Where Queer and Vegan Meet

The Development, Negotiation, and Desires of an Emerging
Intersectional Identity

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the emerging phenomenon of queer individuals more frequently practicing veganism; seeking to understand the role that veganism plays in the lives of queer people. Applying intersectionality, or an understanding that identity categories are intertwined (Crensaw, 1989), it is apparent that the identity categories of 'queer' and 'vegan' are to be examined concurrently and in relation to the systems of oppression in which they are positioned. This approach sought out to bridge the gap in literature that has evaluated such identities and practices in isolation. Following this theoretical underpinning, 16 queer vegan identifying individuals were recruited via social media to participate in semi-structured in-depth interviews. The data collected was analyzed utilizing thematic analysis in the first phase of collection and Grounded Theory throughout the length of the project. The results of this study found that the queer vegans involved viewed their identity temporally. This is first exemplified through the participants describing how they look to their past to explain the development of their identity categories as a step-by-step process in which veganism is viewed as a means to address the trauma that they have experienced due to their queer identity category. In the present, the participants describe how they must negotiate the current meaning of their intersectional identity in relation to discourse, ideology, social isolation, other salient intersectional identity categories such as race/ethnicity and class, as well as utilizing Queer Vegan social media groups and online communities to stabilize the salience of their identity categories. For many of the individuals involved in this study, their past developments and present negotiations with their identity categories are seen as investments for a future in which their marginal identity is considered normal and mainstream, but most importantly, the participants expressed a desire for a kinder and more inclusive queer vegan world. Through the analysis, it is made clear that veganism is more than a practice or a lifestyle to the individuals involved, but instead, is a defined identity category that plays a considerable role in the lives of the queer individuals involved, in which the

experiences of being queer influences one's practice of veganism, as much as one's veganism influences their queerness.

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Preface

"The human omnivore uses his freedom of choice in a most peculiar way. One of
his specific features is that he is amazingly particular- even finicky about his
food. Man feeds not only on proteins, fats, carbohydrates, but also on symbols,
myths, and fantasies. The selection of his foods is made not only according to
physiological requirements, perceptual and cognitive mechanisms, but also on
the basis of cultural and social representations, which result in additional
constraints on what can and cannot be eaten, what is liked and what is disliked."
- Claude Fischler (1980, p. 937)

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1. Introduction

It's a typical Wednesday night in Amsterdam and I find myself tucked away in a dim and grimy bar, hiding from the rain. Punk band posters, sexual liberation pamphlets, and anarchist graffiti surround the precarious table that I happen to be sitting at. Only a few streets away, next to lavish hotels and up-scale boutiques, is Dam Square, bustling with tourists. This particular bar is amongst scaffolding and construction; the neighborhood is in the midst of transitioning from squats and refuse to acceptable tourist traps and luxury condos. From the street, the bar is inconspicuous, with a simple sign and a dusty window, almost hidden away and seemingly on the margins of the encroaching threats of gentrification and consumerism. I'm not alone at the bar, but rather, the scene is bustling, with a line forming at the door. What draws me here is an event I saw on Facebook; a low price dinner the bar organizes on a weekly basis and is managed by queer people, or those who don't identify as heterosexual (Warner, 1991). The meal is advertized on the group page as being made from only plant-based foods, otherwise known as being vegan (The Vegan Society, 2018); and invites those who may identify as either queer, vegan, both, or none at all to meet new people, have conversation, and most importantly, share a meal and a beer with some *queer vegans*.

At first, the connection between queerness and veganism was a matter of coincidence in my mind; the only thing I could think of to explain such a peculiar intersection of queer and vegan was something that I could expect from the scene being located in the progressive city of Amsterdam (Gordan, 2014); or somehow connected to the stereotype of lesbians being vegetarians (Bianco, 2012). There was also a general intrigue with the tension between the two as queerness seeks to deconstruct binaries such as homosexual and heterosexual (Seidman, 2008), whereas veganism is centered on an opposition between what is acceptable and unacceptable to eat (Arppe et. al, 2011). Upon closer intersection of the terms queer and vegan online, there are a myriad of pages to be found on Facebook, from all over the world, with large followings. These pages unite the two concepts together under a 'Queer Vegan' banner; creating spaces for belonging and digital community development for those who are members of these connected networks. Everyday there seems to be tens of posts

where individuals ask for support, friendly conversation, a shoulder to cry on, as well as share recipes, spread animal rights information, and tell stories about their experiences interacting with heterosexuals and omnivorous people, some good, some bad.

I was elated and shocked when I came across these pages; a whole world that existed without my knowledge and all of it was so new to me. However, it should not have been such a surprise to find this world online, as the practice of veganism is on the rise in the global West (*Dalia Research*, 2017) and additionally, many queer people are adopting this particular way of eating to the point that the green stripe in the Pride flag may now represent those who are queer vegans (Le Vay, 2017). Awareness of both veganism and queerness are at an all time high, however, there does not seem to be any clear explanation as to why queer individuals, at an increasing rate, are choosing to eschew meat and animal products from their lives, which opens this project to answer the following research question: *What role does veganism, as an increasingly salient practice, play in the identity of queer individuals?*

Within this thesis, the research question is answered through the analysis of 15 semi-structured in-depth interviews with 16 individuals who identify as queer vegans that were recruited through queer vegan Facebook pages. These interviews were analyzed utilizing a queer theoretical perspective that seeks to challenge and contest the normalcy of heterosexuality (Warner, 1991), but also, in relation to this project, queer theory is applied to question the normalcy of an omnivorous way of eating. Both veganism and queerness are an act of 'doing', but are also ways of 'being' and can be conceptualized as identity categories (Butler, 1990; Griffin, 2017). This project seeks to bring the identity categories of queer and vegan together through the lens of intersectionality, which allows for an analysis that views these identity categories as intertwined (Crenshaw, 1989). For those that find themselves at the intersection of queer and vegan, the meanings of both identity categories are constructed in concert, but also over time and are dependent upon one's social context (Collins, 2000). With this understanding, it allows for the queer vegans involved to be positioned in relation to their context, but also relates the similarities of their experiences living on the outside of heterosexuality and omnivorous eating.

A series of sub-questions are posed in order to structure the analysis of the main research question. The first sub-question examines how the identity categories of queer and vegan are multi-layered and temporally constructed; h*ow have queer vegan individuals developed their identity over time?* The second sub-question examines the construction of these identity categories in relation to community and the connecting with others in real life and online; *how does the intersectionality of identity influence a queer vegan's sense of belonging?* The third and final sub-question examines the increasing practice of both veganism and queerness and how they are becoming more accepted in the mainstream; *how do queer vegans view the normalization of their identity categories?*

The goal of this research is to add to the body of literature that is already available on queerness and veganism. Past research has focused on each of these concepts in isolation from a multitude of academic fields and perspectives (Ruby, 2012; McIntosh, 2012; Adeagbo, 2016). Queerness has limited empirical sociological foundation as it functions to question the institutional means of traditional sociological methods, and because of this much of its base stems from the humanities as well as clinical gay/lesbian/bisexual identity research (Seidman, 1994). This is in contrast to veganism, which has a sturdy empirical foundation on which to ground this project in its understanding of veganism and its relation to omnivorous eating (Ruby, 2012). This thesis seeks to address the gap in literature by joining these isolated concepts together and analyzing the intersectionality of these identity categories. In a sense, Griffin (2017) began to bridge this gap by utilizing a queer theoretical framework to examine veganism, but the author did not focus on a sample of queer individuals, although queer people were included in the sample, thus leaving the role that veganism plays in the identity of queer individuals, in particular, open to future research endeavors, which this research project addresses.

This thesis is structured in a manner to guide the reader through the research beginning with the theoretical framework, which first outlines and fully describes the concepts of veganism and queerness as being both practices and identities, relating to a queer theoretical underpinning, which views identity as a social construction. This flows into an explanation of intersectionality, its relation to the various categories that construct identity, and how these are

contextually determined. Although queerness and veganism can be salient identity categories, they remain relatively invisible and rely upon disclosure, which brings us to the third part of the theoretical framework, which examines how disclosing one's identity category is an act that seeks to make a marginal identity 'normal' and how it can be a force for the development of community and digital spaces. The theoretical framework concludes with the presentation of the research question and sub-questions.

Following the theoretical framework is a chapter focused on the methods utilized for this study along with the research design. The chapter will begin by explaining the use of qualitative methods, specifically the semi-structured in-depth interview. This is followed by an overview of the process of finding access to a sample and how interviewees were recruited, from there, the overall experience of establishing trust amongst these respondents will be discussed as well as a thorough description of the sample. Next, the concepts of identity, community, queerness, veganism, and intersectionality are explained and expanded upon in their relation to the construction of the interview guide. The methods of analysis will then be discussed, focusing on the use of thematic analysis to develop themes, along with grounded theory and member checks to develop a coding scheme. This chapter ends with a discussion of the validity, reliability, and ethical concerns of the research.

In the following chapter, the results of the analysis will be presented. The 'Results' chapter is structured into three parts, the first examining the temporality of identity and how queer and vegan identity categories are developed over the interviewees life and influenced by their experiences with community and trauma. The second part explores how the interviewees must negotiate the meanings of their identity in relation to various aspects of their contextual life, including their system of beliefs that guide the construction of their identity categories, their sense of social isolation, the intersection of other identity categories such as race/ethnicity and class, and the importance of online communities to support their sense of identity. The chapter ends with the third part that explores how the interviewees view the future of their identity categories in the face of normalization as well as the utopian visions they may have of the world.

The thesis will conclude with a robust discussion of the analysis through answering the posed sub-questions and main research question. Limitations to the research will be presented, making a note of reflexivity in the project and how the study could be improved. The chapter will end with theoretical implications that the project raises and recommendations for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter is organized into four sub-chapters, which will be used as a means to guide the reader through the theoretical underpinnings and empirical base of the overall research project. The first sub-chapter 'What a queer way to eat!' is the initial stepping stone into the thesis, outlining veganism, queerness and providing a foundational understanding of the queer theoretical perspective. In this sub-chapter, it will be argued that veganism is a non-normative eating/consumption practice that positions those who follow such guidelines on the margins of society; and from this vantage point, veganism can be considered a queer practice.

The argument that veganism is *queer* leads the reader into the second sub-chapter 'Queer Vegans – Interconnected Identities' which outlines that those who follow non-normative practices can be stigmatized by society, often positioning such practices as a form of identity. Queer theory argues that identity is socially constructed and the meanings that identity categories hold are contextually contingent. For queer identifying individuals, their sexuality and gender identity categories are created in relation to heterosexuality, in which queer people diverge and differ from the normative conceptualization of sexuality being between a man and a woman. It is argued, that veganism exists in opposition to the social structure of omnivorous eating, which constructs the eating of animal flesh as natural and normal. Up to this point queerness and

veganism are examined in isolation and are finally brought together into an understanding that those who embody both queerness and veganism as identity categories, should be examined through a lens that sees them as intertwined. The second sub-chapter will end after a thorough description of how marginal identity categories intersect, reinforce and influence one another within a system of oppression, also known as intersectionality.

The third sub-chapter, 'Coming Out Vegan in a Queer World' will continue the argument that queerness and veganism are both non-normative ways of identifying, but because these identity categories do not necessarily manifest in physical or visible ways, an individual must disclose their identity to others, otherwise known as 'coming out'. Disclosing one's identity is a means of managing an identity and is argued to be a form of identity negotiation in which an individual has the agency to control how other's perceive them and what their identity means. Disclosing identity is also a powerful means of connecting individuals with marginal identities together, creating communities around similar identity categories. However, for some, the disclosure of identity and the creation of spaces for marginal identities is a means of oppression. For others, it is argued, that spaces where queerness and veganism are 'normal' is a means of imagining a future where oppression is a thing of the past.

The final sub-chapter, 'Research Questions' will begin by summarizing the previous sub-chapters and identifying the gap that exists within the literature, thus leading the reader to the presentation of the main research question along with the sub-questions that this thesis will address.

2.1 What a queer way to eat!

  2.1.1 Veganism and Normalization. Veganism is a type of vegetarian eating pattern that eschews meat and animal products such as dairy, eggs, and honey (Rosenfeld & Burrow, 2017). *The Vegan Society* (2018) defines veganism as a way of living that seeks to abstain from all animal products, including those that are not consumed as food, including leather, wool, and silk as well as any form of animal exploitation such as hunting, scientific testing, and manual labor. The term veganism was coined in 1949 by the *Vegan Society* on a philosophical

and ethical basis of compassion for animals and as an explicit act of non-violence (Vegan Society, 2018).

The practice of veganism, in some shape or form as defined today, has existed throughout recorded human history in the global East and West; such examples include the concept of Ahimsa, a Jain religious belief in not causing harm or suffering towards other beings (Rankin, 2006); and was advocated by the philosopher Pythagoras in Greek Antiquity (Violin, 1990). Although practiced throughout history, abstaining from the consumption of meat was not given an institutionalized definition of 'vegetarian' until 1847 by an organized group of individuals, *The British Vegetarian Society*, in an act of protest against the barbaric factory style slaughterhouses that were polluting London (Beardsworth and Keil, 1997). Much like vegetarianism, the practice of veganism was founded in a rapidly modernizing society where technology had almost completely disconnected individuals from animal cruelty, but also a new era of geo-political and environmental threats brought a new consciousness and understanding (Wright, 2015). In other words, both of these practices were developed in times of great social change and uncertainty, much like our world today, veganism is becoming more widely practiced and is advocated by followers as being a way in which to save the world (*Dalia Research*, 2017; Erb et. al, 2016).

Despite the active practice by increasing numbers in Western society today, veganism remains a minority lifestyle in relation to omnivorous eating (Edwards, 2013). The dominant mode of eating can otherwise be referred to as *omni-normativity*, which acts as a dominating social structure that constructs the consumption of both animal and plant-based foods as the cultural norm (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992). According to Ahmed (2004) omni-normativity centers itself on a strict binary that divides humans and animals, and constructs the consumption of dead animals as normal and positions humans as a superior species. When a social practice is attributed with the label 'normal' it means that it has undergone normalization, which is a social process that grants certain ideas, identities, actions and behaviors as neutral, taken-for-granted, and objective (Foucault, 1990); this process occurs over an extended period of time, and such definitions of normal are consistently changing in relation to various structural and contextual forces (Danaher et al. 2000), in other words, what is

considered normal varies to a great extent and is largely situated around one's geographic location, class, race, age, cultural background, among many other factors. However, there are larger cultural norms in place, which is often enforced through institutional powers such as through laws and policies by political and government organization.

For those who exist outside an established definition of normal, they are relegated to a social position that is abnormal and problematic (Weeks, 1998). There has been considerable research that has shown that vegans are relegated to the margins of society (Edwards, 2013); for instance, empirical research has revealed that amongst a representative population, veganism is perceived as irresponsible, strange, and deviant (MacInnis & Hodson, 2015). In a similar light, Cole and Morgan (2011) have shown that veganism has been depicted as unhealthy by mainstream media outlets in which the safety of its practice is put into question. Along these lines, Simonsen (2012) describes how his own practice of veganism has ruined his family's ability to eat together, and is seen as a disruptor of traditional family values. For Foucault (1977) these ideal norms of behavior that veganism strays from are socially constructed and create a position in which all other forms of behavior can be judged. The author adds to this argument by explaining that those who exhibit conduct in line with the norm are rewarded and those who do not are instead punished, a theory formulated around the cultural norms of the law, crime, and punishment (Foucault, 1990).

