DIETARY DISCLOSURE: CONSTITUTIVE RHETORIC OF IDENTITIES IN ALTRUISTIC AND EGOISTIC VEG*ANISM

by

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ABSTRACT

MACKENZIE E. CADDELL. Dietary Disclosure: Constitutive Rhetoric of Identities in Altruistic and Egoistic Veg*anism. (Under the direction of DR. ASHLI Q. STOKES)

Despite the rise in popularity of vegan and vegetarian (veg*an) diets and the emergence of social media activism, ethical philosophies related to meat abstention and veg*an identities remain stigmatized in Western societies. The recent popularity of the practice of veg*anism absent its philosophical underpinnings can be attributed to the masculinization of veg*anism rather than to growing public compassion. That is, while *eating* veg*an foods has become more widespread and socially acceptable, *being* veg*an and claiming the identities associated with veg*anism remain disparaged. This thesis demonstrates this discordance by comparing the ways in which various entities, including celebrity Gordon Ramsay and activist groups Forks Over Knives and Farm Sanctuary, constitute their identities as either altruistic or egoistic in the rhetorical moment of disclosure of veg*anism, as well as the performance of masculinity and femininity in the groups' social media presences. The findings of this study suggest that altruistic motivations for veg*anism are associated with feminine gender identities. In contrast, egoistic motivations for veg*anism are associated with masculine gender identities, and are more socially acceptable than altruistic motivations.

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INTRODUCTION

The popularity of vegetarian and vegan (veg*an) diets has grown considerably in the last few years. Tracking Google searches related to veganism and plant-based eating, Ipsos Retail Performance found that interest in plant-based lifestyles grew 300% between 2004 and 2019 (Ipsos Retail Performance, 2020). With mock meat products in almost every grocery store, culinary icons like Gordon Ramsay, and sports celebrities like Cam Newton adopting the diet, the movement is poised to take a stronger foothold in mainstream culture. Despite vegetarianism and veganism (together denoted as veg*anism) trickling into the mainstream, these diets still face considerable obstacles to widespread acceptance. In a culture fixated on protein and meat, veg*anism asks its followers to confront the ubiquity of meat consumption and challenge cultural norms of meat-eating (Potts, 2016). In subverting the norms surrounding something as commonplace as eating, veg*ans embody resistance whenever they shop for food, cook, eat, and join meat-eaters at the family dinner table.

Foodways are an important method of creating community and identity. Engelhardt (2013) defines foodways simply as "why we eat, what we eat, and what it means" (p. 1). Questioning the dominant ideologies of food is challenging the cultural norms surrounding them. To that end, veg*ans sometimes face stigma from a variety of sources. Veg*ans are ridiculed, questioned, and left out of even the most important cultural and familial celebrations involving meat-eating, such as family reunions (Twine, 2017). Veg*ans are perceived as ascetic, awkward, and disruptive (Cole, 2008; Truath et al., 2021, Twine, 2014). Veg*ans are associated with pacifism and virtuousness (Hamilton, 2006; Ruby & Heine, 2011). This stigma is further

evidenced by the fact that more people follow the diet than claim the title; that is, more people practice veg*anism than *are* veg*an (Truath et al., 2021).

Gender is also closely associated with meat consumption and stigma. Eating meat is synonymous with masculinity psychologically, socially, and symbolically (Nath, 2010; Rogers, 2008; Rozin et al., 2012). Men who choose to go veg*an face more significant stigma than women who choose to follow the "effeminate" diet (MacInnis & Hodson, 2015). Male vegetarians are also perceived as less masculine than non-vegetarians, whereas perceived masculinity does not vary significantly between female vegetarians and non-vegetarians (Ruby & Heine, 2011). Meat is also symbolically associated with death and violence, as most of the meat that humans consume comes from animals killed for consumption (Adams, 2015; Hamilton, 2006).

In addition to symbolizing masculinity and violence, meat symbolizes power and humankind's domination over nature (Fiddes, 1991). This domination is not limited to nature, though, as meat-eating has historically symbolized social status and power over other humans (Hamilton, 2006; Schleifer 1999). This exploitation of nature is also profoundly linked to patriarchal oppressions (Birkeland, 1993). Women and people of color have been traditionally conceptualized as being closer to nature and more "wild" than white men (Birkeland, 1993; Car, 2011). As such, these groups become part of nature in false nature/humanity dualisms and find themselves dominated alongside other elements of nature in patriarchal ideological systems (Carr, 2011).

