some with help of acquaintances and some realized it themselves when searching for more knowledge about the animal industry and its effects. Many had similar stories when it had become clear they were actually eating an animal. One realized it when her parents ordered veal at a restaurant and when told she was eating muscles and another one realized it when she was defrosting a chicken and blood came out. Most of them described a feeling of relief once they stopped eating it, a feeling the vegans experienced again when becoming vegans. None of the interviewees saw themselves ever going back to eating meat.

The feelings of chafe and relief can be indications of cognitive dissonance, as discussed by Festinger (1957). When their cognitions contradicted because they knowingly behaved against their values of animal rights, cognitive dissonance could have occurred, resulting in feelings of chafe. Once reducing the discrepancy however, a feeling of relief occurred because their cognitions were not contradicting anymore. Further, some explained that after changing diet, they had tried to eat meat they had really liked before. However, once they were going to, it did not taste or smell good and some could not push themselves to actually eat it. Moreover, several of the interviewees talked about their changed view on meat as an eye opener; once they saw it for what it was, it could not be unseen.

And then I got to see how they did all that, like chicken, pig and I thought that after that, there was no going back, then it wasn't even motivated to like, yeah, like you couldn't have it unseen, so that's what made me take the step.

- *Vegetarian 2*

Getting the knowledge of what they contributed to when eating meat was thus discouraging for many of them. Most of the interviewees also talked about a changed view on how the society is working right now.

In the movie [...], two men who were talking and one said 'Here, do you want to kill this pig?' and the other said 'No, certainly not!', 'Okay but is it okay if I kill it?', 'No, certainly not!', 'But if I go into my little cabin and kill it?', 'No, because I still know you're going to do it!', 'But if I go in here then?' and he went into a factory, a slaughterhouse, 'Oh, then it's totally fine!'. [...] many are probably against it but it's like just because you can't see it, then it's okay to keep sponsoring it, it's weird. It became very clear then that I didn't want to sponsor it.

- *Vegetarian 1*

As illustrated in the quotes above, they described the treatment of animals and the view of them as disturbing once starting to see it. It made them not wanting to contribute to it once it became clear that they were. These realizations show interesting aspects of the view on meat as separated from the animals. Since many had moments when they fully realized what they actually were eating, it shows how hidden and disguised the animals are. It corresponds with the ideology of Carnism, where one of the defence mechanisms to keep people to consume meat is the denial and invisibility of both the ideology but also of the farmed animals (Joy 2011). By keeping those hidden, people often continue to eat since they are unaware of, or denies, the consequences, which correlates with the interviewee's experiences. Moreover, Joy (2011) talks about a cyclical process of our actions and our beliefs. If people believe, for example, cows are for eating and not dogs, the more they keep eating cows and not dogs, the more it reinforces their belief. So, once the interviewees started believing it was wrong to eat animals and the more they stopped eating them, the stronger their belief might have grown, which ultimately can have put them in a position where meat is not an option anymore since their belief around it has changed. This can

explain the disgust and difficulties they felt when trying to eat meat again after a longer period.

An additional discussion worth mentioning were some interviewees talking about the difficulty with connecting cheese and milk to animals suffering.

To be a vegetarian, it was easier because I don't like to be able to see the contours of animals, so if you eat chicken, then you see the chicken legs [...]. With dairies, you don't see that it comes from animals. It becomes easier to disconnect the consequences it has, that I'm eating my cheese.

- *Vegetarian 6*

So, when not seeing the actual animal body, it was not as obvious. Instead, it kept the animals and the industry invisible and easy to deny, which might explain why some of the vegetarians kept consuming animal products and still considered themselves as animal lovers.

5.2.3 *The four common myths considered as facts*

As described earlier, most of the interviewees did not consider it as an option to exclude meat in their diet, even though they could feel reluctance by it.

It's so easy to only focus on meat to be the only thing you can... That it always has to be something with meat when it actually doesn't need to be that way [...]. I just didn't know about it but once I found out, then... then it was pretty easy for me to convert.