As described above, within the process of normalization those that follow norms are rewarded and those that are unable to meet these expectations are punished, which Foucault (1977) describes as being a process of disciplinary power that seeks to "bring the unfavorable in line with the more favorable" (Foucault, 2007, p. 91). Through disciplinary power, normalization seeks to maintain social control with little force by defining a set of expected cultural practices, in the case of this project, the cultural expectation that one eats both plants and animals. It is argued by Lemke (2011) that normalization is fueled by the production of knowledge that creates social truths for regulatory purposes. For instance, the consumption of meat is supported by the state through dietary recommendations at an institutional level, thus enforcing omni-normativity as healthy and natural (Health.gov, 2018; GOV.UK, 2016; FAO.org, 2018).

2.1.2 Queer Theoretical Perspective. When it comes to institutional regulations of behavior, McLaren (2002) argues that the only way in which one can resist such processes of normalization is through individual self-transformation, in other words, one must deviate from the norms in one way or another. For vegans, the way to deviate from omni-normativity is to not consume animals or animal products and actively consume foods that are one hundred percent plant-based (Simonsen, 2012). The way in which deviating from such regulatory power has been conceptualized has been through the lens of sexuality and gender expression amongst queer scholars and those that follow a queer theoretical perspective (Butler, 1993; Plummer, 2008).

Queer theory emerged from Lesbian/Gay studies and feminist theory (Giffney, 2009); and initially set its perspective as a means of contesting the normalcy of heterosexuality (Seidman, 2008). According to Foucault (1978) the term 'homosexual' was socially created in order to monitor behavior of those who failed to adhere to social definition of acceptable sex between men and women. Adding to this theory, Warner (1991) argues that heterosexuality and homosexuality are structured in a normalizing regime that views heterosexuality as the only acceptable form of sexual desire, also known as heteronormativity. Heterosexuality, much like omnivorous eating, is not only expected from individuals, but is a social demand and cultural assumption. Engel (2011) adds to this with their agreement with Foucault's (1977) concept of disciplinary power and applies it to heteronormativity stating that those who fail to meet the demands of heteronormativity are rendered invisible and are thus alienated to the margins of society, in other words the homosexual is rendered into a categorical 'other'.

As heteronormativity positions heterosexuality as a cultural norm, it is thus taken-for-granted and an expected social convention, which according to Weeks (2007), is challenged by the theoretical perspective of 'queerness'. Weeks outlines queerness as a means of challenging the norms that are situated within heteronormativity, including heterosexual relationships, the institution of marriage, and the regulatory nature of ascribing labels and identifications for one's sexual desire. Halperin (1995) adds to this argument by stating that

queerness is a position point in relation to what is considered normal, and that queerness is situated in opposition to anything normative. Moving beyond a mere oppositional position, Halberstam (2011) argues that queerness is a point of heterosexual failure, in which new roads of gender and sexual possibilities can be built and is an imaginative position that exists outside the boundary lines of established norms.

By failing to meet expectations, it is argued above, one is free to explore other alternatives. Although, queerness has been presented as a means of diverging from sexual and gendered norms, it has also been expanded to include all those who live their lives outside mainstream conventions (Halberstam, 2005). In this line of argument, Ahmed (2004) describes how queerness is not only an act of failure to reproduce heteronormative conventions and values, but also can be extended to those who transgress other political and ethical norms, such as contesting the normalcy of murdering animals for food. Considering this understanding of queerness to be position in society in which one exists outside the normative, veganism can then be considered a queer lifestyle as it is in active opposition to omni-normativity. The practice of veganism puts into active question the social normalcy of consuming dead animals and exploiting animals for food, labor, entertainment, and science. In the next sub-chapter we will begin to explore how this queer practice can be transformed into a category of identity.

2.2 Queer Vegans - Interconnected Identities

In the previous sub-chapter, veganism was explored as a practice that sits in opposition to omni-normativity, which is a social structure that deems the consumption of both animals and plants as normal and natural. This is much like queerness, which is positioned in opposition to heterosexuality within the cultural regime of heteronormativity, which views sexual relationships between men and women as the only natural and permissible form. Veganism functions as a means to question the normalcy of omni-normativity and due to this position, those who follow veganism are subjected to the margins of omni-normative society and are perceived as problematic.

2.2.1 Stigmatized Identities. The act of being different from omnivores, those that practice veganism are attributed with the othered identification of 'vegan'. According to Wright (2015) veganism is more than just a practice, and because of the categorical label, it can be attributed with the status of an identity. The word 'identity' here is following the definition by Gecas and Burke (1995), which is defined as the various meanings that are ascribed to an individual by themselves or by others. Veganism cannot be only defined by an act of 'doing' veganism, but also how vegans views themselves, others, and larger culture. The same can be said for those who are categorical others in terms of sexuality and gender, i.e. the gay, the lesbian, the trans, the queer, amongst many others (Brow, 2011). According to Goffman (1963) those who are othered in society, like the vegan and the queer, are attributed with social stigma, in which their identity is devalued and not granted full social acceptance.

Social stigma, no matter the extent in which it may be experienced, is a uniting force that can be a means to bring people together over shared experiences, which Goffman (1963) refers to as 'sympathetic others'. This is best exemplified by the Women's and Gay Liberation movements of the late 1960s and 1970s, in which women and gays, as socially devalued identities, were united together to contest the oppressive dichotomous categories of man/woman and hetero/homosexual, all of which was done by means of the theoretical underpinning of gender and sexual essentialism (Stein & Plummer, 1994). Essential identity theory argues that identifications such as being a woman or being a homosexual are intrinsic biological facts (Tauches, 1993). However, queer theory contests this perspective using social constructivist theory to describe how an essentialist sexual identity constructs heterosexuality as a natural categorization, rather than one that is socially determined (Halperin, 2002; Gammon & Isgro, 2007).

Queer theory seeks to understand how socially constructed sexual and gender identifications emerge and how they can be contested (Namaste, 1994). According to Butler (1990) sexuality and gender identity emerge through the habitual and iterant performances of expected normalized behaviors. For women, the act of being a woman is repeatedly acted out in society and one

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monitors themselves in relation to social pressure; gender is not a way of being, but rather a 'doing'. A queer identity, then is not an essential identity, but one that is underpinned under a contestation to subjectivity; to understand how one views themselves in relation to their specific and grander socio-historical context and that one's identity is largely shaped by structural forces (Plummer, 1992). According to Green (2010) the use of sexuality and gender identity labels are given only within heteronormativity and the use of the identity 'queer' presents new opportunities to exist outside such constructs; one's identity then becomes that of doing an act of resistance.

As established in the previous sub-chapter, veganism can be considered a queer practice and because of its position in relation to omni-normativity, it is transformed into a resistant identity category in which one is actively doing the practice of veganism (Simonsen, 2012). However, veganism, as a queer identity, is in direct relation to queer sexual and gender identification, as omni-normativity is dependent and supported by heteronormative notions of sexuality and gender. Adams, (1991) argues that the consumption of meat and animal flesh has historically been connected to masculinity and thus refusing to eat meat frames a man to be effeminate. When one refuses to eat meat, they are then failing to meet the mandates of heteronormativity and are then stigmatized by society (Goffman, 1963; Edelman, 2004). In this line of thinking, Ahmed (2004) argues that veganism presents an opportunity to disrupt the heteronormative nuclear family meal, in which the shared consumption of animals and animal products that serves as a means of organic solidarity is resisted.

2.2.2. Intersectionality. As described above, heteronormativity and omni-normativity are intersecting and reinforcing means of oppression. This then means that one who identifies as queer and also vegan must cope with the social struggles of being oppressed because of identity differentiation on multiple axes. Considering that these identity categories are interrelated, their relationship between and to social structures must be empirically evaluated in tandem (Hancock, 2007). This evaluation of identity is called intersectionality, which as Brah and Phoenix (2004) state, intersectionality refers to "the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects, which ensue when multiple axes of

differentiation—economic, political cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential—intersect in historically specific contexts" (p. 76).

Intersectionality first emerged in the late 1980s in response to analyzing the social oppression of black women, an often overlooked and silenced group of individuals (Dhamoon, 2011). Crenshaw (1989) coined the term to address current conceptualizations of identity that isolated one difference from another, but failed to address how oppression compounds for those who occupy multiple category positions. According to McCall (2005) intersectionality has been utilized in research to encompass, "the relationship among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations" (p. 1771). Collins (2000) elaborates on this by describing how one occupies a social position that is determined by micro and macro systems of oppression. For Collins, intersectionality is an individual or group process of occupying a position of oppression such as race or gender, but these oppressions are interlocking on the societal level through institutional and cultural systems, which shape oppression and discrimination. One occupies an intersectional position within an interlocking system of oppression. For queer vegans their intersectionality on an individual or group level is that they occupy a position of marginalization within the interlocking systems of oppression that is heteronormativity and omni-normativity. Individuals occupy numerous categorical positions in which one may be located within position of privilege such as being white, but also a position of oppression, such as queer.

Within queer theory, there has been a call for the utilization of intersectionality when addressing sexuality and gender, which Butler (1993) views that the only way for a queer politic to emerge, one must strive for commonality amongst those beyond an isolated queer identity, but also including an understanding of how class, race, age, ethnicity, and ability are interrelated and influence one's social position. In a similar light, Varela & Dhawan (2011) argue that queer politics must acknowledge intersectionality of identity in order for queerness to be a project that is under constant deconstruction and negotiation. This is reminiscent of Crenshaw's (1991) understanding of intersectionlity to be located both structurally and politically, in which structural intersectionality focuses on how inequalities impact individuals and political intersectionality is how these inequalities and their intersections can be used for political purposes.

An intersectional queer theoretical perspective acknowledges that identity is socially constructed. McCall (2005) argues that intersectionality, much like queer theory, offers a critique of identity in which categories are understood as artificial and only have meaning within their context. Crenshaw (1991) confers with this position in which intersectionality offers an alternative to essentialized identity politics in which differences and commonalities can be understood between and within categorical groups. As essential identity theory sees identity as an innate part of an individual, intersectionality allows for one to see that identity categories and oppressions are controlled and regulated by social and cultural structures. Evoking Foucault's (1977) concept of normalization, intersectionality allows for one to see how a normative positions and presentation of the self can heighten one's acceptance and tolerance in society. In the next sub-chapter we will explore how these identity categories are disclosed and may serve as a means of developing group solidarity.

2.3 Coming Out Vegan in a Queer World

In the previous sub-chapter queerness and veganism were described as identity categories that exist in relation to normative society, by which we refer to heteronormativity in relation to queerness and omni-normativity in relation to veganism. For this thesis, however, we are not examining these identity categories in isolation, but instead are addressing them in concert as 'queer vegan', in which they can be described as intersectional. Applying intersectionality allows for an understanding of these identity categories as relational, intertwined, and in conversation with each other in terms of how an individual views themselves in their context and how they behave and act in the world. Often times, an individual or groups of people may occupy multiple positions of oppression; and when analyzing their identity one must take an intersectional approach in which identity categories cannot be isolated, but taken as a unified category that is interactive and defined by the social and cultural structure in which an individual is located. Queer vegan emerges as an identity, however, these identity categories remain invisible and rely upon an individual to make their identity known to others.

  2.3.1 Disclosing Identity. For many queer individuals, the act of disclosing one's identity is known as 'coming out' (Boxer et al. 1991). As a

foundational argument, Kus (1985) states that coming out begins when one first accepts their queer identity as positive. The need for individuals to first accept their queerness is because, as established, heteronormativity ascribes such an identity as problematic and negative (Engel, 2011). As one comes to adjust to their emerging status of being located in a queer identity category, they may stay in the closet out of fear of social stigma (Taylor, 1999). The fear or experience of social stigma may lead an individual to conceal their identity in order to remain within the normative; an act that Goffman (1963) refers to as 'identity management'.

Before one comes out, an individual is first 'in the closet', which is when one hides their queerness from others and, ultimately, shapes one's identity in social life (Sedgwick, 1993). Seidman (2002) argues that the closet is a modern convention that emerged to initially protect gays and lesbians from institutional and cultural discrimination. Similarly, Adams (2010) elaborates on the closet by referring to it as a "relational construct" (p. 236) that an individual can go in and out of based on social context. When considering the closet from an intersectional perspective, one's experience is intricately shaped by social identity beyond queerness such as race, class, and gender and that each of these identity categories determines where and when one can be 'out'. This is described by Orne (2011) who uses the phrase, 'strategic outness', which is a process that is conceptualized by the author as a lifelong journey of contextual management of sexual identity. The author theorizes 'strategic outness' using Swidler's (1986) concept of a cultural toolkit, in which queer individuals utilize a variety of methods to decide if and how they can disclose their identity within the normative culture. Orne's theory positions queerness as a socially constructed and contingent matter in which the meanings that are ascribed to such an identity are contextually dependent and transitory. In other words, for queer individuals, the meaning of their identity is consistently negotiated not only socially, but also in relation to the other identity categories in which they embody. This process is not fixed at one point in an individual's biography, but rather is a continual practice.

Considering that 'coming out' is utilized as a method of disclosing an invisible identity category, one can begin to consider it a useful tool that vegans

may also use to make their identities known. In this manner, Simonsen (2012) argues that when one declares their veganism to the omni-normative culture then that vegan comes out of the closet. According to Griffin's (2017) qualitative research into the lives of vegans in the United Kingdom, coming out narratives emerged from numerous individuals, in which when confronted with their new identity category as a vegan, they had to disclose to various individuals that they could no longer consume meat or animal products. Amongst the participants in Griffin's study, it was noted that their coming out experience was not limited to a fixed moment in time, but rather as a continual process, one that is often guided by a normative narrative of disclosure that has been presented through public discourse and action, especially through popular culture (Plummer, 1995); which we can expect from the participants in this thesis to experience the disclosure of their identity categories in a similar manner. However, it is argued that the normalization of coming out, in turn, has normalized queer identity, establishing a set of norms and expectations that further legitimize heteronormativity (Duggan, 1991).

2.3.2 Building Communities Online. Disclosing one's identity to others can be a powerful force in social action and community development (Jenness, 1992). For those who are socially marginalized, others who share similar identity categories may not be within their contextual environment; many queer people develop spaces of solidarity situated around such identities (Collins, 1990; Duggan, 1991). For others, who may be socially isolated within the normative culture, the Internet provides a wide breadth of options to foster community as well as a sense of identity (Pingell et. al, 2012; Chiou, 2007). Considering the argument above, Alexander (2002) refers to these spaces as 'Homo-Pages', which provide individuals, in and out of the closet, with queer-related information, as well as a network of advice and support in relation to one's particular social category. Likewise, Egan (2000) argues that for many young queer people, the internet functions as a space in which they can perform their queer identity, while still remaining in the closet in their 'real life' out of fear of their own safety.

The need for community is a fixture of marginalized identity development (Chiou, 2007). This is made apparent in Cherry's (2006) examination of vegan social collectives that strict vegans maintained strong social networks to encourage such a lifestyle; concluding, "maintaining a vegan lifestyle is not dependent on individual willpower, epiphanies, or simple norm following; it is more dependent on having social networks that are supportive of veganism" (p. 130). However, Cronin et al. (2014) presents an analysis of veganism in their ethnography of hipster culture where veganism is used as a means for individuals to build community networks through the presentation of resisting mainstream culture. The authors argue that for these individuals, food acts as a material for identity construction and a symbolic object "for group consumption where the shared identity is formed, confirmed and strengthened, and where status is developed and displayed" (p. 23). Both studies present veganism as a means of constructing identity in relation to others.