A unique element of veg*anism is that the movement is further separated within the veg*an community itself. Veg*ans are typically divided by their primary motivation for following the diet. The most common reasons include concern for animal welfare, environmental

sustainability, social justice, and personal health, though most veg*ans reported multiple reasons (Janssen et al., 2016). Most often, these reasons are classified into two categories in studies of veg*an motivations: altruistic and egoistic (Fox & Ward, 2008; Janssen et al., 2016; Lindeman & Sirelius, 2001; MacInnis & Hodson, 2015).

Altruistic veg*ans are those motivated by external and ethical considerations, including concern for animal welfare and environmental sustainability. Lindeman and Sirelius (2001) assert that for some veg*ans, their diet is a form of activism or resistance. Egoistic veg*ans, on the other hand, practice veg*anism strictly to benefit their personal health and well-being. There is a certain degree of overlap between these two categories, and long-practicing veg*ans tend to adopt more, if not all, reasons for continuing their diet (Fox & Ward, 2008). Typically, a veg*an's initial and primary motive falls into one of the two categories and remains constant over time (Janssen et al., 2016; Lindeman & Sirelius, 2001). Interestingly, scholarship suggests that the stigma a veg*an experiences depends on their primary motivation for following the diet (Phua et al., 2019). Studying veg*an diets and the expression of altruism and egoism in these diets carries significant implications.

Any discussion of dietary choice inherently involves public health components, but studying veg*anism's complex and unique ideological disruptions also opens the door to understanding social underpinnings. The questions raised by these underpinnings include whether altruistic behaviors are regarded as feminine and whether this association is a barrier to altruistic behaviors. By locating these associations in the rhetorical moment of disclosure of veg*anism, this study seeks to investigate the constitution of identity through veg*an diets. In the moment of disclosure, people actively shape their identities through the reason they choose to explain their dietary choices. It is important to investigate the experience of this disclosure in

various contexts, including public and group communication. This study seeks to discover patterns in these moments of disclosure of veg*anism across these contexts to explain why altruistic motivations are devalued.

Increased stigma toward altruistically motivated veg*ans compared to egotistically motivated veg*ans has important implications for understanding what social barriers to activist behaviors may exist generally. If people are ridiculed for altruistic motivations, it is implied that caring about other beings or things is socially constructed as a sign of weakness or frivolousness. Men are also more likely to cite egoistic motivations rather than altruistic motivations when they do choose to abstain from meat-eating (Mycek, 2018). In addition, people tend to have more respect for people who limit their meat consumption for health reasons and when the diet is not named as veg*an (Fegitz & Pirani, 2018; Phua et al., 2019). Further, egoistic meat abstention is treated as more accepted and valuable within a patriarchal society, suggesting that altruistic veg*anism is devalued and related to femininity.

For a few reasons, the rhetorical construction of veg*anism is an especially apt way to study this phenomenon. First, meat and meat consumption are rhetorically and socially linked to masculinity (Gaard, 2020; Nath, 2010; Oliver, 2021; Rogers, 2008; Rozin et al., 2012; Ruby, 2011). Second, veg*anism has a clear ingroup division between altruistically and egoistically motivated participants (Fox & Ward, 2008; Janssen et al., 2016; Lindeman & Sirelius, 2001; MacInnis & Hodson, 2015). Finally, veg*anism is a form of resistance to a dominant ideology that occurs daily, in the universal and often social act of eating. In the following section, I synthesize existing literature that reinforces these points. In addition, I explain what remains to be studied in rhetorical constructions of veg*anism and how the present study satisfies the gap in the literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The association of food with gender is not based on biological science; indeed, there is nothing about assigned sexual organs that dictate which protein sources are appropriate for a person to consume. Like gender, on the whole, food associations with femininity and masculinity are the result and process of discourse (Sobal, 2005). Rather than males inherently preferring and requiring meat consumption as a part of their male physiology, meat consumption is constructed as a masculine trait that is then mistaken by many for a biological truth. Similarly, meat abstention and vegetable-based diets are constructed as a feminine quality by and through discourse. These binary eating practices thus become a way to perform and express gender, ultimately becoming naturalized as a prominent piece of masculine and feminine gender identities.

The idea that gendered traits are performance rather than a genetic predisposition is not new. West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that gender is maintained through everyday interactions. Aside from the biological traits associated with gender, the differences between men, women, girls, and boys are performances that children are socialized very early in life to emulate, a practice so ubiquitous that it has become naturalized or assumed to be inherently gendered (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Gender simultaneously serves to organize social situations at the same time that it is an outcome of those same social situations (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Sobal (2005) extends this idea to the realm of food, arguing that people perform their gender by consuming gendered foods; specifically, this gender performance hinges on meat consumption, with men preferring to eat more meat than women and patriarchal norms of meat-eating serving as the dominant ideology.