- *Vegetarian 4*

As shown in the quote, there was an unawareness of other diets outside of meat. Many of them had heard about vegetarianism or veganism without considering it as an option and instead following what was considered as normal. When telling their families of changing diet, several was met with scepticism as well as an ignorance of what to eat instead. Most of the interviewees also described how omnivores often questioned if they would get enough nutrition when not eating meat, something both the vegetarians and vegans had previously been concerned about as well. Additional common view on veganism appeared to be that the food would not taste good. This was shown in the reaction from others were people tended to cook two meals instead of eating vegan food themselves or not wanting to order vegan meals at restaurants. It was also a concern some vegans had before making their decision.

People not understanding what to eat if not eating meat indicates how natural and normal it is seen. It is also shown when the interviewees did not reconsider eating meat even though many did not like eating it. Further, the scepticism they faced of possible nutrition intake illustrates an unquestioned view of meat as nutrient where the alternatives are not. Lastly, the view of vegan food tasting bad can show how inadequate and unnatural it is seen, making it not an option. These convictions correspond with Joy's (2011) and Piazza et al.'s (2015) 4N's of justifications. They are the four common myths considered as facts in society which justifies eating meat without questioning it, where meat is considered to be natural, normal, necessary and nice.

5.2.4 *Why some animals are okay to eat whilst others are not*

I always thought people who ate horse meat was like 'HOW can you eat horse meat!' haha, and I think I saw some picture or movie about people that ate dogs in China and was like

‘What on earth!’, so [...] I’ve always loved animals and when I started to compare which animals I loved then, yeah well then maybe I started... thinking a bit...

- *Vegan 4*

Several interviewees said they had an awakening when realizing they viewed and cared for animals differently, as shown in the quote above. When reflecting on their attitudes and behaviours, they started changing their view. Once realizing what they contributed to, they found the system of animal agriculture as strange. Many thought of which animals they loved and why, which in the resulted in them becoming vegans. This correlates with Joy’s (2011) discussion of cognitive distortion as one of the defence mechanisms for consuming meat, where the view on animals is culturally conditioned. People learn that some animals are edible and as products for consumption whilst others are not. This view appeared to have been strongly fixed for them before becoming aware of it. Moreover, since we culturally are learned which animals to categorize as inedible and edible, Joy (2011) explains that people normally react with disgust when faced with meat from an animal they have classified as inedible, since they picture the living animal it came from. As the interviewees encountered, dogs are seen as inedible animals people often have a personal connection to whilst a pig, for example, is fine to eat. So, the only thing differs is our perception of the animal.

Further, cognitive distortion was shown when interviewees told others they were vegans and why. A common question was what would happen to all the animals if everyone became vegans. This might show how rooted the ideology of meat consumption is and the view of farmed animals as food, when not knowing how these animals could exist otherwise. Moreover, it might be a sign of cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957) where cognitions are added in order to try to convince themselves they are acting right. If stating that veganism is also a bad alternative for the animals because all might be killed, the guilt for eating animals might be decreased.

Moreover, several talked about encounters where omnivores had been defensive when finding out they were vegetarians or vegans and they often, unquestioned, defended their choice of eating meat. This might illustrate the view of animals as products and if it would change, people would have to realize their contribution to animals being killed. Instead, they might react strongly and defend their meat consumption. It coheres with how Festinger (1957) explains cognitive dissonance and why people tend to change their attitude instead of their behaviour, so they can avoid facing hard emotions and realizations. By adding cognitions and convincing themselves their behaviour is right, the discrepancy can decrease. In addition, the example can also show how separated farmed animals appears to be from other animals, as well as how the view is that they *should* be eaten, how that is the dominant ideology. Connecting Fairclough’s (1992) view on discourses as constituting the society where people are creating the reality. If there are strong discourses around how to view animals, it is fair to believe people are learning those depending on their culture. This view might simplify for adding cognitions and keeping an attitude that farmed animals are for food, since it is the norm. Because of this norm, the people in the examples can believe they still love animals and it is not wrong for farmed animals to be killed because they have been taught to believe they are for food. Since the view of animals as edible and products are one of the defence mechanisms needed for keep consuming meat (Joy 2011), when this view changed for the interviewees, it made them stop eating meat. Thus, that defence mechanism needed for consuming meat did not work anymore.