It has also been shown that vegans turn to the Internet in order for their identity to be developed; for instance, Sneijder and te Molder (2009) show in their analysis of online vegan discussion forums that vegans use the sites for identity scaffolding and the sharing of vegan discourse. These groups function as a means for vegans to feel supported by other vegans, but one particular finding that the authors noted was that the online vegans perform an act that the authors refer to as "doing being ordinary" (p. 627), which is described by how vegans depict their practice of veganism as something ordinary and non-problematic to each other. In line with Goffman (1963), which describes this online behavior as "normification," (p. 31) which is when a person who is socially stigmatized attempts to present themselves as someone who is seemingly part of normative culture. Although these individuals in these forums occupy a non-normative identity category (veganism) they still make attempts to present themselves as being in line, and thus regulated, by omni-normative social expectations.

2.3.3. A Utopian Departure. The normalization of both queerness and veganism, or at least a desire for normalcy, can be viewed as a lofty utopian dream where all people are vegan and marginalized identity categories are no

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longer oppressed by the normative culture (Caserio et. al, 2006). This may be a dream for some, but others argue that queerness cannot be normalized; but rather, is constantly in flux and taking a standpoint of resistance to normalization and, hopelessly, a queer veganism will always be oppressed (Edelman, 2004; Simonsen, 2012). But no matter the utopian ideal or anti-social disposition in which one finds themselves, it has been argued by Muñoz (2009) that the past and present negotiation of identity is an investment for a more queer world in the future. However, a queer vegan intersectional identity has yet to be established through empirical analysis, which in the next sub-chapter we will argue that this gap in literature should be addressed with this current thesis.

2.4 Research Questions

As established in the previous sub-chapters, veganism is the active practice of eschewing meat and animal products as well as abstaining from any activity in which animals are exploited. Veganism is a marginal identity in its relation to omnivorousness, or what can be referred to as omni-normativity. Normalization, as argued by Foucault (1977), is the process of ascribing certain behavior, actions, and identities as normal; normalization acts as a regulatory force. From a queer theoretical perspective, heteronormativity is a regulatory regime that positions heterosexuality as the only healthy and natural form of sexual expression. In a similar way, omni-normativity positions veganism as an unhealthy and problematic practice. A queer theoretical perspective acts as an oppositional means of questioning normative culture, and in this sense, veganism can be considered queer.

      Veganism is not limited to an act of doing, but is also a way of being. Early feminist and LGBT theory suggested that sexuality was an essential identity category, but queer theory contests the very nature of identity, seeing it as socially determined and situated within a specific context. A 'queer identity' is seen as doing an act of resistance against heteronormativity. Veganism and queerness are duly linked together in that heteronormativity supports and lays a foundation for omni-normativity and vice versa. Those who are queer vegans must be viewed through the lens of intersectionality, which sees multiple identity categories as intertwined; oppression and life experiences must be

viewed in concert. An intersectional queer theoretical perspective acknowledges that identity is socially constructed; intersectionality, allows for one to see that identity categories and oppressions are controlled and regulated by social and cultural structures.

Both queerness and veganism, as identity categories, are invisible to the naked eye and require an individual to socially disclose such identifications. Historically, queers have utilized the concept of 'coming out of the closet' as a tool in which to negotiate their identity to those who are inside and outside of the heteronormative culture. Coming out is theorized to be a continual process that many queer individuals maneuver strategically; disclosing only when they feel it is necessary. Coming out provides a means of developing a sense of group solidarity with others who share identify categories, but for those who are socially isolated, the Internet acts as a tool to develop one's concept of their identifications as well as to build a community. Queers and vegans have both used the internet to develop community, but also as a means of producing and coming into contact with discourse as well as making attempts to normalize their practices and identity categories. No matter how one seeks to normalize their identity as a queer or a vegan, or act in resistance to heteronormativity and omni-normativity, it has been theorized that all negotiations of identity in one's past and present, is an investment for a queerer future.

Within the body of literature on queerness, veganism, and intersectionality, there is a gap that unites the three concepts. Following Griffin (2017) as a template for this study, the author employed a queer theoretical perspective onto the study of veganism, establishing a similar theoretical framework and viewing veganism as a queer practice that acts in resistance to the omnivorous majority culture, which I have referred to in this project as omni-normativity. Although Griffin uses a queer theoretical underpinning, the intersection of queer and vegan identity categories was not sufficiently addressed, but perhaps a happenstance finding within the data that queer people do practice veganism. This relates back to the foundational query presented at the beginning of this thesis, which asks why it has become so common for queer people to adopt veganism, which Griffin does not address. Although, within Griffin's research the author finds a similar connection to the coming out narrative and veganism as established in the above sub-chapter, but there is no direct analysis of how either coming out influences the relationship between participants queer and vegan identity categories, and again, it is a matter of happenstance that the author

uncovers this finding. Within this project, I seek to fill the gap in the literature by examining the intersectional identity, queer vegan and actively moving away from the body of empirical research that studies these identity categories in isolation.

The main research question that is posed for this study is the following: *What role does veganism, as an increasingly salient practice, play in the identity of queer individuals?* This question synthesizes the main concepts of queerness, veganism, intersectionality, and identity in its formulation; viewing identity as a socially constructed and contingent process and salient meanings are continuously negotiated. This question is accompanied by three sub questions, the first of which is focused on temporality; How have queer vegan individual's developed their identity over time? The second sub-question seeks to address a queer vegan's sense of belonging and their place within a community; How does the intersectionality of identity influence a queer vegan's sense of belonging? And the third sub-question is related to normalization; How do queer vegans view the normalization of their identity categories?

3. Method & Research Design

For this project, an intersectional queer theoretical approach has been established in the theoretical framework and in this chapter the reader will be led through the research design. We will first look into the choice of method, followed by a discussion of the process of locating participants and a description of the sample. The next sub-section is focused on how the main concepts were operationalized in the form of an interview guide. This is followed by a description of how the collected data was analyzed. The chapter will end with a discussion of the research's validity, reliability and ethical concerns.

3.1 Choice of Method

Queer theory offers a unique methodological approach to sociology in which the structural power of heteronormativity is deconstructed, exposing how heterosexuality is reproduced in society as well as functions as a normative power to manage the sexual desires and gender expressions of those who fail to meet the regime's demands (Namaste, 1994). A queer sociology presents an undetermined method that seeks to question institutionalized methods of data gathering and analysis (McCann, 2016); and relies upon social constructivist theory to deconstruct identity categories (Seidman, 1994). From this theoretical perspective, classic sociological methods can be viewed as normative and reliant upon notions of essentialist identity categories in which a queer methodology is

one that questions such normalizing practices (Green, 2010). Browne & Nash (2010) refer to queer research as a means of exploring the instability of such social identity categories, how they are interrelated and dependent upon one's social context and culture.

Intersectionality research is strikingly similar in its objective position in which getting access to contextual data to understand how oppressions and oppressive forces are structured (Jordan-Zachary, 2007). For Collins (2000) the best route of action to reach this understanding is to participate in a dialogue with those who are affected by oppressive forces. Participating in a dialogue is a means of getting in-depth explanations and using "concrete experiences as criteria of meaning" (Jordan-Zachary, 2007, p. 261). Considering this advice, this project employs the use of qualitative methods as this is an empirical field in which focus is directed at how participants makes sense and interpret the contextual environment in which they live (Bryman, 2012). Nagoshi et al. (2014) elaborates by describing qualitative methods as beneficial for contextualizing unique experiences of individuals and small groups.

According to Charmaz (2006) the method that is chosen for data collection should flow from the formulation of the research question, and in this case, in-depth interviews were chosen to answer the 'how' question. Lamont and Swidler (2014) believe that interviewing gives the researcher a great depth of understanding of a particular individual's perspective and experiences; interviews may reveal more about an interviewee's perspective of reality through examining what is not visible, such as idealizations and fantasies. Pugh (2013) argues that interviews have a great strength of being able to uncover and give life to people's emotions. She argues that interviews provide a researcher access to meta-feelings, which are the accounts of an individual, embedded within culture and is used as a "measure of the distance between how someone feels and how they ought to feel" (p. 51). Pugh's conception of "meta-feelings" is a useful tool for understanding how socially constructed identity categories are contextually contingent and how ideology may form one's conception of their identity. Pugh continues, by stating that the details in interviews open a window for the researcher to see how an interviewee views the world.

3.2 Access and Sampling

When the research process began, the initial route of action to collect data was through an ethnographic study of a queer vegan organization, however access to the group proved to be a difficult task in which my 'outsider' status made trust almost impossible to establish. Griffin (2017) describes in his research of vegans that access of a marginalized group presents unique obstacles as these individuals are subjected to social stigma for their non-normative identity category and thus navigating these relationships can make trust difficult to establish. After several experiences with the queer vegan organization there was a general lack of access to informants and discourse due to two causes which I was able to locate; one of these being that the queer vegan dinners took place at a bar, which was open to the general public, this environment was not conducive for intimate community development and diners were treated more like customers rather than being part of a collective. With this dynamic in place, the second issue was that there was considerable boundary work enacted by those who organized the event, in which the 'regulars' were seated at the bar, in close contact with those running the event, and all those who were newcomers or tourists were seated at tables along the edge of the facility. After these experiences and witnessing the difficulty of crossing these borders, the research shifted away from the group and towards digital spaces in which queer vegans gather. Through an exploration of Facebook groups under the search 'queer vegan' I found four different groups that had over five hundred members and had lively daily involvement of over three posts a day that received, on average, 30 interactions by members in the form of likes, comments, or shares. This decision was driven by grounded theory theoretical sampling in which data searching is directed towards an emerging theory of queer vegans and where was best to locate them (Stern, 2011).

After these four groups were located, I made a request to join, all of which asked for new members to be approved by administrators. All of the groups asked those requesting membership to answer an introductory questionnaire; some questions presented were straightforward and asked for identification categories and how long one has been 'doing veganism'. As each of these groups identified in their descriptions or in the questionnaires, the act of veganism is a

constant negotiation with the omni-normative culture that they are situated, in which 'doing veganism' is striving to be as ethical as possible, or making life changes in which one is transitioning to veganism. For some of the groups this was made visible through such phrasing as "we must acknowledge that we live in a world where veganism isn't practiced by everyone" or "milk is in almost everything, it's okay if you slip." Other groups asked more complicated questions such as outlining one's ethical or political positioning. One group requested that the rules be read before applying for membership, in which at the end of the list an answer could be found; only having this 'key' would grant one access. Administrators explained their gate keeping as a means of protecting the queer vegans from omni-normative and heteronormative harassment and 'trolls'. The boundary work that is enacted by these groups shows that it is necessary to create a safe space for queer vegans and contributes to one feeling like they belong in these digital groups. Beyond the sense of belonging, some group outline that posts are meant to be for members to grow and learn from, adding to the expectation that these groups are used for the development of identity categories.

Once accepted into the groups, I contacted the administrators to ask for approval to post on the page to solicit/recruit participants in the study. Only three of the four groups granted me access, the page that did not grant me access did not respond to my request. My post outlined the project's goals of examining the intersectionality of queer vegans and my academic background. In the post, I explained that I personally identify as a queer individual, however, as I do not identify with veganism, my particular outsider status was noted, but received little to none negative feedback from participants. The decision to disclose my identity categories on these posts was to establish commonality in generating a safe space (Griffin, 2017), but also to ensure complete transparency with the interviewees by acknowledging my own outsider status in relation to veganism, limiting ethical issues that may arise if I were to withhold such status (Damianakis & Woodford, 2012). In the post, I outlined that participants should be practicing veganism for at least one year prior to the interview, as this time frame would grant participants with a breadth of experiences from which they

could draw from in the interview (Greenebaum, 2012). Once posted, on all three groups, in total 39 individuals expressed interest in participating.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) state that "selection of informants must be based on the best judgments one can make in the circumstances," (p. 139) and the selection of participants was primarily based on availability. For many of those that were interested, they were unable to take the time out of their day for an in-depth interview of an estimated 45 to 60 minutes. For those that did have the availability, we organized a time to talk via Facebook Messenger and I submitted the consent form along with a dialogue guide (see Appendix A), which outlined the five concepts that would be covered in the interview as well as an overview of the project. Interviews were conducted over Facebook Messenger audio calls and through Skype. The majority of the interviewees noted that not being face-to-face made the ability to talk much less awkward and easier for them to reflect on their experiences. Although it is argued by Chadwick et al. (1984) that phone interviews can be impersonal and lead to limited responses, this was not the case with the interviews conducted. Bird (2003) refers to this type of interviewing an "ethnographic encounter" (p. 8) as the interviewees were recruited on the Internet, it would only make sense to conduct the interviews in the same context. The Internet functions as a natural environment in which these individuals are often finding themselves and is a space in which they feel comfortable. This is in line with Sarch (1993) who found that interviewees who have less social power feel as if they have more control over the interview if speaking over the phone.

In total, 16 individuals were recruited to participate in this study, with 15 interviews occurring over a 17-day period of time from March 8th to March 24th, 2018. The interviews ranged from 31 minutes to one hour and 17 minutes; the average interview being around 52 minutes in length. The individuals recruited are located in the global West, and predominately in English speaking countries (United States, United Kingdom and Australia), with one exception of an individual located in Italy. The age range is from 18 to 53, the average being 36 years of age. The practice of veganism amongst the participants ranged from one year to 26 years, and four individuals identified as 'vegan-ish' where they are not strictly vegan, but strive to be. All interviewees identify under a queer identity

category. The majority of interviewees hold a bachelor degree and all but one is currently employed. The majority of the sample identified as white and middle class and/or from working class backgrounds; two were immigrants in their country of residence, one was Black, three were Latinx, and one was East Asian. In regards to the diversity of identity categories, it was expected that such variations would add richness to the data and that the experiences amongst the group would vary in relation to their identity categories. (See Appendix B for a detailed description).

3.3 Operationalization

The five concepts that were initially identified in this study were queerness, veganism, intersectionality, community, and identity. As the iterant research developed it was soon understood the negotiation of identity occurs over an individual's life course and with community scaffolding, while contributing to one's systems of beliefs and ideological development. These concepts and theoretical underpinnings were formulated into questions for the semi-structured in-depth interviews with the participants (see Appendix C); the guide is structured into four sections, in relation to the concepts, which will be described in detail below.

Beginning with veganism, the first questions set the mood and as Griffin (2017) implores, making sure the interviewees are comfortable in an interview setting. Having the interviewees talk about food was a way to easily frame the conversation around life experiences and how their tastes have changed over time. The second half of questions in this section are devoted to understanding the participant's relation to omni-normative society, their contextual experience, and how they manage their identity category. The second section of the interview is focused on the concept of queerness and is grounded in the life course negotiation of identity meaning. The third section of the interview focuses on examining the concepts of Identity and Community, in which the interviewee is allowed to reflect on the role that community plays in the development of their identity. The final section is focused on the intersectionality of queer veganism and the relationship between the two identity categories. In this section, the interviewee is asked to reflect upon how their experiences as queer and vegan

are related. Although intersectional analysis should focus on the relationship between and amongst categories, not isolating one from the other (Yuval-Davis, 2006); in this interview guide it was necessary to first isolate and then bring together the concepts to get a full picture of understanding of the participants life experiences.