Historical Associations of Food and Gender

Foodways, traditions, and food preparation work are all influenced by deep discursive associations with gender. One of the most notable identities formed through food and foodways is gender identities. Normative and discursive associations deeply link food and gender. To understand this complex association, it must be noted that the connection between food and gender has deep historical roots. In Adams' (2015) landmark book of vegetarian studies, she links meat with masculinity through the lens of ecofeminist critical theory. Through an analysis of advertisements depicting animals as women and women as animals, Adams (2015) argues that the oppression of women and the oppression of animals are both symptoms of the same underlying problem, cultural misogyny. The crux of Adams' argument is that female and animal bodies are broken down into unrecognizable parts and consumed either through sexualization or through eating. Though this work catalyzed the association between ecofeminism and dietary norms in 1990, the issues originally discussed in this foundational piece are still relevant. In an anniversary article published 20 years after the book's original publication date, Adams (2010) notes the work that has followed in its footsteps while acknowledging the discursive work that is still forthcoming to accomplish the goals of the original piece. These goals include the respective consumption of both animals and women.

While Adam's work hinges on the association of female bodies with meat products, DeVault (1991) focuses on the association of female bodies with food preparation. In an ethnographic study of 30 families, DeVault (1991) found that feeding and caring are practices of family maintenance that fall disproportionately to women. Such work is unpaid, undervalued, and lacking any social reward or recognition, begging the question of why women accept these roles. DeVault (1991) argues that care work, mainly feeding, is both burdensome and a source of

pride, given that caring is constructed as an essentially feminine trait, and women who lack this trait are viewed as unnatural. The author sees caring as a social construction of both dominance and difference (DeVault, 1991). On the one hand, women have historically needed to exchange care work for material sustenance. At the same time, caring is a feminine virtue, a morality essential to the female identity (DeVault, 1991).

For example, in heterosexual marriages, rather than negotiating and agreeing on a compromised style of eating, conjoined meals often reflect masculine and Western food ideals (Brown & Miller, 2002; Sobal, 2005). One example is the "meat and two" structure, a Western ideal wherein a meal consists of a serving of meat as the main component accompanied by two side dishes, often consisting of a starch and a vegetable (Brown & Miller, 2002; Sobal, 2005). This lack of compromise reflects a concession of the female partner's feminine identity consistent with patriarchal domination. In addition to conceding food preferences when meals are shared, women also enjoy less freedom when it comes to exploring food preferences, as this exploration is seen as at odds with their existing care and feeding duties.

Cairns et al. (2010) trace the intersection of gender performance and care work amongst "foodies," or self-proclaimed food lovers, noting that while male foodies were generally able to explore food fully, female foodies felt their care obligations kept them from fully exploring their interests in food. Specifically, kindness and care work, expressed through feeding, is normalized as an inherently feminine quality when this connection is produced through discourse (Doyle, 2016). In other words, kindness and care work in the form of feeding is a way to perform feminine gender identities rather than such care work occurring as an inherently feminine trait. Likewise, food choices, such as meat-eating and veg*anism, become a way to constitute one's gender identity.

The Rhetoric of Veg*anism

The construction of vegan and vegetarian identities consists of two main elements: philosophy and praxis. There is a discrepancy in the philosophy of veg*anism and how they are perceived in individual practice. Notably, representations of the philosophy of veg*anism portray it as a totalizing, ridiculed identity. In contrast, the behaviors and practices that define veg*anism, such as abstaining from meat consumption, are conceptualized positively, despite their stigmatization. These differences are reflected in how people perceive the behaviors associated with veg*anism and how people perceive veg*ans as individuals who claim a veg*an identity. Mediated representations of veg*anism as a philosophy conceptualize it as deviant from normative eating, as meat is associated with masculinity. Further, the philosophy of veg*anism is effeminate, weak, ascetic, and artificial.

Meat as Normative, Natural, and Nauseating

To understand what it means to abstain from meat-eating, it must first be established as a dominant ideological system. Fiddes (1991) notes that "meat was, and remains, a venerable symbol of potency and indeed of civilization itself" (p. 66). That is, meat consumption is normalized and representative of domination over nature and patriarchal oppression (Fiddes, 1991). Fiddes (1991) argues that meat symbolizes violence, as cruelty is necessary for producing high-quality meats such as veal and lobster, and hunting is a symbol of masculine strength and supremacy. Further, meat consumption is a status marker in Western society (Fiddes, 1991; Ogle, 2013; Schleifer, 1999). Where Fiddes (1991) places this status in human domination of animals, Hamilton (2006) refutes this claim, arguing that the prestige associated with meat is due to its connection with affluence and a sense of superiority over other humans rather than over animals. While there is likely a blend of the two perspectives at work, whatever the origin of the

perceived status and prestige of meat-eating, the result is the same: meat functions as a status marker.