5.3 Attitudes, beliefs and behaviours

After having treated the discourse used by the interviewees and how this shows signs of Carnism being the dominant ideology, the effect this might have will be discussed. For the

last section, the result regarding the decision-making process is treated, focusing on values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour. The analysis investigates how these might interact with each other when making a decision and what believed consequences there are, where theories are put in relation to the result and analysis for further understanding.

5.3.1 *Values versus behaviour*

A core value all interviewees shared was their empathy and love for animals. For the vegetarians, their willingness to not contribute to animals hurting was what had motivated them to stop eating meat. It did not lead them to be vegans due to lack of discussion and knowledge around veganism at the time, where most of them did not consider it as an option. Instead, they believed vegetarian was what was needed for them to cohere with their value. Today, with more knowledge and learning about the issues, several of them had started to feel a chafe again when eating animal products. Everyone said being a vegan is the better option, both for the environment and the animals. However, they also said they did not have enough knowledge to know for sure, but it was what they believed to be true.

Interviewer: If it's a bit better for the animals to be vegan and it coheres with your values, why do you think yourself that you aren't a vegan?

God, this sounds so terrible but because... [...] Like it's not good enough for the animals, so from being a meat eater to become a vegetarian it feels like a big improvement for the animals but to be a vegan, then... [...] like, yeah it's better for the animals but it's not like an equally big assault on them either so it's not enough for me to get over the threshold if one thinks about the complications it would be for me.

- *Vegetarian 2*

The vegetarians stated they were not sure how much they contributed to animals being poorly treated anymore since they felt like they had at least stopped contributing to the worst animal treatment and the remaining probably did not hurt animals that much. Since animal rights was a core value for them but now, they were not as well-read in the question anymore, it might indicate cognitive dissonance where the interviewees had diminished their attitude of how important animal rights are for them, which can be illustrated in this quote:

Yes, or I think I'm a bit in denial [...] Because when I was younger, I was very... I was really passionate about it and really wanting to change but then I think it became... Since I haven't done anything to change it I think I'm sort of denying my part in it.

- *Vegetarian 1*

In relation to what Festinger (1957) says, they could have added cognitions to fit with one of the cognitions, like animals are being treated okay in Sweden and drinking milk is not so terrible. They also seem to have reduced the importance they put on their attitudes, like it is more important that they have a flexible and easy lifestyle than animals maybe hurting a bit, and at least they did not contribute to them being killed which was important enough. By convincing themselves they did not need to change their behaviour, their cognitive dissonance could be decreased.

Further, when people invest a lot of time and energy in a goal and then finds out their goal was not as they expected or believed, cognitive dissonance can occur (Cooper et al. 2005). Thus, to reduce the cognitive dissonance, they justify their efforts and convince themselves that the goal is more worthwhile and attractive than it really is. There are indications of this phenomena for the interviewees, which can be shown in the quote.

I have somehow imagined that it's pretty good in Sweden [...]. I have this like glorified image that animals can go outside. I don't know if it's true in Sweden really, but I have that image and I don't really feel so bad for them.

- *Vegetarian 3*

Since they have put a lot of effort and time in becoming vegetarians believing they would achieve their goal of not hurting animals, finding out they might have still contributed to it would be difficult to face. Since most of the vegans decided from the beginning they would strive to be vegans, that was their goal, which it was not for most of the vegetarians. So, they might have convinced themselves they are behaving in accordance to their values and does not harm animals to bring their behaviour in line with their values.