3.4 Method of Analysis

The analysis portion of this research was iterative and reflexive from the first moments that data began to be collected all the way to the final analysis. As data was collected, there was a consistent back and forth with literature (Spiggle, 1994). The theoretical framework was formulated in tandem with the data collection, in which the reading of literature was an inductive process that both shaped and reflected the interpretations presented in the analysis. Spiggle (1994) describes how this type of research "permits the development of provisional categories, constructs, and conceptual connections for subsequent exploration" (p. 495). Charmaz (2006) refers to this process as "abductive logic" (p. 138), in which a researcher participates in creative interpretive thinking in connection to the data and literature, then returns to the field to check interpretations, which is a hallmark of grounded theory.

With an iterant process of qualitative research, thematic analysis, or identifying patterns within the data, was employed in the initial stages of analysis or what Boyatzis (1998) refers to as the "prediscovery" (p. 5) stage of inquiry. Three themes emerged in the interviewing process; they are, development of identity over life course, negotiation of identity in the present, and future idealizations. As the themes emerged the analysis transitioned towards a constructivist grounded theory approach in which it is assumed that identity is socially constructed and that these constructions exist within structural conditions (Charmaz, 2000). As Charmaz (2009) notes, the analysis must focus on the interpretation of the research participants' actions and their contextual experience that guides such actions.

Throughout the interviewing process, the interviewees were consistently separated into subsamples at various points of intersectionality, including age cohorts (18-29, 30-39, 40-53), geographic location (Urban, Suburban, Rural), and

length of time being vegan (1-3, 4-10, 11-26). The transcripts were coded within each of the subsamples and cross-compared. New patterns emerged and were applied within other subsamples to determine their reliability (Boyatzis, 1998); this process is referred to as constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The final codes were determined and organized under the three emergent themes (see Appendix D). The coding scheme was then applied to the data. The coded material was then reorganized and condensed into an outline, removing what Stern (2011) refers to as 'filler' and focusing less on providing a description of the data and more on developing an interpretation.

The coded outlines were then cross-compared with memos and available theoretical literature. With this analysis, intersectionality was applied as method in which the themes and codes are related to the relationship between identity categories; how they are experienced separately and together. The interpretation of the data and it's presentation is reliant on the temporality of identity categories; one's development is much like grounded theory, a negotiation of meaning is, ultimately, socially constructed and determined by past experiences, present context, and future desires.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

Queer theory challenges the notion of validity, as the subject and identity categories are a fluid matter that cannot be assigned to a system of measurement or comparison (Green, 2010). The individuals who participated in this study and the data that they provided is contextually contingent (Charmaz, 2000). What analysis that is made is reliant upon these meanings and life experiences. However, despite this theoretical positioning, the trustworthiness of the analysis can be addressed through the use of the coding scheme, which was developed to provide face validity, or in other words, the analysis, using these codes, appears to meet the initial aims of understanding these concepts and their relation to the interviewees responses (Bryman, 2012). The use of member checks, or the assessment of analysis process and interpretation of data by participants (Creswell & Miller, 2000), was utilized throughout this research with two of the interviewees. In these checks, I had the participants examine one of the interview subgroups (Age cohort 18-29 and Practice of Veganism 4-10) and form

their own evaluation. After a review of their assessment, I then had the participants evaluate the coding scheme. With agreement upon the definitions for each code, I proceeded to the final analysis of the data.

As this research project utilized semi-structured in-depth interviews, the reliability of the responses provided is a reliable measure; the use of an interview guide allows for the reproduction of the interview to occur with a wide variety of queer vegans, and be replicated, to a degree, with the respondents in this current study. The questions that were formulated are focused and amongst the data that was collected in the fifteen interviews conducted, answers between respondents could be compared and related. (Golafshani, 2003).

In regards to the ethics of this project, it was noted above that in the process of recruiting interviewees my own identity was made transparent, but also the ethical issues surrounding the interviewees must be acknowledged. All the interviewees were provided with a consent form that fully outlined the purpose of the interviews and that all the responses would be subject to interpretive analysis. In this consent form, interviewees were given an option to remain anonymous, but these rights were also extended to refuse such anonymity. Giordano et. al (2007) argues that giving participants the choice to disclose their identity can add to research by granting interviewees an understanding of their role and responsibility in the research outcomes. The authors believe that the possibility of non-disclosure affords the participants with a greater sense of autonomy and grants the researcher with confidence in the truthfulness of the information that is being provided. In a similar light, Kong, Mahoney, & Plummer (2002) argue that waiving confidentiality will add to research by allowing the researcher to have greater access to personal experiences and allow for participants to co-facilitate interpretations of the analysis. From the perspective of the current project, giving participants such power over their identity established a mode of collaborative research in which the interviewees were seen as stakeholders in the final outcomes of the analysis (Trivedi & Wykes, 2002).

4. Results

In this chapter, the analysis of data will be presented through an exploration of the three temporally situated themes that were uncovered in the 'pre-discovery' period. These themes function to explain how identity categories are socially negotiated over time and are done so for the sake of idealizations of a utopian future. The data is presented in reference to the themes and coding scheme (see Appendix C). The first section will begin by exploring the theme 'Development of Identity Over Life Course', which describes how the interviewees conceptualize their life experiences into a sequence of growth and progression of their identity categories. The second section 'Negotiation of Identity in the Present' will be focused on how the interviewees manage their identity categories in their current lives and how other intersectional identity categories, such as race, class, and age may influence their experience as queer vegans. The third chapter 'Future Idealizations – Queer Vegan Utopian Desires' examines how the interviewees present their hopes for the future of their identity categories in relation to normative society and how these desires manifest in the present. It should be noted that the concept 'identity' used in the formulation of these themes is centered on identity being socially constructed and contextually contingent; that identity is the meanings, actions, and behaviors in which one ascribes to themselves as well as consisting of categories that are intricately situated within a normative structural regime (Collins, 2000).

4.1 Development of Identity Over Life Course

The individuals who participated in this study identified as queer vegans, an intersectional identity that finds itself in an oppressed position in relation to the normative regimes of heteronormativity and omni-normativity (Rosenfeld & Burrow, 2017; Edwards, 2013; Warner, 1991). These identity categories do not manifest in visible ways, which requires an individual to disclose their identification to others (Adams, 2010); this act is known as 'coming out' (Boxer et al., 1991). For many of the individuals, 'coming out' is a continual process that

stemmed from their first realizations of their social difference. For most of the respondents their identification with a queer identity category arrived before they made the choice to transition to veganism; the practice of veganism did not become a salient identity category for many until they felt secure in their ethical motivations. As an identity category, veganism was chosen for many of the individuals in connection with their own negative experiences of oppression being queer. Throughout the life course of the interviewees, their intersectional identity as a queer vegan is perceived as an intertwined process of 'doing', but also 'being' (Butler, 1990). The interviewees view themselves as moving through time, a transitory experience in which the development of their identity and what meanings they attribute to each identity category is a step-by-step process. In the following sections we will explore how the participants developed their identity as queer vegans.

       4.1.1 Identity as Process. Every participant acknowledged that in their childhood they always knew that they were different from the other kids. For some, this difference was centered on their sexual desires or gender expression; multiple participants knew they were queer in some way from their early youth. For instance, Nyalah (23, they/them, Pansexual[1], 2 years Vegan-ish[2]) explained how there was always a faint voice telling them they were queer, but struggled coming to terms with the realization, "there was a lot of confusion, but always in, in the back of my mind there was like this… I kind of would describe it as a *hum*; it's kind of always been there, like white noise." The experience of knowing they were different, but not having the right vocabulary to express the feelings was a general attitude amongst participants that came from working class backgrounds. Once they were able to "break away" from their middle class lives, they were allowed to evolve their conceptualization of their queer identity category. For instance, Destiny (18, she, Queer, 3 years vegan) described how her identity evolved after being exposed to new identities when she joined her

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[1] Pansexual describes how one's sexual desire is not determined by gender expression or biological sexual organs, but rather that sexual desire is found through emotional connections with others (Callis, 2014)
[2] Vegan-ish is one who strives to be Vegan, but may "slip up" on occasion (McLaughlin, 2017)

school's gay-straight alliance, she explained "I initially identified as a lesbian, but then I started dating a transgender guy… And so I thought that identifying as a lesbian was not an accurate portrayal of my sexuality so I just started to identify as queer." By being open-minded to new experiences and a growing sense of one's identity category was a way for many of the participants to better understand themselves. Destiny's description of her expanding understanding of her sexual identity category is similar to other participants, especially those who identify as 'queer'.

Some of the participants expressed their difference from others by connecting with animals, and at very young ages were able to develop and stand with a personal ethic of non-harm. Amongst a minority of the interviewees, the practice of vegetarianism started at a young age. For one, they were raised as a vegetarian, but for others they decided to stop eating meat while still in primary school. Ross (34, he, Pansexual, 1 year vegan) described how a teacher told him at the age of four that animals were killed for food, which caused Ross, in that moment, to stop eating meat. Jasper (37, they/them, Queer, 16 years vegan) had a similar experience of becoming a vegetarian at a young age, but described how in their rural community where they grew up, the connection between animals and meat was kept secret from children, which Jasper was able to see through. At a young age, these participants were able to distinguish "the truth" hidden behind the smoke and mirrors of the meat industry. For many of the participants, albeit later in life, once they were able to see the connection between the harm of animals and the food on their plates, they began to make the transition towards veganism.

Although these identity categories have been presented isolated from each other in relation to their development, other participants described how their identity categories as queer and vegan were able to develop in tandem. For instance, Izzy (32, she/they, Queer, 11 years vegan) was able to make the connection between veganism and accepting herself as a trans-woman. Izzy initially went vegan to control her acne and the results of this life change was extremely positive. The practice of veganism, for Izzy, was a reflection of her desire to take control of her identity, and lead to her taking ownership of her physical body with the acknowledgment of her gender identity and pursuit of

gender transition. In this instance, and for every interviewee, the act of transitioning to a vegan way of living represented a major life change, and a means in which to take personal power over their life and choices. Amongst the participants, there was an acknowledgment that being queer is not a choice, but a facet of themselves that is essential, whereas being vegan was an active decision to live more ethically or healthfully. However, for some of the participants, although originally made as a choice, veganism has become an essential part of their identity over time.

For the majority of the participants their identity has not remained fixed since their initial feelings of difference or their first 'coming out.' Over time, they have been able to adapt to new information, environments, experiences and changing cultural values. For example, a third of the participants initially adopted veganism for health benefits, which was a slow process of eschewing meat and animal products, but as they became completely plant-based, they were able to make the greater connection to the ethics of animal rights. However, once an individual aligns their vegan identity category with that of animal rights, their practice of veganism becomes quite strict and situated on a binary of un/acceptable to eat or use. This is in stark contrast to those whose queer identity category is open to negotiation and development. For instance, Jasper describes how their identity is always open to interpretation, "I guess the labels I use are something like, agender and trans-masculine-ish and I don't know, sometimes a lesbian and sometimes a fag and also there's a really strong amount of 'it's all just made up anyway so it doesn't matter' (laughs)." The journey for Jasper to understand their queer identity was playful, but came with the help of others along the way. In the next section we will see how for many of the participants, their process of developing a sense of identity first came by disclosing it to others.

4.1.2 Discovering Identity with the Support of Others. As described in the previous section, the process of understanding an identity category for the queer vegans in this study has occurred throughout their lives, but for all of the respondents, being able to claim one's identity category came with needing to disclose to others For instance, Nyalah's acceptance of their sexuality did not

occur until they were given access to a community of individuals who they perceived to be confident in their sexuality and gender non-conforming expression. The acceptance of their queerness came with the help of a community, knowing that there were others with whom they could relate to. Nyalah describes in detail how they began to understand and explore their gender identity:

> "I've met other people who identified as non-binary and I always felt uncomfortable about it until I had met my current partner. I felt like I could not only get more knowledge from them, but more knowledge from those people who were like linked to them as well that were either identified as non-binary or knew people who were non-binary."

Here, Nyalah described how having a connected community network was necessary for them to take the next step in discovering their identity category. The journey towards their current identity was not done alone, but relied upon social scaffolding. This is in line with Mufioz-Plaza et. al (2002), which found that LGBT youth were able to gain access to identity information through non-family social support systems, as well as emotional support for the development of their identity. In a similar light, Nyalah overcame the fear of rejection and isolation only through knowing that they had a community to come out to, one that would continue to support them. Much of this fear comes from the fact that Nyalah's grew up in a homophobic environment and was rejected by her parents when she came out. Nyalah uses the term 'non-binary', which refers to a gender expression that is outside the heteronormative framework that places man/woman in a dichotomy. Among many of the respondents, the use of academic language in reference to identity category labels did not come out of thin air, but rather were encountered through community networks, their access to information on the Internet and, for some, their own academic background.

This sense that community serves as a reference point when one first comes to terms with their identity was shared by many of the respondents. For instance, Paolo (48, he, Gay, 26 years vegan) found that a gay community was needed in his first years of self-uncertainty. For him, his university's gay association and London's gay bar scene allowed him to affirm his identity as a

gay man, but once he felt secure, the community no longer served a purpose. Paolo's conceptualization of a sexual community is one that is closed off to diversity and difference and in order to explore more about one's identity, he needed to "get out of the ghetto," which is a point of view that he shares with the other gay identifying individuals in this study. This finding is similar to the results of LeBeau & Jellison's (2009) study of gay and bisexual men's perceptions of the gay community; positive factors included access to a social scene as well as for identity development. The discouraging factors were similar to Paolo's assessment in which around fifty percent of the respondents found the gay community to be shallow and negatively affected one's identity development.

The negative aspects of the above author's survey is related to the experiences that Tony (26, she/they/he, Pansexual, 1 year vegan-ish) found while seeking to explore her identity within the queer community, she explained, "…when I went to New York, I was surrounded by this very supportive queer community, but it was like if you aren't 'queer', or if you're not confident in your queerness, then you're not **queer**. The gatekeeping is real." The feelings of being pushed out of group, which she perceived as supportive, made it difficult for her to feel comfort in her developing identity; because of the boundary that she was unable to cross, her identity remained unresolved. Other participants expressed a similar sentiment, that within the queer community there are clear boundaries and some individuals actively work to make sure "only the queerest people can be queer." What is striking, is that amongst all of the respondents, there was a critique of other vegans sharing similar boundary making attitudes in which some individuals have a "holier than thou" attitude towards those who recently made the transition to veganism. Many in the study expressed how when challenged or given a hard time by someone as they experimented with their sexuality, gender expression, or their veganism, it was seen as counter-productive to the development and security of their identity. In the next section we will expand upon this and explore how traumatic experiences have shaped one's perception of their identity categories.

4.1.3 Dealing with Trauma. The process of coming to terms with one's identity is often met with negative feedback and abuse from family, community

or individuals of authority in one's life. Previous research has established that when one discloses their sexual identity or gender expression to family and friends, they are often rejected or experience being ostracized from the family (Meyer & Dean, 1998; Denes & Afifi, 2014; Grafsky, Hickey, Ngyuen, & Wall, 2018). Consistently, for many of the participants, coming out as queer to their family was met with parents refusing to accept the identification. Some participants explained that their parents suffered physical ailments in the aftermath such as a mental breakdown or a stroke, or the parents explained that their queer identification did not align with their religious beliefs. Many of the participants internalized homophobia in response to a home environment that did not condone homosexual relationships, which caused various participants mental distress. Others came out by accident or were forced to come out to their parents, in which they were forcibly moved out of the house or cut off their relationship with their families.