Despite these connections with status, there is a growing discomfort people feel with meat consumption. In other words, some meat-eaters seek confirmation for their food choices. To combat this development, Fiddes (1991) notes that meat sellers participate in a "verbal concealment" which distances meat products from the death of the animal from which the meat was taken (Fiddes, 1991, p. 98). For example, "beef," rather than "cow," demarcates pristinely wrapped pieces for sale in the meat section (Fiddes, 1991; Moore, 2014). In addition, Fiddes (1991) notes that those foods which suggest the animals' countenance are perceived as the most grotesque, such as tongues and eyes.

This segmentation and discursive re-labeling reflect a general discomfort with the violence necessary to produce meat (Adams, 2015; Fiddes, 1991; Heinz & Lee, 1998). The discomfort people feel consuming meat that suggests the existence of a once-live animal reflects the sentiments of Loughnan et al.'s (2014) meat paradox; that is, people eat meat despite reporting that they care about animals. Both this paradox and the verbal concealment of meat products suggest that meat-eating is not as natural as it is discursively framed to be. In addition, the meat paradox calls into question why people consume products that make them uncomfortable. To that end, meat-eating must serve some higher function to persist even as it causes discomfort.

Meat Masculinity

Meat also functions as a symbol of hegemonic masculinity. In a quantitative study, Rozin et al. (2012) hypothesized a connection between male identity and meat consumption. Participants were asked to categorize words in two trials, consisting of gendered names, names

of meat products, or names of vegetables. In one of the trials, the categories were meat/male and vegetable/female. For example, the terms ‘Mary’ and ‘carrot’ would be sorted into one category, while ‘John’ and ‘steak’ would be sorted into another. In a second trial, the categories were reversed to meat/female and vegetable/male. The reaction times of the participants were recorded and compared. The study found that it took participants less time to correctly categorize items into meat/male than meat/female, supporting the hypothesis that maleness is latently associated with meat. These findings demonstrate that the learned gender associations are so ingrained that they have become implicit psychological associations for the gendering of food.

These psychological associations are created and reinforced in discursive representations of food as gender expression. Identity negotiation becomes necessary for men who break these dietary norms, primarily due to the trivialization of diets perceived as feminine, such as meatless diets. In analyzing news articles concerning men’s diets, Gough (2007) found that men use dietary choices to adhere to hegemonic masculinity. Gough (2007) also noted that although traditionally masculine and meat-forward diets are recognized as unhealthy, dieting is trivialized and feminized to such an extent that unhealthy eating is celebrated for men. In a similar study of advertisement rhetoric, Rogers (2008) analyzed fast food marketing strategies and found that they routinely trivialize meatless diets, specifically the consumption of tofu, and equate meat with masculinity. He argues that this marketing style capitalizes on the anxieties and threats that meatless diets pose to masculinity (Rogers, 2008).

In her book, Contois (2020) describes “dude masculinity,” a derelict and lazy masculine identity that simultaneously allows men to resist hegemonic masculinity while continuing to uphold subordinating gender binaries. To examine the rhetoric of “the dude,” Contois (2020) studied gendered food advertisements for foods traditionally associated with dieting, a feminine

practice, such as yogurt and diet soda. Through this analysis, she notes that companies attempt to masculinize the practice of dieting and diet foods by featuring darker color schemes, hypermasculine spokespeople such as athletes, and by constructing men who diet as "dudes." Additionally, Contois studied this dude identity as it is found in celebrity chefs. No one embodies the dude more than Guy Fieri, the ultimate authority in "dude food," or food that serves to soothe gender anxieties created when men step into the home kitchen; indeed, this food is bold in flavor, large in portion, meat-forward, and its recipes are written with cheeky, sexualized undertones (Contois, 2020). The dude identity functions as a way to navigate masculinity while breaking from traditionally masculine ways of eating.

*Of Virtue, Vaginas, and Veg*anism*

Just as meat is associated with masculinity, meatless diets are associated with female gender identities (Rozin et al., 2012). In addition to its association with vegetarian diets, femininity is also defined by its association with virtue, restraint, and asceticism; indeed, female bodies that do not uphold these associations, regardless of their role as perpetrator or victim, are severely punished (McGettrick et al., 2021). The attributes of purity and asceticism associated with essentialized femininity are established in religious creation stories, such as the Christian creation story of the first man and woman, Adam and Eve. The original sin for which humanity was condemned was a woman's indulgence in a food she was not meant to consume. This story is a major facet of colonial imperialism, cited as the justification for women as the weaker sex. The ideal woman, then, embodies self-denial and the virtue of asceticism.