Moreover, a reason for the interviewees stating they did not have enough knowledge about the impact vegetarianism has on animals can be due to what Allgeier et al. (1979) argues for when it comes to cognitive dissonance. People are rather perceived as incompetent than dishonest, since a dishonest person whose thoughts does not cohere with their words and behaviour is difficult to trust, thus making it an unattractive personality trait. Therefore, saying they are incompetent in that question might be because they do not want to be perceived as dishonest by knowingly acting against their values.

5.3.2 *The three beliefs that guides the behaviour*

The believed social pressure

The vegetarians all consistently talked about their concerns of the perception of others.

I want to go towards being a vegan as well but then it's another step, it's more difficult...
And there it really is that you're the annoying person.

- *Vegetarian 4*

There was a fear amongst everyone of being seen as another person, a person who is somewhat judgemental, blithering and inflexible. Thus, the previously discussed discourses of veganism seem to have affected since many said they did not want to be identified with that. Since they had foremost negative perceptions of vegans, they were afraid others would see them the same.

These concerns can be further explained using TPB where the believed social pressure and what people think one should do affects their intention of changing behaviour negatively or positively (Ajzen 1991). In this case, it appears to have affected them negatively since they did not want to be perceived as they feared they would be. The result shows that their beliefs of what others would think of them might interfere with their attitude of becoming vegan.

The believed control over the situation

Additional common reasons for not becoming vegan could be found, used by all vegetarians. These were the difficulty of eating with friends and at restaurants, how more time-consuming it would be and a lack of knowledge of what to eat. Thus, their overall biggest concerns seemed to be that it was difficult and hard to maintain being a vegan. Many of the vegans had experienced the same concerns but once becoming vegans, they disappeared. That it would be difficult to maintain a vegan diet were found in the media discourse analyses as well (Möller & Ståhlberg 2016; Cole & Morgan 2011). Having veganism being portrayed like that in mass media might explain why it was a big concern for the interviewees, making it a recurring discourse in the subject. Another concern was the feeling of commitment, where many saw it as once they had taken the step, there was no going back. They must stay vegans and could not 'cheat'. Due to this, many said they were

not ready. Some said they did not have what it takes right now. The perceived hindrances or ease with performing a behaviour is discussed within TPB, where the perception of behavioural control is another determinant factor impacting the willingness to change behaviour (Ajzen 1991). Thus, the difficulties the vegetarians saw with being a vegan have made them question their control, which then could have impacted the attitude towards veganism and hindered their willingness to act.

The believed consequences of the behaviour

Another common belief from several vegetarians was a view of their individual contribution as powerless and not being sure how to behave correctly when it came to climate change issues. They expressed feelings of impotence and being lost, a feeling many of the vegans shared. However, the vegans felt like they could at least lean against their veganism, thinking they did what they could. For several of the vegetarians however, they tried to not think about climate change. The quote illustrates a response when asked about if climate change was something they thought about in their daily life:

Yes, I can get a bit of climate anxiety but I also feel, yeah I think I need to read more. [...] Like, whatever I choose, it will impact the environment. Like avocados is super bad for the environment, soya products are super bad for the environment, meat is bad for the environment [...]. It's just that I can't navigate in that.

- Vegetarian 2

The vegetarians had similar views on climate change issues where they did not know how to behave correctly and were not well-read in the question. A possible effect from this can be detected when comparing to TPB, where their insecurity about the consequences of how much they could and would contribute to animal rights and a sustainable living could hinder them from choosing a vegan diet. This since the believed consequences of one's behaviour are important contributors when deciding on changing behaviour or not. If the believed benefits of the expected outcome is unsure, the change of behaviour is not as tempting. When not being sure if the outcome would be positive, the attitude towards it becomes more negative (Ajzen 1991). So, their lack of knowledge about the effects of veganism might influence their attitude towards it.

Altogether, the beliefs of the social pressure, control and consequences can influence the attitude, which in turn guides the behaviour. The stronger these beliefs are, the stronger the attitude can be (Ajzen 1991). Since their beliefs previously have been identified as strong discourses, it is reasonable these are strong beliefs for them. Thus, believing that becoming a vegan would lead to a more complicated and inflexible lifestyle where people would view them negatively, while not being sure if the consequences were worth it, it might have affected their attitudes negatively towards veganism, preventing them from wanting to change behaviour.