For many of the participants, there was also a lack of support from their parents and peers in their transition to veganism. Past research by Jabs et al. (1998) found that heteronormative "nuclear families" did not accept a vegetarian identity (p. 186); in a similar fashion Beardsworth & Keil (1991) found that children's desires to become vegetarian would often be degraded and covertly suppressed by parents. Among the participants in the present study, when they came out as vegetarian/vegan their family members reacted with such behavior including mocking, indifference, secretly feeding them meat or with a general response that the individual was just "going through a phase," responses that are similar to what individuals receive when disclosing their queer identity category (Stevens, 2004; McLean, 2008; Denes & Afifi, 2014; Cole & Morgan, 2011). For instance, Felix (31, he, Asexual[3], 10 years vegan) described how he comes from an abusive home environment in which his identity was never taken seriously, he explained, "When I first went vegetarian I was too scared to even tell my mom. I knew that she was going to ridicule me...my mother was like, she's kind of like huge bully." The fear of his mother's disapproval made a non-normative identity a site of discomfort for Felix; these same fears caused him to repress his

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[3] Asexual refers to the absence of sexual desire for other individuals (Bogaert, 2004).

desire to transition to male throughout much of his life. Although Felix was able to uphold his vegetarian ethic as a child for the sake of the animals, he was not able to live out his own identity as a man, all because he couldn't get the bullying of his mother out of his head.

Other participants experienced bullying as children for their perceived sexuality that deeply affected their childhood experience and their development into adulthood. For instance, Tony described how other children bullied her because she was perceived to look masculine and was called many homophobic names. In response to these negative experiences, she used vegetarianism not only as a means to escape her identity, but also to explore an identity she desired, she explained in detail, "I focused on the aspects of vegetarianism like 'this is what is making me feminine, this is what is making me pretty, this is what is making me pure' … I was always really sensitive about my masculinity, because I had like a unibrow and hairy arms." In this case, vegetarianism was initially taken as a 'counter-identity' to make up for what she felt her image and identity were lacking, a technique to cope with a stigmatized identity (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004). Eating meat was equated with masculinity (Adams, 1991); vegetarianism acted as a mask to cope with the real issues of her gender identity. She compensated with the practice of vegetarianism to counteract the shame she felt for being perceived as a masculine female. Her perception of eating vegetables meant eating in a more restricted way, in line with heteronormative perceptions of meat being a man's food and vegetables being feminine fare (Ruby & Heine, 2011; Sobal, 2005).

The trauma that was experienced by the individuals in this study due to their queer identity category was directly translated into the desire to protect others from suffering and mistreatment. Many of the participants made a conscious link between queer individuals receiving abuse by heterosexual society and animals being exploited and slaughtered by omnivores. For this group, heteronormativity and omni-normativity represent oppressive systems in which they were actively living in resistance to. Not participating in either is a conscious protest, similar to Clark's (2004) ethnography of punks who practiced veganism as a feminist act against the patriarchy. Numerous participants expressed that they could not eat meat or animal products because of the guilt

that would be associated with harming another individual and supporting systems of exploitation and oppression, which allows such to exist.

For these individuals, when they see images of animals in cages, the death occurring at slaughterhouses, animals being forcibly impregnated, they picture themselves in the animals' place. Their experiences of social oppression are projected onto the animals slaughtered for food. They understand the pain of being isolated, threatened, tortured, and helpless; for some they communicated this as "queer empathy." For many of the participants, the link between queerness and veganism is that as a queer individual, one experiences marginalization by heteronormative society and has been forced to adapt to hate and social torture. From the perspective of many of the participants, being vegan is a way to cope with the trauma of a queer experience, which acts as an end to the cycle of abuse and degradation.

The participants who conveyed that they were bullied or abused for their queerness, all expressed how "coming to find themselves" did not just occur when they adopted a singular understanding of their identity, be it sexuality, gender or veganism, but instead, felt that they were "living their truth" or that "a weight had been lifted" once they accepted that they were not only queer, but also vegan; meaning that their process of identity development did not become stable until they were able to come to terms with the intersection of veganism and queerness. This conception of 'living one's truth' evokes an essentialist understanding of identity, which many of the participants acknowledged that their identity categories were innately part of there existence, either biologically or psychically/emotionally (Plummer, 1995); however, in the next sub-chapter we will see that the meanings of these identity categories remain open to negotiation.

4.2 Negotiation of Identity in the Present

In the previous sub-chapter it was established that the participants in this study have developed the meanings of their intersectional identity over the course of their life. Their experiences and specific context has shaped the ways in which they have been able to transition to an identity category and feel salience to such identifications. For many, the act of coming out serves as a means for disclosing their identity categories. According to Orne (2011) the act of coming out is a

strategic process in which who and how one chooses to disclose is determined based off specific criteria and assessments. According to the author, each time one must disclose their identity, it is an active negotiation as to what that identity category means not only for themselves, but for others as well. For all of the individuals who participated in this research, they actively have to come out of the closet for all categories of oppression in which they identify, but not only are the meaning of their identity shaped by this constant negotiation, but also by the other intersections of identity categories in which they embody as well as by established systems of beliefs that scaffold their acts of 'being' and 'doing' an identity category (Collins, 2000; Butler, 1990).

In the following pages, we will explore how the participants negotiate the meanings of their intersectional identity categories; first by exploring how these individuals base the meaning of their identity categories off established beliefs systems and ideologies; second, through the negotiation with their social context, specifically how identity is shaped through social isolation; third, through how identity is negotiated through the meanings of other intersections of identity such as class, race, and age; fourth, through the influence of veganism on their sexual desires; and finally, how one's identity can be developed, and engendered through the use of online queer vegan social network groups.

4.2.1 Identity as Belief System. The practice of veganism is based on eschewing meat and animal products from one's daily meals and abstaining from activities and products that exploit animals. For some in this study, this practice is linked to health and for others, they follow a strict guideline that is outlined by The Vegan Society, an organization that provides information, education, ways to get involved with vegan activism, and lifestyle tools, services and products (The Vegan Society, 2018). This group acts as a normalizing power that situates veganism in opposition to omni-normativity and functions as a means to outline a boundary between what is and what is not vegan. Greenebaum (2012) notes in her study of veganism, that the strict definition of veganism guides the direction of a vegan's life, both personally and socially. The definition of veganism in this way is not actively negotiated by vegans, but acts as a structuring force that is supported by a variety of discursive means that comes in the form of video clips,

booklets, information resource packages and even, for many of the individuals, documentary films, most notably *Cowspiracy* (2014) which was produced by Leonardo DiCaprio. The Hollywood celebrity influence was a normalizing power for many of the respondents to stabilize their veganism as an identity category.

For those in the study who view veganism in line with the definitions outlined by The Vegan Society, they see their veganism as a moral decision and an ethical philosophy. However, some argue that the ethics of animal rights cannot be conceptualized as a rule. For many in the study, their moral choice to accept veganism was intricately intertwined with their queer identity. As noted in the previous sub-chapter, many of the queer vegans experience "queer empathy" in which they are able to connect their oppressed queer experience to that of tortured animals, in this sense, the definition of veganism transfers to a queer identity as well. Some participants went as far to acknowledge that they do not purchase or consume products by corporations or businesses that support anti-LGBT or misogynistic policies. An idea that relates one's identity salience with their buying power and consumerism.

When veganism is practiced from the perspective of animals rights, it transforms beyond a diet based on the avoidance of certain food products and transforms into an ethic to live one's life by, something that needs to be believed in and held close to the heart (Arppe et al. 2011). Many of the participants connected veganism to the religious concept of Ahimsa, or the practice of causing no harm to any living being (Rankin, 2006). These participants saw the concept as more than a belief that is limited to the practice of veganism, but instead, it had transformed into a spiritual practice in of itself. For example, Ross experiences more out of life and explained how veganism has become an enlightened identity, he goes on, "I think veganism is part of my identity now… I believe in veganism. It's almost like a religion." Amongst the participants who viewed veganism in a spiritual way, their perception of the world was presented as open-minded, in which they were guided by compassion and seeing themselves in non-violent resistance to the sadistic and exploitative omni-normative regime.

Veganism is strictly defined in a dichotomous manner, defining which foods, products, activities and behaviors are un/acceptable; and in this way

veganism is a normative power. This presentation of veganism is in stark contrast to queerness, which acts as a means of questioning normalization. However, despite this, many of the respondents viewed queer theory and queerness from a position of dogmatic authority and that there are proper ways in which to 'be' and 'do' queerness. For instance, Wendy (48, she, Lesbian, 12 years vegan-ish) described how she "isn't a good lesbian," others describe how they needed to read Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) to understand that they could explore gender expression. For others, their understanding of queerness as an acceptable form of expression only came when they saw representations of queer relationships or behaviors on mainstream media outlets. However, as we will see in the next section that these individuals found the need for approval of their identity categories because contextually, they find themselves socially isolated in the normative world.

   4.2.2 Social Isolation. As established, queer vegans are situated on the margins of society due to their oppressed position in relation to heteronormativity and omni-normativity. All the individuals in this study noted that at one time or another have been left out, excluded or felt like they did not belong or fit in. Multiple participants noted that they have experienced at least some form of social isolation in their family, education, work, or even with their intimate social group, specifically when they are encountered with activities centered on food, sexuality, politics, and religion, and often how these are intricately connected. Although some may feel socially excluded, others describe how they purposefully distance themselves from those who do not identify with their identity categories. Social isolation, for these participants, acts as a means in which they have to negotiate the meanings of their identity categories in the form of who and how they disclose such identifications, and whether or not they live with a sense of discomfort, feel unsafe, and/or threatened. For some, their identities only exist within compartmentalized worlds of their creations, isolating one identity category from the other, while others simply hide in the closet.

   For those participants who are located in geographies that are rural or suburban they often described being a minority in relation to their identity

categories and felt socially isolated because of it. The feeling of being alone, without community support led many of the participants to mold themselves and what they believe in to fit the circumstances of the heteronormative and omni-normative culture. For those participants who found themselves in geographic isolation, there was a need to adjust their vegan identity to fit their culture. Jess (26, she, Pansexual, 2 years vegan-ish) describes how she splits her time between the metropolitan city of Minneapolis and the rural suburbs of Eastern Iowa; she is not able to fully embrace her vegan identity because she fears that veganism's marginal status and exact definition would scare her family away, she explains in detail:

> "...being vegan is something that my parents really, honestly, will
> never comprehend. They don't understand fully what I eat. If I
> were to be like 'yeah, I'm strictly vegan now' which is something I
> can never plan on doing because I wouldn't be able to go back
> home..."

For some of the participants they felt they needed to hide and not disclose their identity to others for the purpose of protection, as aspect of Orne's (2011) theory of strategic outness in which one controls who is allowed to know their identity. Numerous participants noted that they had to hide their identity categories from their employers out of fear of losing their jobs or causing issues within the work place. Others described how they would need to isolate themselves from their co-workers in the lunchroom because they couldn't be around anyone eating meat. Some described how if they were forced to be around such individuals eating meat, they would get confrontational, which would further isolate them.

For others, they felt the need to hide their identity out of fear of what others would perceive of them based off of stereotypes and false notions. For instance, Paolo describes how he often hid his identity as a vegan from others because society is more accepting of a health vegan than they are of an ethical vegan. He felt that he needed to hide his identity because of other people's judgments, and most of all, he didn't want to answer any questions, which confers with Greenbaum's (2012) study that applied Goffman's (1959) theory of identity management and how vegans used 'face-saving' strategies to avoid

confrontations with omnivores that included such techniques as waiting to address issues at an appropriate time and presenting health benefits in conversation. The situations in which Paolo negotiates his identity is shared with multiple others who feel that they have to negotiate the meaning of their identity categories, or the perception of their identity in order to fit the situation and control people's perceptions and judgments. For some, this may be a negotiation of their ethics, but also for others, they avoid using particular vocabulary or definitions because they feel it is beyond mainstream understanding i.e. pansexual and queer identifications; a perception that their identity is an 'in-group' phenomenon (Jenness, 1992).

Tony describes how in her suburban community she is most bothered by how others perceive her identity. She describes that in the suburban working-class area where she lives there is little understanding of non-normative identities; to have such an understanding of identity outside of heteronormativity or omni-normativity is an expression of being educated, and to be educated is to be pretentious and "better than" those who lack such privilege. Her identity as a queer vegan makes people skeptical of who she is and Tony is treated as a spectacle, she explained, "where I live now I feel like a **big red thumb** because no one here is vegan, no one here is queer. No one here has even thought about it, like you're shamed for being those things." The intersectionality of her identity makes for a socially isolating life experience in which she must negotiate the oppression of both identity categories at once. This sentiment of feeling like a spectacle is shared by many of the participants, especially those who expressed how they feel that they always have to "be on guard" or defend their choices to those in the normative culture. For these queer vegans the intersectionality of their identity led to feeling gazed upon and objectified; and in the following section, we will explore how participants negotiated other intersectional identity categories.

4.2.3 At the Intersection of Identity. The participants in this study all experience life from a multitude of identities that also intersect with their identity as a queer vegan. Many in the study come from working class or impoverished backgrounds; their class identity often disrupts their ability to

fully 'do' veganism. For example, ever since Izzy has become a vegan, she has reduced the number of foods that she eats because of her inability to find work or keep a steady income as a trans woman. The instability of economic status has allowed Izzy to use veganism as a means of keeping the food bill low. For those who come from low economic status, food has transformed into a more pleasurable experience since they've become vegan, but it still remains a predominately utilitarian experience because of their lack of access. In this way veganism is oppressed by a normative social structure that is capitalism. For those who are unable to have access to vegan options, every meal is a potential threat of identity salience.

For others, their geographic identity prevents them from fully embracing their other identities, for Dylan (25, she, Lesbian, 2 years vegan-ish), her Midwestern location and the social connections she has in rural areas, makes her vegan identity antagonistic to the agricultural industry, she explains:

"In the Midwest, every other person you meet has some connection to agriculture, either they're a dairy farmer or, you know, they supply the cows or the pigs that omnivores can eat. So when you say 'I don't buy your family's products by my own choice'. I think a lot of people are afraid to offend their family and their friends."

Coming from a rural environment, Dylan's perception of coming out as vegan is an act of opposition against the normative culture, but because she values her home culture and her community, coming out as vegan could malign her status to those she cares most about. She hides her identity category or monitors her own behavior in the presence of these individuals, making veganism a negotiable identity category in its relation to her contextual cultural position.

For those with an ethnic or racial minority identity, the intersection with their queer vegan identity presents many challenges of management as they view themselves moving from their real life in their queer vegan social circles and to another world of their ethnic or racial community. For instance, Nyalah describes how in almost every community they find it exhausting to live out at least one of their identity categories, but they are most comfortable with black

queers because in this environment they can relax the most. Although, they express how even within their black community there is a misunderstanding of their identity as a black queer vegan, in this case she is presented with oppression even from within one of her categories of difference.