The values of self-denial and asceticism in essentialized femininity can be easily observed in diet products. For example, Contois (2020) writes about one of the quintessential diet products: diet soda. Artificial sweeteners, she argues, allow for the satiation of sweetness

while preserving feminine restraint. Similarly, Contois (2020) also dissects the marketing of yogurt to women and the marketing of yogurt to men. While yogurt targeted at men emphasizes what it is, yogurt targeted at women emphasizes what it is not. In other words, yogurt for men is a source of protein, a satisfying snack that tastes like dessert, while yogurt for women is a low-fat substitute for dessert (Contois (2020). The actual yogurt products are fairly similar in protein content and flavor profiles, but women's yogurt symbolizes virtue via victory over dessert cravings.

Vegan and vegetarian diets are also part of the assemblage of asceticism, virtue, and femininity, as they are often discursively framed as ascetic by nature. Cole (2008) notes that themes of asceticism are dominant in this discourse, with news articles about it favoring the use of words such as "strict." In Addition, Cole and Morgan (2011) analyzed news articles that mention veganism and found that vegans are described as ascetic, faddish, oversensitive, and hostile, and explained these descriptions as ridicule. Truath (2021) further analyzed this public ridicule as it appears in fast food commercials, describing a growing prevalence of anti-vegan rhetoric that trivializes vegan options in response to the increasing availability and popularity of vegan products.

Cole (2008) refutes the association of veg*anism with asceticism, arguing that a false dichotomy is created between the satisfaction of meat-eating and the sacrifice of that satisfaction in order to be veg*an. In other words, the idea that veg*an diets are a form of self-denial insinuates that meat-eating is inherently pleasurable, a universal good. To combat this problem, Cole (2008) calls for a hedonistic account of veg*anism, which celebrates the variety of foods eaten by veg*ans and the time they spend cooking as equally pleasurable qualities of the diet. To further explore the ways in which veganism is synonymous with self-denial, asceticism, and

radical feminism, Wright (2015a) describes the errant discursive connections between veganism and disordered eating purported by the media. Unlike other forms of dieting, celebrated in women as a kind of virtuous self-denial, vegan diets are chastised for being inverse to normative carnivorous eating in patriarchal societies.

In addition, veg*anism is also discursively framed as antithetical to the feminine identities of motherhood. Wright (2015a) locates this criticism of veganism in media representations of "uninformed (at best) or sadistic (at worst) vegan mothers," citing two cases of infant mortality attributed to veganism (Wright, 2015a, p. 90). Wright (2015a) compares the representation of these cases in media compared to other causes of infant mortality, finding them to be vastly overrepresented and criminalized compared to their statistical significance. In articulating vegan mothers as cruel and neglectful, they are vilified not just for their perceived insufficient diet but for their failure to provide proper care and feed their offspring. Media outlets' choice to overrepresent vegan mothers in reports of infant mortality exemplifies the scrutiny women face as vegans, as the diet is framed as antithetical to their maternal care and feeding responsibilities.

Interestingly, veg*anism is also discursively associated with sexuality, seemingly directly contradicting its associations with feminine virtue. Fegitz and Pirani (2018) trace the connection between femininity and veg*an diets as expressed in female celebrities. The authors argue that celebrity veg*anism is highly commercialized and sexualized, citing that female celebrities are often depicted as hypersexualized when their diet is under discussion. Specifically, they analyze Beyoncé's vegan diet plan that promises its followers a conventionally attractive, thin figure (Fegiz & Pirani, 2018). While the sexualization of the bodies that follow a veg*an diet appears to break from representations of veg*ans as virtuous, it serves to support the themes of virtue, self-

denial, and asceticism in veg*an diets; indeed, through self-denial and ascetic dieting, one can achieve the "ideal" body type.

At the same time, feminine self-denial can go too far. Wright (2020) describes the threat that veganism poses to hegemonic patriarchal values of meat-eating. This form of "denial," rather than being celebrated as another successful example of a restrictive dietary venture, is pathologized for its resistance and "refusal of insidious Westernization marked by an increasingly carnivorous – and cruel – diet," (Wright, 2020, p. 125). Veg*anism also functions as a kind of feminist resistance. Wright (2020) notes that news headlines announcing the rise in veganism's popularity often highlight the threat such diets pose to various animal agriculture industries. Animal agriculture, especially the practices of the dairy industry, essentially functions as the systematic exploitation of the female reproductive system, a connection ecofeminist theorists find is inseparable from the oppression of human female bodies (Adams, 2015; Estok, 2021; Gaard, 2020).