6 Discussion

The aim with this study has been to give an understanding of what might have affected and guided the interviewed vegetarian's decision when considering a vegan diet and the part norms and ideologies might have had. The discussion begins with the communication they have used, focusing on discourses showing signs of norms and dominant ideologies, in order to answer the first research question: *What perceptions do the interviewed vegetarians and vegans have of veganism?* Thereafter, the effect these might have on their decisions, so how it might have impacted their attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviours, answers the second research question: *What influence can these perceptions have on the interviewed vegetarian's attitude towards veganism? And how can this impact their decision when considering veganism?*

6.1 The perceptions around veganism

The discourses

Throughout all interviews, recurring and similar perceptions of vegans were found as radical hipsters or hippies who were being ridiculed in media, and as inflexible, blithering and judgemental towards others. Also, veganism being seen as time-consuming, difficult to maintain, a trend and not for everyone. The image was overall negative, and they did not want to be connected to it and being 'that person'. These corresponded with the ones found in previous research (Möller and Stålberg 2016; Cole and Morgan 2011), making it reasonable to believe these are strong discourses, where veganism is considered as outside of the norm.

The dominant ideology of Carnism

In the material, strong indications of eating meat being the norm was found. When analysing how this norm persists, Joy's (2011) research of the dominant ideology Carnism, where eating meat is seen as the common sense, have helped with understanding. Clear tendencies of the three necessary defence mechanisms, denial, justification and cognitive distortions, being used to keep meat consumption as the norm could be identified. Firstly, all interviewees talked about their previous ignorance and lack of knowledge of other alternatives and meat as well as how animals were treated. Many had experienced chafe and disgust whilst eating meat but continued, not realizing they could exclude it. Several also talked of moments when realizing they were eating an animal, which made the food unappealing. This indicates the defence mechanisms where both farmed animals but also the ideology Carnism are invisible, which makes the industry unquestioned and possible to deny.

Moreover, several interviewees said that mainly omnivores, but also themselves, did not understand what vegans would eat, why they had made their decision, how they would get all necessary nutrition and how they would keep this diet without exceptions. They also experienced a gap of knowledge around veganism and it was seen as a short-term option one should not adhere to. It coheres to the defence mechanism where common myths are considered as facts; that eating meat is justified since it is believed to be natural, normal, necessary and nice. It is plausible that Carnism is the base for these beliefs and it influences the discourses of veganism to be perceived outside of the norm and meat as the common sense.

Tendencies of the last defence mechanism could also be shown, which is cognitive distortion, where people are culturally learned to view certain animals as objects and edible whilst others are inedible and pets. Several interviewees shared stories of realizing they said they loved animals but only cared for some and ate others. It appears as once the system and animals became visible, the myths were questioned, and when they realized they

viewed animals differently, the interviewees stopped eating meat. Thus, the defence mechanisms contributing to meat consumption lost their powers.

Another tendency, not being as discussed in previous research, is the cognitive distortions and disconnection between animals and dairies. Many saw an association with meat coming from animals, but some mentioned the difficulty with connecting animals suffering to dairies. It is not as obvious since it is from a living animal and it is not a body. So, the interviewees might still experience an invisibility around the animals used for dairies. This might explain why they became vegetarians to avoid contributing to the industry but did not see as clearly how they still contributed to it when consuming dairies.

Answering the first research question: this study found strong perceptions of vegans as hippies or hipsters, judgemental, inflexible and blithering. Also, veganism is believed to be complicated, hard to maintain, time-consuming and not a legit option in comparison to eating meat. These discourses show strong tendencies of the ideology of Carnism as dominant and as the common sense one should act after, as well as strong indications of its defence mechanisms functioning as contributors to meat consumption. In turn, it impacts the discourses of veganism, where it is viewed as outside of the norm.