Religion was a point of contention for many of the participants in which their religious upbringing did not give value and/or abhorred a queer identity. For instance, Gian's (44, he, Gay, 3 years vegan) Roman Catholic background made it difficult for him to come to terms with his sexuality in his youth, he explains, "I grew up as a Catholic and it was preached that you are going to hell if you do this or you do that. That is a reason why I never really opened up…" For Gian, his identity was conceptualized as a threat to his security and presented itself as a potential to destroy his future if he ever came out and this shame was internalized. Now that Gian is far away from his home in the Philippines and has found pride in his identity as a queer vegan, he isn't afraid to hold strong feelings about his identity as an immigrant Filipino gay vegan man and feels that his identity is superior and supported by education compared to those who shamed him in his home country. Yip's (2007) research on LGBT discrimination in religious communities found similar results amongst respondents that religion can intensify internalized homophobia and lead to the rejection of religion in adult life. The author also found that amongst homosexuals there is a general rejection of religious communities, which corresponds to almost every participant in the current study, each describing their discomfort with Christian values. Now that Gian has embraced veganism, is has allowed him to let go of the shame surrounding his homosexuality, and sees himself as being morally superior to the religious family that seeks to oppress him. In this way, Gian's veganism is used to 'counter-act' his own shame of his queerness.

For those participants that are middle-aged, they all noted that their age has become an identity factor in itself, in relation to how they feel about their queerness or veganism, and also how they are willing to present themselves to others, and talk about their identities. For instance, Frances (53, she, Pansexual, 7 years vegan) described how her age has given her the ability to not feel uncomfortable talking to others about her identity as a queer vegan. Renee (53, she, Bisexual, 2 years vegan) and Derk (53, he, Gay, 5 years vegan) feel that their

age has given them perspective on social progress, in their youth in the 1970s and 80s queerness was far from being socially accepted as compared to now and can be a reference for the "vegan movement." Renee refers to herself as a "post-advocate," which she describes as being open and honest with others about how she identifies. For those who are middle-aged, the ability to be open about their identity to others is an extreme privilege that they believe is taken-for-granted by today's queer youth.

As this section established, the intersectionality of identity categories requires one to negotiate the meanings of each in a conversational manner, taking into account how one affects another and how to adjust one's identity. In the next section we will touch upon a finding of how veganism influences one's sexual desire.

4.2.4 Vegan Sexuality. At the points in which veganism intersects with one's sexual desire comes a notable finding; amongst the participants, most were romantically involved with a partner or multiple partners, and for those in committed relationships, monogamous or otherwise, their partners also shared a vegan identity category. For those whose partners were not vegan, there was an expressed desire for the partner to transition. This desire comes from the need to be able to maintain a vegan diet and to have a strong bond with another in which to sustain such an ethic as exemplified by Potts and Perry's (2010) research on the subject that found individuals sexual desires were situated on cruelty free actions and an ethic of veganism; their analysis of vegansexuality in mainstream discourse found that vegans are depicted as sexual losers with a direct connection between the heteronormative belief of masculinity and sexual prowess and it's direct connection to eating meat. Griffin (2017) found among the participants in his qualitative study that vegansexuality was expressed by individuals who found one's values, ethics and morals the preeminent attraction factor when looking for a partner.

Dating omni-normative individuals was not an option for multiple participants. For instance, Wendy describes how she struggled with a sexual identity category label for much of her life because veganism always took the highest priority. She explains:

"I felt like I needed to be with a partner of some sort, girlfriend, boyfriend, somebody I could actually talk with, and who wouldn't feel like I was trashing on them if they were eating dead animals, but I didn't feel like I could relate to somebody who could not see what they were doing, or even once they had been shown… like I would have no respect for that, and I couldn't be with somebody that I didn't have any respect for."

Wendy describes how she can only be with a vegan romantically and how this was tied with her process of coming to terms with her sexuality. For many years she thought she was bisexual, because she was only attracted to vegans. Her sexual identity negotiation was directly linked to her vegan identity.

Other participants describe how they went onto the Internet in order to locate partners who were also vegan. For instance, Paolo began a Facebook group in hope of finding a boyfriend who was also vegan. The page would also function as an open forum for other queer vegans to talk about their dating experiences, he explains:

"My ultimate idea for starting the group would be to get a fully vegan boyfriend (laughs). Yeah, that would be my ultimate dream. It never really happened… the group idea was to have a platform for people to discuss their own sexuality in relation to veganism. This could of course, be centered on discussions about how difficult it is for vegans to find partners that are also vegan. I knew it was kind of difficult for people, because I had bad experiences dating meat eaters"

Much like Paolo, who started a Facebook group in order to locate a queer vegan partner, every participant in this study uses the Internet as a means of finding other queer vegans to build relationships and community. In the next section we will see how these Internet spaces are used to maintain and develop one's identity as a queer vegan.

4.2.5 Mediated Sanctuaries. As many of the individuals in this study feel socially isolated or long to find spaces that are not hostile to their identity, interviewees have turned to the Internet to seek out relationships and

community with those who fall under one of their identity categories or at the intersection of queer vegan. These online outlets are a means of building identity support and to provide confidence for others, but what they represent is a space in which these identify categories are normalized, which for some acts as a bubble to protect them from the oppressive normalizing forces of heteronormativity and omni-normativity.

For most in the study, Facebook functions as a means of connecting with other vegans, for instance Katie (24, she, Bisexual, 2 years vegan) describes, "Facebook to me is purely used for vegan purposes. I literally don't use Facebook for anything else." Facebook is a means of plugging into a network of individuals around the world that share the same beliefs as she does when it comes to animal rights. For the majority of the participants who are members of Facebook groups, they see the space as supportive to the vegan identity, where they can air their grievances against normative society, ask questions, get recipes and cooking ideas, and to develop their overall sense of identity. Some even describe how Facebook functions as a space where they receive most of their information on animal cruelty, where they can post vegan-related memes, videos and other discursive elements that attempt to "wear omnivores down" and spread the vegan ethic.

For others, a singular vegan group is not enough, and the desire to have an online space for the intersection of their identity as queer vegan is the most important means of creating a safe space in which they can act out their identity categories without fear of having one or the other compromised. Many of the individuals in the study explained how if one were to post about a queer issue on a vegan page or vice versa that members of those pages would "call them out" or "degrade them" for posting a non-related subject to the forum. Ross explains why he chooses to follow only queer vegan pages:

> "The only vegan circle of friends I have is the online group called
> LGBTQ+ Vegans. And, the moment I decided that I was going to be
> vegan, I joined that group. They have held me together. It's a really
> really friendly group. It's like with the groups online, I just feel like
> they are so supportive. I don't know if it has to do with the fact that

we are all LGBTQ or allies, but it's a very welcoming place as

opposed to others which area bit, I don't know, snooty"

The group represents a safe space in which an identity can be maintained without fear of hostility (Cherry, 2006; Hillier & Harrison, 2007). For these individuals, support from a community is necessary to maintain an identity, when one feels the threat that their identity will be shamed, questioned or belittled it puts that identity at risk. Some individuals described how certain groups at their intersection could trigger another identity, for example Felix described how he could not join queer Facebook groups because they may have posts about cooking meat, which makes him uncomfortable as a vegan. In this case, participants also agreed that when it comes to these groups there is always a risk that when one identity is isolated from another, that it poses the risk of oppression, which is a reality for those with intersectional identity categories, if one category is isolated from the other, the individual feels fractured; the only way to live one's "truth" is to bring the identity categories together.

These intersectional Facebook groups represent an ideal community that exists within the digital world. It is a democratic space in which all members feel supported, heard and seen by their community, where any one can engage in a meaningful conversation, ask for advice, give hints, tips and recipes, and most importantly the group can act as a space where one can vent and let out their frustration with the other members about their experiences living in a heteronormative and omni-normative world. For instance, Frances describes how her vision of these Facebook groups is an image of a constructed utopia disconnected from the one in which we all live, she describes, "it really is nice to talk to people across the globe actually and about how things are doing on the **veggie planet** and on the **queer planet**."

The sentiment that Frances expresses is a representation of what an ideal world looks like for many of the individuals who participated in this study. As we will explore in the next sub-chapter, the negotiation of identity categories and the building of digital community is viewed by many, as an investment for a future where these identity categories are no longer oppressed, but rather, normalized in their own right.

4.3 Future Idealizations – Queer Vegan Utopian Desires

In the previous sub-chapters it was established that the queer vegans in this study have developed their identity over the course of their lives. Amongst the participants, the meanings of salient identity categories are developed through step-by-step self-discovery, the influence and assistance of others with whom they can relate and feel supported, as well as a reaction to trauma. In the present, their identity is consistently negotiated in relation to the belief systems that serve as a normalizing and structuring force, as well as to their social placement in their contextual environment, and the relationship their queer vegan identity has with other intersectional identity categories. In order to garner some sense of community solidarity and to build relationships with others who fall under their identity categories, queer vegans are drawn to Facebook where they can participate and be a member of spaces in which their identity as a queer vegan is considered 'normal' and not problematic. In their present lives, the negotiation of identity is seen as an investment for their future and for a global future. Strikingly, every individual expressed some hope for a future where their identity as queer vegan is no longer marginalized and the current era becomes a reality of the past. In this sub-chapter we will explore how the queer vegans in this study imagine a queer vegan future.

> **4.3.1 The Fight for Normalization.** As defined by Foucault (1977)**,** normalization is the process in which ideal norms are constructed and used as a means to judge all behaviors, actions and identities. For many of these individuals there is a struggle to express their oppressed identity categories in the face of normalizing structures. This includes a general struggle to find social and personal acceptance, which garners a desire to engender the same environment of acceptance that they experience online into their everyday life. As established above, queerness and veganism are oppressed identity categories within the mainstream heteronormative and omni-normative society in which they exist on the margins. Due to this status, many of these individuals believe that queerness and veganism are painted as an extreme or even "fringe" practices, and work everyday to bring these identity categories into mainstream normative acceptance.

For many, their queer vegan identity receives strong reactions from normative individuals, who act with intrigue and surprise. Jess explains how when she "gets reactions" from people that she tries to respond with care, maintaining her identity in hope of a future where these identity categories are part of everyone's reality:

> "...if you tell someone that you're gay they're like 'OH!' and if you tell someone that you're vegan they're like 'OH!' like its still so 'different' that it's surprising to people that I don't follow "the normal lifestyle"...I'm trying to make that a more normal, like it's a normal thing, it's my life after all and the next time that I talk to them, they won't have such a surprised reaction and it will become their normal too."

The ideal in her mind, as well with others, is that their cultures will adopt veganism as a different way of living, where there is no feeling of identity threat or hostility, an expression of difference and diversity as normal. This analysis is reminiscent of Greenebaum's (2012) research in which vegans tried to lead by example in order to not perpetuate stereotypes about veganism in the omni-normative culture.

Many of the participants expressed their desire to live as a queer vegan "role model," as they look to the mainstream for acceptance of their identity categories and want to be seen as normal and not extreme in their views. Slowly educating others, telling them their experience, and having friendly conversations are tools that many individuals utilize in their attempt to normalize their identity categories in the minds of the mainstream population. However, many of the individuals expressed their distaste for activist vegans because this radicalism fuels an anti-normalization narrative. For example, Gian believes making changes to an identity is a personal choice, and in the end, it is these small steps that will make a bigger difference, in which he sees activists scaring away people interested in veganism. He explains, "I can't see the benefits of being an activist... I think what I'm trying to do now is living vegan as an example. I live a healthy life, I can do it, I think I can convince people. It's a responsibility to helps humanity to become vegan."

Gian sees activism as "too extreme" and in order to convert individuals you must live by example. The future of the planet, and of veganism in general relies upon the conversion of others to live as a vegan. As Gian describes above, it is a responsibility to lead others in the direction of a cruelty free life, which many of the participants would agree in his statement. In this way of thinking, numerous interviewees discussed how they make concerted efforts to spread information about veganism, and to bring positive and "normal" messages of what veganism entails. Because veganism is a choice, it is reliant upon convincing others to make such a decision, but it is presenting the change in a way that is easy to digest. For example, Tony was able to convert her partner to veganism by transforming food into a site of exploration, and showing him the possibilities that he'd never seen from an omni-normative perspective.

Although many of the individuals expressed their desire for normalization, there are those who believe that a boundary between ethical and health veganism needs to be maintained. Veganism cannot be chosen because someone can convince you that the food can be good and that the life you live is going to be normal, instead it is a choice that is made because one is trying to liberate animals from a system of suffering. This sentiment is similar to Simonsen (2012) who actively sees a queer veganism being one that can never be normative and always fighting against oppressive forces. For some, the concept of choosing veganism for health reasons is a means of taking the power out of the term 'vegan'. For these individuals, their identity rests on veganism being a moral choice that goes beyond the self. The line between a "real vegan" and a "fake vegan" is threatened by the call for normalization through presenting veganism as a diet, as opposed to an ethic. Others also described a dissent from multi-national corporations offering vegan options and producing vegan lines of food products, as it was seen as veganism being a lifestyle and not an ethic, however, many others within the study expressed how this was a move in a positive, albeit normalizing, direction. This also brings attention to those that believe veganism is not a matter of identity, but rather what they see as an "obligation" and they are convinced that there is no real intersection between veganism and queerness.

Normalization is a way of presenting veganism and queerness to the mainstream. It is a way for these identities to co-exist, but for some, normalization is a means of presenting veganism and queerness as separated from their radical, world-changing position, and the real call is for revolutionizing the world under a single ethic and system of belief (Warner, 1999). When conceptualizing queer community many of the individuals in the study viewed the term as an overarching umbrella in which all people could find themselves under, as a global concept that unites every person, but from this perspective, it doesn't view queerness as a means of questioning normalcy, but rather as an identity category, which represents plurality and that everyone is marked by some set of difference. However, this is starkly contrasted by those who view veganism as a uniting force, once that puts non-harm of living beings over the acceptance of cultural, identity and behavioral differences, in which for these individuals a perfect world is not one that respects difference, but rather one that is universally vegan. For instance, Wendy explains that governments already legislate morality, but make exceptions for war, poverty and the slaughter of animals. She explains, that all cultures and all people should be united under a banner of veganism, despite cultural boundaries and divides, she explains:

> "...veganism shouldn't be a preference, everyone should be vegan...
> I guess there are people who are up in the arctic circle and stuff,
> but we should find a way to do it... but I guess there are cultural
> things... maybe I'm talking about an ideal world, which is
> doubtfully going to happen in my time, if the planet even survives
> that long."

The question arises in this commentary by Wendy, about what an ideal world in her mind looks like, as she negates all difference of perspective, experience and culture, while advocating that every person in the world should be vegan, no matter what resources one has access to, or what reality they experience. In this case, the belief that animals are equal to humans is perceived as a universal truth and a normalizing power that judges all those who may harm or exploit animals as problematic. The universal pursuit of veganism is one that is based in ableism and is an erasure of cultural difference, although this type of veganism questions

the normalcy of slaughtering and exploiting animals, it constructs its own regulatory power and seeks to, in turn, oppress those that don't follow its guidelines. An ideal world is one that adheres to the Vegan Society definition of veganism and for the vegans who believe in an ideal world shaped by this norm, their perception of culture is homogenous, and they view the world as a small space that can be conquered and colonized with their ethics. However, universalism in the future is not a future that all the participants envision. In the following section we will examine participants who see a future that embraces plurality and non-normalization.