Another discourse surrounding veg*anism is unsurprising given the naturalization of meat-eating; indeed, if meat is conceived as natural, then veg*an foods are conceived as fake and artificial (Kerslake et al., 2022; Truath et al., 2021). That is, meatless products are trivialized for their attempt to replicate meat dishes. This perceived artificiality of meat-free products discourages lifelong meat-eaters from attempting to eliminate meat in favor of products they perceive as imitative, unsatisfying, and lesser. Rather than promoting vegetable-based meals, the idea that meatless diets consist of nothing but meat replacement products further implies that eating meat is the natural state of the world and that abstainers must work to replace such staples with alternative and imitative foods rather than discovering and eating inherently meat-free dishes.

Domination Over Nature

Wright (2021) holds that the connection between the treatment of animal, female, and colonized bodies is made rhetorically, and continually reified through dominant discourse. The ways in which we discuss these bodies and represent them in discourse constructs them as consumable, lesser, and compliant. Not only are these qualities created in discursive representations, but they are also naturalized through discursive representations. This naturalization occurs when discursive representations become so prevalent that they are treated as objective facts, thereby creating the idea that these representations are inherently true rather than constructed. In addition to the naturalization of certain bodies as property, Moore (2014) also locates the naturalization of meat consumption in linguistic patterns and discursive representations of animals as beings without social identities, much like traditional categorizations of women and people of color. These ideas are similarly naturalized and treated as objective truths despite being formed discursively.

Further, Aguilera-Cernerero and Carretero-González (2021) also investigated anti-vegan rhetoric as it appears on social media, finding these discourses to be marked by accusations of extremism and cult-like followings. Ultimately, these arguments are rooted in a false human/nature dualism which relegates humans to a superior category and animals to a nature category (Aguilera-Cernerero & Carretero-González, 2021). Like animals, women and people of color fall into the nature category within false human/nature dualisms. In other words, they are beings to be dominated, just as animals are.

One critical framework that is often linked to combatting this idea is ecofeminism. Birkeland (1993) describes “ecofeminism as feminism taken to its logical conclusion, because it theorizes the interrelations among self, society, and nature” (p. 17). One core tenet of this

framework is the idea that exploitation and domination over nature are linked to the patriarchal oppressions of women (Adams, 2015; Birkeland, 1993; Carr; 201; Gaard, 2017; 2020). This link is forged in conceptualizing women and people of color as wild and closer to the Earth and to nature than white men (Birkeland, 1993; Gaard, 2020).

Identifying with dominated beings serves two functions. First, women and people of color can identify with dominated beings and work to subvert their collective domination by abstaining from meat and dairy consumption. To that end, Estok (2021) states that "you can't be a vegan and not be a feminist: a vegan who is not a feminist is just a person who doesn't eat animal products" (p. 340). This quote also illustrates a common critique of contemporary veg*anism as devoid of its morals. Second, they can attempt to identify with patriarchal domination by choosing to consume meat and thereby distance themselves from other dominated species. Cole (2008) notes that it is a symbolic renouncement of power to refuse meat. This renouncement comes from dissociating oneself from the symbolic power and domination that meat consumption represents.

In order to assuage the conflict between eating meat as a normative practice and eating animals, meat producers participate in welfare washing. In a rhetorical analysis of Norwegian meat advertisements, Bjørkdahl and Syse (2021) found that farmers were depicted as caring people concerned for their animals' well-being. This depiction of care during the animal's life allows meat-eaters to reconcile their eating habits with their concern for the welfare of the animals (Bjøokdahl & Syse, 2021). In other words, advertisers are aware of the conflict experienced by meat-eaters who also claim to care for animal welfare, and actively work to reconcile Loughnan et al.'s meat paradox by claiming their meat production methods are humane.

Perceived Qualities of Veg*ans

As described in the previous section, there are warring and contradictory evaluations of veg*anism as diets and veg*ans as people. Whereas the previous section addressed rhetorical representations of the philosophy of veg*anism in media, the following section explores how veg*ans are perceived in an interpersonal capacity. Here, I examine how people navigate their meat-free diets and the qualities ascribed to veg*ans as individuals. These qualities include veg*ans as effeminate and as self-relegated outcasts. Additionally, this section explores the significance of conceptualizing veg*anism as an identity rather than a practice. All of these biases towards veg*ans are rooted in attributes associated with veg*anism that become ascribed to individuals who follow the diet. Importantly, these attributes are voluntarily taken on by the veg*an, as following the diet, and therefore taking on its attributes, is a conscious choice.