6.2 The impact on the attitude and decision

The influence dominant discourses can have on the attitude

The vegetarian's strongest concerns for becoming vegan were that people would perceive them negatively, it would be too difficult to maintain, and they were not certain how much it would contribute to better animal welfare and environmental benefits. How one believes they will be perceived, how much control they will have and the consequences of the behaviour are what impacts the attitude towards a behaviour (Ajzen 1991). So, even though many vegetarians thought they 'should' become vegans, it is likely that the negative discourses of veganism impacted their attitudes, making them not wanting to change diet.

Values, beliefs and behaviour

The vegetarians believed veganism was better for the animals. However, they also said they were not well-read in the question and thought they did not contribute so much to animals hurting by consuming animal products. Since their meat consumption previously conflicted with their image of themselves as animal lovers, it is reasonable their continued consumption of animal products contributes to cognitive dissonance. Throughout the material, tendencies of this were shown. Connecting it to TPB (Ajzen 1991), their supposable negative beliefs of veganism can have resulted in them not wanting to change behaviour since it appears too difficult. Instead, they might have added cognitions to make their attitude go in line with their behaviour, convincing themselves they are doing enough as vegetarians and does not contribute to animals suffering. Also, saying it is too time-consuming might be them decreasing the importance they put on their value to avoid cognitive dissonance. Moreover, saying they are not well-read in the question can be due to people rather wanting to be perceived as incompetent rather than dishonest by not following their beliefs (Allgeier 1979).

Additional understanding can be given when putting the result in connection to expected outcomes of a goal (Cooper et al. 2005). Being vegetarian, the goal was to not contribute to bad animal welfare. To avoid realizing they still contributed to it, they could have justified their efforts by making the goal, vegetarianism, more attractive than it is, believing vegetarianism is good enough and bringing their behaviour in accordance with their values.

A limitation with this study, however, is the difficulty with establishing if the interviewees are experiencing cognitive dissonance. Animal rights might not be a core value for them anymore, which might make them not experiencing cognitive dissonance. However, the statements point strongly towards it, but more studies are needed to investigate their core values and connection to animal rights.

So, how might the discourses around veganism have influenced the vegetarian's choice of diet? The discourses can have impacted the vegetarian's attitudes negatively, contributing to them not wanting to change diet. But, since they might experience cognitive dissonance, it can have led them to enforce their cognitions and convincing themselves they are behaving right to reduce the dissonance which then can influence how they talk about vegetarianism and veganism.

6.3 A new norm is rising

Henceforth, a new indication will be discussed which might influence the vegetarian's decisions further on. All interviewees talked about a changed view on vegetarians where it appeared to not be as extreme anymore, something also shown in sale statistics and opinion polls (Jordbruksverket 2019; WWF 2019). However, the image of veganism seems to be changing as well. The vegans talked about an increased awareness during the recent years where they had seen increased supplies, fewer questions of what veganism is, less scepticism and more institutions talking about veganism. Moreover, more artists and athletes are promoting veganism today, which is also discussed in magazines like *Glamour* (2019). This might help enable new role models who can contribute in changing the previous image. Some interviewees said that when they found celebrities contradicting with vegans as radical hippies outside the society, it simplified becoming vegan, making it normalized. Further, vegan athletes can disprove the image of them as undernourished. So, once people can adjust their image of vegans, they might consider it as a more alluring alternative.