4.3.2 **"Aren't we all Queer?"** As examined in the previous section, the desire for normalization of queer veganism stems from a socially isolated position in relation to heteronormativity and omni-normativity. The desire to feel normal can be an expression of wanting to "fit in" or not be a spectacle to the normative culture; however, for those that view veganism as more than an identity category and one that is a moral obligation do not take cultural differences and categories of difference into account. The idea that veganism can be universally practiced is counter to the possibilities of queerness, which is resistant to all forms of oppressive normalizing regimes, even those that are presented as being a liberating force.

For many of the participants, the idea of a queer future is one that is an expression of universal plurality. For example, Tony describes an ideal world where everyone is constantly evolving and expanding their identity, exploring and experiencing life outside of the confines of identity boxes, in her words she says, "Ideally, a queer community is everyone, Everyone is queer." This is a presentation of a world that can thrive on difference and diversity, and everyone can build a just world together. Striving for such a world is a political act that exists not only within the imagination, but also within the worlds that these individuals are creating in the present.

For some of the participants they see themselves not as purely individuals, but members of a larger force, something bigger than themselves. They are disconnected from religion, but find a spiritual presence in the power of humanity to make change and difference. The participants imagine that they are

laying the groundwork for a queer vegan world. The desire for such a world where difference and diversity is what unites all people together is fueled by the participants experience with their own personal journey and coming to terms with their identities. They live an exhausting life and wish for a future where people can "just exist" without having to defend their actions, choices or identities.

Through the experiences that the participants in this study have gone through and their own development of identity as a queer vegan, they all offer an individual and intricate view of their personal life, their identities and their perspective of the world, but for all, their identity as queer vegan has been shaped and formed by experience and both have been pursued through thoughtful choices. For the normative society, identity is often a taken-for-granted reality, but for the individuals who participated in this study, they have all had the opportunity to explore themselves and see beyond the normative narrative, but it begs an answer to the question, does queer veganism exist in the present? Or is it an identity that is waiting to be lived? Are queer vegans waiting for a world in which they can be free; where compassion and personal freedom are at the forefront of public consciousness? Many of the participants explained that their identity as a queer vegan is their most "true" or "natural" expression of who they want to be. For them, the 'doing' and 'being' of queer veganism is one in which lays the blueprints for an inclusive and kind world in the near future.

5. Discussion & Conclusion

This thesis set out to investigate the particular phenomenon of queer people more frequently practicing veganism; and to understand what role veganism plays in the lives of queer individuals. Through a theoretical underpinning that first views veganism as a queer practice, it is also understood that veganism and queerness can act as identity categories that one can embody. Both of these identity categories exist in relation to normative structural regimes that define what actions, behaviors, and identities are socially acceptable and healthy. Queerness is positioned in relation to heteronormativity, which defines heterosexuality as the only permissible form of sexual desire and gender expression, and veganism stands in opposition to omni-normativity that views the consumption and exploitation of animals as normal. At the onset of this thesis we established that intersectionality will be employed to analyze queerness and veganism together, under the identity label of 'queer vegan', which views these identity categories as intertwined and relationally influential. Despite the fact that queerness and veganism are both gaining popularity within the mainstream consciousness, queer vegans remain on the margins of both normative structures and are impacted by oppression from multiple axes.

Through qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews and grounded theoretical analysis it was made visible that the interviewees relate their experiences of identity development and salience temporally, where they view their development of their current identity categories as a step-by-step process over time, that is influenced by their sense of community support and past struggles with trauma. In the present, the queer vegans involved in this study, negotiate the meanings of their identity categories in relation to one another, grounding the meanings on a system of beliefs. One's sense of social isolation plays a large role in how one can act out their identity categories as well as how other salient identity categories such as class, race, and age, among others, may influence the meanings of one's queer vegan identity. For some of the interviewees their sexual desire has been directly influenced by their vegan identity. For many of the respondents, the Internet acts as a space in which they can act out both identity categories freely with others, and represents a template for a queer vegan utopian future. The participants all expressed their desire for a future where their identity categories are accepted by the normative culture, while many expressed this as a desire for the entire world to be queer and vegan, in which they can exist in peace, without the threat of marginalization and exploitation.

In this chapter we will bring the analysis into a discussion, focusing first on addressing the sub-questions and presenting their analysis in a focused manner that act as a foundational structure to the main research question, which will be answered immediately following. In the remaining pages of the thesis, the discussion will flow into the limitations of the research, what implications these raise both methodologically and theoretically, and closing the thesis with suggestions for future research.

5.1 Research Questions

In the sub-chapter below, the sub-questions will be posed and addressed individual, which are the following:

Sub-One: *How have queer vegan individual's developed their identity over time?*

Sub-Two: *How does the intersectionality of identity influence a queer vegan's sense of belonging?*

Sub-Three: *How do queer vegans view the normalization of their identity categories?*

These questions will then lead to the conclusion that will answer the research question, which is the following:

RQ: *What role does veganism, as an increasingly salient practice, play in the identity of queer individuals?*

6.1.1 Sub-Questions. In order to fully examine the main research question, sub-questions will first be addressed. The first of which is focused on the temporality of identity processes and asks, *how have queer vegan individual's developed their identity over time?* For the interviewees their identity is perceived as a project that has been constructed over a period of their life course. For many of the participants, they viewed themselves as being different since childhood, some choosing to act out this difference in their sexuality or gender expression, while others were able to identify with animals and actively practice vegetarianism in resistance to the omni-normative world they were raised in. For others, their identity as a queer vegan was developed in tandem, in which the one's practice of veganism allowed for a greater understanding of their queer identity. Amongst the participants, there was a direct connection between one's past experiences with trauma in an oppressed identity category and their practice of veganism. Participants described how their veganism was influenced by "queer empathy" or the ability to connect one's oppression and abuse as a queer individual to that of the systematic oppression of animals by the omni-normative culture; being vegan is a way to cope with the trauma of the queer experience, and in its own way ends the cycle of abuse.

This development of identity does not occur in isolation, but rather within the social world. For many of the vegans in the study, their sense of identity as a queer vegan was grounded through their participation in communities or groups that were united around their identity categories. This leads us to the next sub-question, *how does the intersectionality of identity influence a queer vegan's sense of belonging?* For many of the participants, they find themselves socially isolated in their contextual environment from others who identify with their identity

categories or at the intersection. This led many to feel uncertain in how they could identify and needed reference groups and support systems in place before they could find that comfort. Many of the respondents grounded their sense of identity through their access to queer and vegan discourse. The information that they were able to access was a means of providing a guideline and system of beliefs in which they could map out what meanings their identity categories represented. For some this relied upon strict definitions and creating boundary lines between what they viewed as acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, actions, and identity categories.

As the interviewees were recruited from Queer Vegan Facebook groups it is necessary to address the role of these platforms in the roles that they played in the interviewees salience of their identity and how the sense of belonging within these groups scaffolds one's sense of self-identity. Many of the participants use Facebook as a networking site only for queer vegan purposes, in which they are able to connect with a non-oppressive space that represents a democratic ideal in which members are allowed to express themselves openly without condemnation. For many of the queer vegans, they expressed how within groups that isolate their identity categories, that the meanings and their individual experiences can get washed over or ignored; and at the intersection they feel a sense of peace. Belonging to these sites allows for individuals to escape their isolated reality and live within a digital environment where queer veganism is the norm, and there is a general understanding of the oppressive forces that seek to erase queer vegans from existing.

Amongst many of the participants, queerness acts as a means of keeping the mind open, with an understanding that identity is a fluid and socially constructed reality. Veganism is paired with this open-ended understanding as a structuring force that forms a dialectical relation between the two. Veganism is based on a strict binary opposition that starkly contrasts to the open-ended nature of queerness, although both acts as a means to question the normalcy of heteronormativity and omni-normativity. This oppositional relation between the two, however, is not an issue amongst the respondents, which puts into question the very idea that veganism can be an identity category in the first place. Amongst the participants, a definitive difference emerged between those that

view veganism as an identity category and those that do not. For those that do see veganism as their most salient identity category, veganism is the defining aspect of their lives, in which they receive the most opposition, often times this is because their queer identity has become normalized.

The finding presented immediately above leads to the answer of the following sub-question of *how do queer vegans view the normalization of their identity categories?* Veganism rests upon a normalizing definition that regulates what foods, products, activities, and behaviors are acceptable and which are unacceptable. The foundation to this binary rests upon the ethics of animal rights and the practice of non-harm to living creatures. Veganism is an oppositional force that questions the normalcy of eating and exploiting animals that is perpetuated by omni-normativity, but because of this, it is a "minority food culture" (Edwards, 2012, p. 111).

Queerness, by definition, is located on the margins of heteronormativity and, more generally, normative culture in any form (Warner, 1991; Halberstam, 2004). The participants did not agree upon how queerness is expressed as an identity category. Many viewed that queerness, especially "born this way" essentialist notions of gay and lesbian identity, have become more widely accepted in the normative culture; and that sexuality, for them, has moved beyond a site of oppression, and one that has become a neutral and "normal" identity category in wider society. For these individuals, they no longer see queerness as a site of opposition and instead, feel that their vegan identity is the most oppressed identity category in their life and as a site in which to advocate for others to adopt such a way of living. Veganism becomes a defining category that they seek to bring into the normative culture much like queerness has in the wake of 'Marriage Equality' in parts of the global West. This is accomplished through a process of educating others, presenting the self as a "normal person" that does veganism, relying upon discursive means to spread veganism, leading by example, presenting veganism as "easy" or "just as delicious as omnivore food", and enacting a series of boundary work between those who are vegan activists and those who are "regular people who happen to be vegan."

For these individuals, the normalization of queer identity and queer life is seen as a guiding foundation to how veganism can too become part of everyone's

"new normal." However, for these individuals, queerness is seen as "just another way of living," but veganism is revered as a moral, ethical, and proper way to live in this world. These individuals see their fight for normalization of veganism as a means of saving animals from cruelty, but also saving the planet from the climatic destruction, both positions that are discursively shaped and proselytized. The fight for normalization of queerness, however, is seen as a way to fit in and be like everyone else, whereas, the struggle for the normalization of veganism is to make everyone vegan. Various participants expressed this notion of universalism and that despite one's cultural, financial, or social context, that veganism should be mandatory, a complete negation of the various ways in which reality is experienced and a belief that veganism is the only 'truth'.

Veganism is more than just a practice or even an identity, but an ideology for some of the participants, which seeks for the erasure of all cultural practices that exist outside its boundary. Veganism is a normalizing regime that is reminiscent of other Western imperial expansions in the past which sought to eradicate 'Othered' forms of existence (Said, 1978; Murphy, 2008); but Veganism is not some powerful force, and to make the comparison would be a false equivalency; but the desire is present, the universalizing need for veganism is behind every single meme that these participants share and every action that they do in regards to their veganism. In it's relation to queerness, they are quite different, in which queer theory rests on a foundation of anti-normalization, but in practice this is very much not the case, in which most of the participants described how they have experienced the normalizing effects of queerness and even fight for it within their own lives.

Among these participants there is a very big difference between the 'being' and the 'doing' of identity categories in which they rest the being on a queer notion of fluidity and open-mindedness, an idealization of pluralism and democracy comes from this, but their everyday 'doing' of identity categories rests on the active investment in normalization. They adjust their identity categories, regulate their behavior as well as that of others, and do what they can in order to present their identity as queer vegan as something that shouldn't be viewed as problematic. This finding further supports Griffin's (2017) argument that veganism has been normalized, however, the participants that identified as

'Vegan-ish' present a queer veganism, as they are able to negotiate the definition of veganism in relation to their context. They still question the normalcy of eating and exploiting animals, but are able to adjust both their 'being' and their 'doing' in relation to the specific context and in relation to other intersectional identity categories. There is an understanding that identity categories are in constant motion, and see one as never being able to be fully vegan living within an omni-normative system, but rather are making strides towards transitioning to veganism, and leaving behind such notions of omnivorous/vegan dichotomy. Amongst this group, perhaps it is a matter of insecurity that they are able to be flexible with the definition of vegan, be it identity, capital, or social insecurity, but regardless, each did not perceive veganism to be an ideology, but rather, a category of identity difference, and an act of their individuality. Could this then be considered a queer veganism as Simonsen (2012) declared; one that is still supported by a belief in animal rights, but open to a fluid definition of veganism? By definition, would a queer veganism be one in which the normalcy of the vegan normalization project is questioned? This, then, raises the question of whether or not veganism can be queer; is 'queer vegan' an oxymoron?

      5.1.2 Main Research Question. At this point we will bring these sub-questions together to answer the main research question, *What role does veganism, as an increasingly salient practice, play in the identity of queer individuals?* The intersectionality of a queer vegan's identity is negotiated through their assessment of their past experiences; for many, veganism represents a means in which to protect other oppressed beings and ends the cycle of oppression for them as a queer individual. For others, veganism has been a means for participants to rediscover their own personal power and to take authority over their body and their desires. Within the development of identity there is a consistent relationship between coming out as queer and choosing to practice veganism, but as identity categories they are separate and incomparable except for the oppression one may receive at the brunt of the normative society.

      For many of the participants, veganism is a salient identity and is not limited to the development, but is acted out in the present through belief systems that are structured through normative discursive means. Ideology and

its development play a crucial role in the salience of these identity categories as veganism rests upon a strict definition that is institutionally maintained and acts a regulatory system. Queerness, which intentionally lacks a definition, has become a revered source of information in relation to identity politics amongst many of the participants. What queerness means to each of these individuals is shaped and formed by their interactions with academic literature and discourse that they get access to through social media.

The Internet serves as a means of finding community and engendering a sense of belonging amongst those that find themselves at the intersection of queer and vegan. Facebook groups in particular have been used by the participants to discover their identity categories, develop them, educate themselves, and spread information about such identities. The meaning of their identity as a queer vegan within this space transforms from one that is non-normative in real life, to one that every member shares, one is which the solidarity of oppression unites each member. Amongst these individuals, veganism and queerness come together on the Internet and with both playing leading and equal roles. As many of the participants view the struggle and oppression of queer people around the world, to be the same as that of the systematic murder and exploitation of animals; advocating for one is the same as advocating for the other online. This means that if one is going to seek justice for queer people, it only makes sense that they also seek justice for other voiceless beings, which are animals.

The oppression that these interviewees receive due to their differential identity categories is a site of negotiation, in which they find themselves socially isolated within the heteronormative and omni-normative culture. In line with Orne's (2011) theory of strategic outness, the individuals in this study all expressed that they must continuously negotiate the meanings of their intersectional identity by choosing who and how they can disclose their identity to. This includes hiding one identity category, but sharing the other, and other strategies in which to block and resist oppression or judgment. In relation to the role that veganism plays for these queer individuals, in various situations one may feel that they need to hide their veganism, but are still able to act of their queerness, while for others this may be experienced the other way around. Since

both identity categories rest upon needing to be disclosed, their role in the respondents' sense of identity was one in which they had completely control over, in which these identity categories can remain hidden or out in the open.

Amongst the participants who are at the intersections of differential identity categories that do not remain hidden from view, there is a constant negotiation of what queerness and veganism means in relation to race, class, geography, disability, religion, and age. The meanings of identity and their salience are constantly in flux in relation to the particularities of social context. For some, the influence of veganism has made considerable impact on their meanings of their sexuality, in which their queer identity cannot exist without veganism, the finding of participants expressing a "vegansexuality" shows how powerful an ideology veganism can be that it restructures one's sense of desire. In terms of an identity being a socially constructed reality, for many of these participants, that social force that is guiding their identity development is veganism.