*Veg*ans as Effeminate*

When men attempt to incorporate ethics into their dietary choices and reject hegemonic food masculinities, their masculine identities are often called into question. Such insults may involve soy, a popular meat replacement associated with femininity. This association is linked to a now-defunct study that errantly claimed that phytoestrogens present in soy affect human hormone balances, a misinterpretation that nevertheless took popular imaginations by storm (Mitchell et al., 2001). In addition, Gambert and Linné (2018) trace the emergence of soy as symbolically feminine, an idea that dates back to the colonial "discovery" of Asian culture and is deeply linked to perceptions of Asian men as effeminate. Soy foods, typically marketed as meat replacements, have thus become a lightning rod for misogynist ridicule of meatless diets. This ridicule culminates in the derogatory slang term "soyboy," an insult lobbed at effeminate men and liberal politicians (Gambert & Linné, 2018). Gambert and Linné (2018) also cite the

apparent reclamation of "soyboy," as its search returns hypermasculine images of men in gyms, proudly proclaiming themselves to be soyboys.

Given the deep-seated, patriarchal barriers to meat-free diets among men, men who choose to disrupt normative dietary culture must cope with the consequences of following an effeminate diet. Nath (2010) cites perceived weakness and emasculation as significant barriers to meatless diets in men. In his study of qualitative interviews with veg*an men, Nath (2010) confirmed his argument that meatless diets are perceived as effeminate and insufficient for "real" men. Curiously, study participants described their experiences navigating heteronormative social gatherings, and many brought up barbecues as a principal site of interrogation and ridicule. Nath (2010) interprets this to be based on the gender roles surrounding such events; that is, men gather outside around the meat on the barbecue, while women gather inside around the sides. For men who do not eat meat, their place in this dichotomy is a disruption.

In a similar investigation, Mycek (2018) interviewed 20 men who abstain from meat-eating in some capacity about how they navigate their masculine identities. The study found that the men did not see their choice to follow a traditionally feminine diet as a concession of masculinity (Mycek, 2018). Instead, they interpreted their motivations as rational rather than emotional, and cited nutritional research to support their decision (Mycek, 2018). Mycek (2018) argues that this adherence to the rational side of the rational/emotional binary is a method of adhering to gender normativity while following a feminine diet. In explaining their choice exclusively in terms of logic, men are redefining veg*anism to fit norms of masculinity rather than disrupting the gender binary through their diet (DeLassio-Parson, 2017; Mycek, 2018).

Similarly, Oliver (2021) studied the online presence of veg*an male influencers. The study found that these men negotiated their masculinity by framing their dietary journey using

traditionally masculine tropes of strength and power; specifically, they conceptualized themselves as the protectors of weaker animals (Oliver, 2021). In another study of vegan men, Wright (2015b) also examines the rhetoric of the "hegan," or male vegan. These men follow vegan diets and present themselves as quintessentially ultra masculine to masculinize vegan diets rather than embrace their disruptive dietary choices. Wright (2015b) attributes this rhetorical deference to traditional discourse of masculinity to a cultural moment that struggles to accept men who prioritize ethics in their dietary choices. In other words, veg*an men tend to seek ways to masculinize veg*anism to avoid attributing their diet to ethics and care.

*Veg*ans as Self-Relegated Outcasts*

Stigma and bias are common reactions to veg*anism (Loughnan et al., 2014). MacInnis and Hodson (2015) found that people hold more biases towards veg*ans than any other dietary group, including religious diets, gluten and lactose intolerance, the only exception being evidence of the greatest bias towards people who follow gluten-free diets despite not suffering an intolerance. Similarly, in a qualitative investigation of interpersonal interactions, Twine (2014; 2017) found that the transition to veganism had a negative impact on people's interpersonal relationships, resulting in exclusion and ostracism. This evidence of stigma and bias towards veg*anism explains why many people who eat plant-based diets reject the veg*an identity.

*Separating the Veg*an Identity from the Veg*an Diet*

In contrast to what one might expect given the discourses of veg*anism traced so far, both Mooney and Lorenz (1997) and Ruby and Heine (2011) found that people who eat mostly vegetarian diets are rated more highly on attributes like intelligence and attractiveness. This evaluation of veg*ans directly opposes the studies previously described, which cite veg*anism as disruptive and comical. Interestingly, neither Mooney and Lorenz (1997) nor Ruby and Heine

(2011) called the diets described in their studies "vegetarian" by name or explicitly mentioned limiting meat consumption on purpose. Instead, participants were asked to read profiles describing a fictional person's eating habits and then rate that person on factors such as intelligence, attractiveness, and virtuousness. In other words, these studies described the behavior of veg*anism without labeling the fictitious people as veg*an, thus not attaching their behavior to any ideological motivations. These findings suggest that the stigma towards veg*anism is attached to the ethics of the diet rather than the actual practice of limiting meat consumption.