Connecting it to Sparkman & Walton's (2017) research about changing norms. People might then be more capable of relating to the ones who changed diet during the recent years, such as the celebrities, than those who have been vegans for a longer period. Celebrities changing might also make people think there are new important facts to consider and that changing might not be so difficult. Continuing with what Centola et al. (2018) states; once a minority group reaches a tipping point of 25% of the population, it can change the norms. If the group size is under 25%, only 6% of the non-committed people tends to change behaviour. In the statistics from Sweden, USA and UK, vegans were 1-8% of the population. An assumption can thus be that the tipping point have not been reached. Conclusions of when and how dominant norms can change is though outside the limits of this study. Further research focusing on how groups influences each other with this study at base is needed, as well as the different influence celebrities and regular individuals might have. However, it appears as if social change is on the way due to the urgency of climate change. As Fairclough (1992) states, society is constituting the discourses, but the discourses are also constituting the society, which can be shown. The discourses and society have created an ideology where meat consumption is the norm. Due to this, society needs to change since the norm is contributing to climate issues. So, this might impact the discourses around veganism, resulting in them being on the verge of shifting. To further understand and analyse the ongoing process in society however, more research is needed that focuses on how the image is shifting and connecting it to research about changing norms.

Another element worth considering is the consequences of only focusing on young women. Since they tend to adopt climate smart solutions more and care about climate change (WWF 2018; Ica 2018), the result would probably differ with another selection of interviewees. Also the somewhat homogenous group of mostly white, middle-class women with a higher education is important to consider and keep in mind. However, the understanding of how discourses might impact the decision-making process is still useful and might be applicable on a larger scale.

Further, it is important to note if it is essential to become a vegan or if it is enough to reduce the consumption of animal products. Since sale statistics and opinion polls shows a

decrease in meat consumption but vegetarians and vegans in Sweden are not noticeable increasing, this is the result of omnivores decreasing meat consumption. According to Massow et al. (2019) and Leenaert (2017), non-vegans adopting more vegan meals is what will make the difference to reduce climate change. Everyone becoming vegan might thus not be necessary but to make veganism socially accepted and a legitimate option are. Therefore, it is of great relevance when striving towards an increase of vegan meals to understand the complexity of the question and why it has been outside of the norm, what defence mechanisms have kept it there and how the discourses can impact the attitudes which guides the choice of diet as well as their communication about it.

7 Conclusions

Looking at the vegetarian's and vegan's communication, there are clear tendencies of strongly rooted discourses in society around veganism, where it is seen as outside of the norm. These appears to have influenced the vegetarian's consideration of becoming vegan by affecting how they believed they would be perceived, how difficult it would be and the consequences and benefits of a vegan diet. Altogether, it seems to negatively have influenced their attitude towards veganism, affecting their willingness to change behaviour. However, a core value for all vegetarians were animal rights but, by consuming animal products, they contributed to an industry they were not comfortable with. This might have led to cognitive dissonance. Due to the negative attitude contributing to not wanting to change behaviour, they instead could have tried to change what they thought about their behaviour. Thus, by adding cognitions, they could convince themselves they were making the right decision and reduce the cognitive dissonance. Indications of this was found, such as believes that animals are not hurt by their consumption of animal products, that it is too time consuming and too much of a sacrifice. Thus, the discourses seem to have affected their attitude which influenced their behaviour. But where do the discourses come from and how do they work?

Throughout the interviews, the reactions they got from others and their own reasoning indicated the dominant ideology of Carnism. In order to keep the view of meat consumption as the common sense, three defence mechanisms are used; denial, justifications and cognitive distortions. Tendencies of the farmed animals and the ideology as denied and invisible were shown. Also, myths treated as facts in society were found, where eating meat was justified by it being natural, normal, necessary and nice. Moreover, cognitive distortions where animals are categorized as inedible or edible objects was seen.

Further, the study shows that the view of veganism appears to be on the verge of change. The discussion of the urgency of climate change, giving veganism a deeper and more urgent meaning, might be a cause for this. Since social change can happen through awareness, it seems as the meat industry starts to get questioned. Moreover, celebrities becoming vegan contradicts the image as radical, undernourished hippies. This might result in more vegans during the following years. However, it is left to be discovered through further research.

By connecting theories that can explain how attitude and behaviour influence each other with theories of possible norms and ideologies, interesting results have been found. The tendencies highlighted in this research builds on a study with young women. In order to draw generalizations on a larger scale, more research has to be done. However, this study can contribute in trying to understand the complex interactive relationship between the influence of discourses, norms and ideologies in society on individuals decision-making process.

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