As discussed above, the normalization of identity categories has a significant toll on what role veganism plays in queer individuals' lives. However, the notion of normalization as described positions queerness and veganism as essential identities and isolates each from one another. However, from a position of intersectionality, the experience of queer veganism can be visualized as deeply situated within the oppressive systems of heteronormativity and omni-normativity, and all in concert with one another. Veganism plays an intersectional role in the identities of the respondents in this study. It is not a matter of veganism playing a specific role, but rather both veganism and queerness playing roles together and sharing the identity stage with other salient identity categories. For the respondents in this study, the salience of their identity categories, be it veganism or queerness, is dependent upon their place within the structural systems and what privileges they are afforded. For many involved, their sense of who they are and what they believe in is situated within their immediate context, lacking the consciousness of other perspectives, cultural beliefs, and systems of cultural power. Few, if any of the respondents, are conscious of the systems of power and structural forces in which they are situated in opposition to, preferring instead to view themselves as normal. The

adoption of the oppositional practice of veganism, may just cancel out the oppositional stance of queerness, creating an individual who is politically neutral and unequivocally privileged.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

This research was able to examine the intersectionality of queerness and veganism amongst a sample of sixteen queer vegan identifying individuals. This study was able to address the gap in literature that was apparent in the sense that these identity categories have only been examined in isolation. Griffin's (2017) analysis of veganism from a queer theoretical perspective laid the foundation for viewing veganism as a queer practice, but Griffin did not employ a queer sample, thus leaving the intersectionality open for future research.

This study was able to add to the growing body of queer sociological empirical analysis, however, there is much that remains open for exploration from a queer theoretical perspective and it's application to the empirical study of social life (Green, 2010). A queer sociological method remains open to interpretation, allowing for limitations in what can be considered research and data, as the method departs from traditional sociological methodology. The study raises general questions about the state of queer theory and its application in everyday life. As we have seen, the understanding of identity as a social construction is widely believed by individuals who identify as queer, but often times in practice, identity remains an innate and essential fact, that is not open to interpretation or negotiation. The tension between theory and practice that is mentioned above is similar to the same tension of identity raised in the analysis between that of 'doing' and 'being'. Perhaps these contradictions are a fact of social reality and the complexity of human behavior; a reality of the disconnection between academia and the everyday lives of working and middle class people's who are often the subjects of sociological studies (Plummer, 2010).

This study utilized a sample that was recruited through the social media site, Facebook. For these individuals to have the ability to access this site is a question of privilege in the sense that one was able to have access to the Internet

on a frequent basis as well as having the access to the technology that will be able to open the site. This frames the sample within a specific group of people, leaving a gap of those who may be queer vegans, but don't have access to Facebook, be it because of geographic location or social class positioning. To add to this argument that the sample was not as representative as it could have been, the sample's diversity in terms of other intersectional oppressed identities such as race, ethnicity, class, and age can be put into question, as the sample consisted of a mostly homogenous group of white, cis-gendered, middle class, educated, and urban individuals. This thesis was framed around a general sample of privileged individuals, which may have skewed the analysis in a direction of normalization, in which under represented and even socially silenced voices may have directed it towards one of radicalism. Within the analysis, the voices that diverged the most from the general group and lacked overall consensus was that of those who were racial/ethnic minorities and additionally trans participants, both of which are oppressed identity categories that are visible. A greater understanding of a multi-lateral intersectional identity in its relation to veganism may prove in the future to have pertinent results in the understanding of queer vegan as an emerging intersectional identity.

As discussed, the individuals in this study are generally located within a middle-class social position and have relative privilege when it comes to their access to capital. To some extent, the development of identity that was found amongst the participants was in relation to their access to vegan foods, specifically vegan alternatives to omnivorous foods like meat and cow's milk, but this was only briefly touched upon within the thesis. The formulation of a salient vegan identity is seemingly related to one's place within capitalism in which omni-normativity is located. Veganism, it seems, has developed into an alternative to omnivorous eating, but both practices are still centrally dependent upon an unsustainable agricultural and food production industry that exploits land, people, animals and positions food as a commodity rather than a right. The normalization of veganism is thus dependent upon one's complicity with a system of exploitation and can be viewed as nothing more than a consumer lifestyle, rather than a political ethic. In all reality, when it comes to food, nothing is cruelty free (Keith, 2009). Additionally, veganism on its own is still not entirely

understood, especially in terms of individual motivations, where these are derived, and what they mean in relation to context. As a practice, lifestyle, and identity, veganism is deeply situated within the system of capitalism; McDonalds now offers a McVegan at select locations, after all. The statement "I shop, therefore I am[4]" is strikingly applicable in these moments, and puts into question the ethics that define the boundaries of veganism.

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Appendix A
Dialogue Sheet

Thank you for expressing interesting in participating in this Master Thesis research project. In the scheduled interview we will talk for a period of 45 to 60 minutes. In this period of time, we will discuss Identity, Community, Queerness, Veganism, and Intersectionality; and how these concepts relate to your life and experiences. If you are not familiar with these concepts, please refer below for a detailed description of the terms and how they will be used in our conversation.

Identity
Identity is the way we see ourselves and others see us. In a way, it can be the meanings that we give to how we act or behave or what drives certain actions that we take. Identity can manifest through labels or can be feelings that have no words or definitions. In the interview, we will discuss how you perceive your identity and what meanings you attribute to yourself, your actions, and the way you see yourself in the world.

Community
Community is the sense of togetherness that groups of people share. For some, community represents the groups that they feel they belong to, or ones that they long to be part of. Sometimes a group of friends or a family can be community, but also can be seen on a larger scale, such as a group of people who identify similarly or experience life in a related way, such as cities, clubs, corporations, and political parties. In the interview we will discuss what community means to you and what role it plays in your life.

Queerness
Queerness can be thought of in two ways; the most notable would be how queerness has been used as an umbrella term to describe sexuality that isn't heterosexual and gender expression that is contrary to man/woman or boy/girl; the second way that queerness has been used is as an action word in which behaviors, actions, and identities can be 'queered' or used to question and resist forms culture. In the interview we will discuss queerness and what it means to you and how it is used in relation to your life and experiences.

Veganism
Veganism is defined by *The Vegan Society* as the act of not consuming meat or using animal products along with not participating in activities that exploit or harm animals. In this interview we will discuss your practice of veganism and what meanings it gives your life and experiences.

Intersectionality
Intersectionality is a way to say that identity is composed of many parts that interact. For example, a 'queer woman' describes one as being queer and also a woman; together they describe a different experience as opposed to isolated queer and woman. In the interview we will discuss how different parts of your identity relate to one another and influence your life experience.

Appendix B
Sample Overview

Age	Location	Years Vegan	Gender	Sexuality	Education
23	Sacramento, CA	Vegan-ish 2 years	Non-binary	Pansexual	High School
24	Durham, UK	Veg all life, 2 years	Cis-gender	Bisexual	Bachelors
32	North Yorkshire, UK	11 years	Non-binary, Trans	Queer	Bachelors
44	Sydney, AU	3 years	Cis-gender	Gay	Bachelors
34	Leeds, UK	Veg all life, 1 year	Trans Man	Pansexual	Bachelors
26	Minneapolis, MN	Vegan-ish 2 years	Cis-gender	Pansexual	Bachelors
25	Minneapolis, MN	Vegan-ish 2 years	Cis-gender	Lesbian	Bachelors
37	Portland, OR	Veg all life, 16 Years	GenderQueer	Queer	Masters
26	Halifax, MA	Vegan-ish 1 Year	Demi-girl	Pansexual	Bachelors
48	Venice, IT	Veg 5, 26 Years	Cis-gender	Gay	Masters
53	Ashville, NC	1.5 Years	Cis-gender	Bisexual	Masters
53	Phoenix, AZ	Veg 25, 5 years	Cis-gender	Gay	Bachelors
18	San Diego, CA	3 years	Cis-gender	Queer	High School
31	Boca Raton, FL	Veg 8, 10 years	Non-binary, Trans	Asexual	Some College
53	Edinburgh, UK	Veg 30, 7 years	Cis-gender	Pansexual	Masters
48	Ashville, NC	Veg 15, 12 Years	Cis-gender	Lesbian	Masters

Appendix C
Interview Guide

Today is (DATE). Interviewee, have you read through the consent form? Do you give verbal consent to be audiotaped? Do you want your identity to remain anonymous? (If not) Do you agree to have your identity revealed in all written data?

Group One: Veganism
1. What were your favorite foods as a child?
2. What would you describe as your favorite foods now?
3. Can you describe foods that you dislike?
4. How would you describe what you eat?
5. Can you describe the process of adopting this way of eating?
6. What do you enjoy most about what you eat?

7. What do you dislike about eating plant-based foods?
8. How did your family first react to the way you eat?
9. Can you describe a situation in which you had to hide what your eat from others?
10. Can you describe a situation in which what you eat was put into question?
11. In your opinion, what does it mean to live plant-based?
12. What are some stereotypes of vegans that you can think of?

Group Two: Queerness (and/or is open for interviewee to discern themselves)
1. How would you describe your own sexuality and/or gender?
2. Can you provide an example of a time when you first started to become aware of your sexuality and/or gender?
3. How would you describe the evolution of your sexuality and/or gender?
4. What does your family think of your sexuality and/or gender?
5. Can you describe a time you tried to hide your sexuality and/or gender from others?
6. Can you describe a situation when your sexuality and/or gender was questioned?

Group Three: Identity/Community
1. What kind of people do you like to surround yourself with?
2. Can you describe the types of people you like to avoid?
3. What groups do you identify with? and why?
4. Can you describe a situation when you went in search for like-minded people?
5. Can you describe an experience when you felt like you belonged?

Group Four: Intersection of Concepts
1. How are the experiences of being queer and vegan similar? How are they different?
2. What does it mean to have a queer community? A vegan community?
3. What rules does veganism have? What about queerness? What rules might they share?
4. How does the phrase 'you are what you eat' apply to you?
5. How would you compare 'coming out' as queer to 'coming out' as plant-based?
6. What is the difference between identity and lifestyle?
7. How does this difference apply to you?

Appendix D
Themes of Analysis & Coding Scheme

Theme One: Process of Finding the Self
Numerous Marginal and/or minority identities are invisible and require an individual to come forward in order to be recognized by those who adhere to a normative culture. The act of "coming out" or revealing one's sexual identity or gender expression to others, can be applied to other intersections of identity such as disability, religion and eating patterns. Coming out can be conceptualized as a single crucial moment in one's identity acceptance/development and/or can

be a continual process, an act that must be done throughout the life of an individual.

- **Code One**: Identity as Process
  - o Definition: Individual perceives their process of coming out and accepting their identity as step-by-step development, that takes many years and/or the course of their life. Identity is not fixed, but rather a development.
  - o **Code One-A:** Discursive Encounters
    - ▪ Definition: Individuals who perceive that coming to terms with an identity is influenced by discourse. Particular moments when the pieces of the identity puzzle formed together in an 'aha!' moment of inspiration.
  - o **Code One-B**: Transition to Identity
    - ▪ Definition: Individuals who see the act of coming to terms with an identity as a movement in which they are required to make life changes in order to live life as that identity.
- **Code Two**: Discovering Identity with the Support of Others
  - o Definition: Individual relied upon a community of support in order to come out. Coming out is not an individual task, but requires a variety of support in order to find the courage, confidence and/or strength in one's self before they can step forward.
- **Code Three**: Dealing with Trauma
  - o Definition: Individuals who come from abusive backgrounds struggle to come to terms with their identities, which can make the process difficult to traverse. Coming out may come with familial backlash and/or may cause a delay in identity development.
    - ▪ **Code Three-A**: Protecting Self
      - • Definition: Individual perceives themselves as victims of violence and abuse because of their identity. They feel connected to animals for being misunderstood and exploited by a system of violence.

Theme Two: Presentation and Management of Identity
Identities are acted out through various activities, affiliations, and community involvement that an individual may be affiliated with. The act of living as a marginal and/or minority identity comes with the negotiation of that identity in mainstream, normative society where one can find themselves on the outside looking in. Along with this position, an individual may also have to negotiate the intersections of their identities as one identity may conflict with and/or support another.

- **Code One**: Identity as Belief System
  - o Definition: Identities are not isolated, but contingent on a set of beliefs that are grounded in an individual's sense of ethics, morals, and/or human rights. Can be presented as a definition, a way of living, or a life practice, which guides their actions.
- **Code Two**: Social Isolation
  - o Definition: Individuals comment that because of their identity they feel that they are alone in their immediate contextual

environment. This can either be by choice or through acts of exclusion by others directly related to one's identity. Perception that the environment in which they live is hostile or unsympathetic to their identity.

- **Code Two-A**: Negotiation of Identity
  - Definition: Individual makes changes within their identity to accommodate their context. Identity has to be molded and shaped in order for one to continue seeing themselves as such an identity.
- **Code Two-B**: Identity as Spectacle
  - Definition: Individual makes effort to note that because of their identity they are at the center of questioning by others or because of how they identify are objectified, humiliated or given unwanted attention.

- **Code Three**: Vegan Sexuality
  - Definition: An individual explains that their sexual desires have been influenced by their practice of veganism in which they are no longer attracted to those who are not vegan. Individual notes that their current partner is vegan or is being converted into a vegetarian/vegan for the sake of the relationship.
- **Code Four**: At the Intersection of Identity
  - Definition: Individuals make known that there are conflicts that arise as other identities come to the forefront. Individuals may comment that it is difficult to manage an identity when another gets in the way. Individual may comment how one identity influences another and how these identities can learn from each other. Concerning Class, Race, Ethnicity, Religion, and Place.
- **Code Five:** Mediated Sanctuaries
  - Definition: Individual's use the Internet as a means of connecting with others from the around the world that share various identities. The individual presents these spaces as being safe from hostility and skepticism that they may receive in their contextual environment. The Internet as an open forum in which one can be supported, seek advice and support others in times of need.

Theme Three: Veganism for All: Queer Utopian Desires
Living as a marginal and/or minority identity can fill an individual with desires for a world where they are no longer feeling alone, isolated or a victim of a system of oppression. The hope for a future, where these are no longer issues, becomes a reality by making social investments in the present and through a creative imagination to envision of future of where the issues of the current era are a reality of a distant past.

- **Code One**: The Fight for Normalization
  - Definition: A desire by an individual for their identity to become widely accepted by the mainstream culture or to be perceived as a new normal. The individual makes steps in order to educate others and be a role model of that identity.
    - **Code One-A**: Evangelization of Identity

- Definition: Individual makes concerted efforts to spread information and messaging about their identity to others in order to educate, inform or convert.
    - **Code One-B**: Desire for Universality
        - Definition: Individual sees a future world where everyone identifies as at least one of their identities. They describe this event as the only way the world can be saved and/or rescued.
- **Code Two**: 'Aren't we all Queer?'
    - Definition: Individual seeks an idealized future where plurality, difference and diversity are at the forefront. They imagine a queer future where there is freedom from the constraints of identity labels and definitions, in which as a society, humans can be less distracted by their differences; and instead, can work to build a just world together.