In addition, meat-eaters see meatless diets as lacking proper nutrition (Kerslake et al., 2022). Paradoxically, Kerslake et al. (2022) found that meat-eaters also described meat-free meals as healthy. That is, when the same nonvegetarians who described veg*an diets as deficient were asked to evaluate the healthfulness of individual meals, they rated meatless meals that were not described as veg*an as healthier than meals containing meat (Kerslake et al., 2022). This finding further suggests that biases towards veg*ans are located in the terminology rather than practice.

In a dialogic study involving influential voices in vegan studies, Truath et al. (2021) claim that identity is an important factor in studies of veg*anism. For some, it is merely a diet. For others, it is an identity and means of social justice (Truath et al., 2021). The participants of this dialogue note the stigma surrounding the terminology of veg*anism; indeed, they hold that more people *eat* veg*an than *are* veg*an (Truath et al., 2021). This issue of identity is further illustrated in the development of the label "plant-based," which describes the diet, whereas "veg*an" describes the person (Truath et al., 2021). Like the aforementioned verbal concealment

of meat products, avoiding the term "veg*an" is avoiding an association with a veg*an identity, even as many people remain uncomfortable with the idea of eating animals.

People who follow veg*an diets and claim veg*an identities tend to be ascribed the attributes associated with that diet. These attributes include femininity, ostracism, and an essentialized veg*an identity. By using terms such as "plant-based," which describes food, as opposed to "veg*an," which describes a person, some people are able to avoid constituting their identity as veg*an despite continuing to follow veg*an diets. In other words, discourse is utilized to constitute and prevent constituting identity.

The Expression of Altruism in Veg*an Diets

Much is understood about the ways that veg*ans are perceived by meat-eaters, as well as how the decision to follow the diet affects interpersonal relationships. What has yet to be explored in this context is the rhetorical moment of disclosure of veg*an diets. This moment is important to study as it provides an insight into how veg*ans attempt to actively shape their identity through discourse involving the ostensive reason they choose to follow the diet. This moment can occur in various situations, though it increasingly occurs through new media channels in today's mediated world. Discursive presentations of veg*ans are often found in advertisements and other new media sources, such as social media (Adams, 2015; Cole, 2008; Cole & Morgan, 2011; Contois, 2020; Fegtiz & Pirani; Rogers, 2008; Wright, 2015a). The location of this discourse in new media is important in that veg*anism continues to be constructed as deviant, feminine, virtuous, weak, ascetic, and artificial, even as media evolve and change.

There are several motivations that veg*ans cite for following the diet. Janssen et al. (2016) found that most of these include concern for animal welfare, environmental concerns,

social justice, and personal health considerations, though most veg*ans reported multiple reasons. These reasons can be classified into two categories and often are in studies of veg*an motivations: altruistic and egoistic (Fox & Ward, 2008; Janssen et al., 2016; Lindeman & Sirelius, 2001; MacInnis & Hodson, 2015). Altruistic veg*ans are motivated by external and ethical considerations, including concern for animal welfare, animal ethics, and environmental concerns. Lindeman and Sirelius (2001) assert that for some veg*ans, their diet is a form of activism or resistance. Egoistic veg*ans, on the other hand, practice veg*anism strictly to benefit their health and well-being. This is not to say that there is not a certain degree of overlap between these two categories, and long-practicing veg*ans tend to adopt more, if not all reasons for continuing their diet (Fox & Ward, 2008). Typically, a veg*an's initial and primary motive falls into one of the two categories and remains constant over time (Janssen et al., 2016; Lindeman & Sirelius, 2001).

Dietary choices are an invisible source of stigma, as they only become visible at the point of disclosure (Goffman, 1974). Goffman (1974) defines stigma as either a visible or an invisible attribute that disgraces the person to whom it is attached. In other words, this attribute marks the stigmatized person as abnormal; further, the entirety of the person's existence is contaminated by this attribute. As such, this stigma is often defined operationally in studies of veg*anism regarding reported reactions to this point of disclosure. Despite the relative ease of "passing," or the ability to seem "normal" around strangers, veg*ans only get so far. While veg*ans may avoid disclosure in most situations, they are often forced to disclose on those frequent occasions when people break bread together.

In a quantitative study of attitudes towards veg*ans, Judge and Wilson (2018) analyze the stigma experienced by male and female diet followers. These attitudes were measured through

surveys conducted with non-vegetarians. The study yielded interesting yet unsurprising results: male participants were likelier to report an overall disdain for veg*ans (Judge & Wilson, 2018). Additionally, male veg*ans were met with more negativity compared to female veg*ans. One reason for this could be the association of femininity with asceticism, making it more socially acceptable for females to eschew animal products. Finally, negative attitudes towards vegans were stronger than those towards vegetarians, a discrepancy that the authors speculate results from veganism's rejection of human dominance over animals and a general disdain for advocacy for species perceived as lesser (Judge & Wilson, 2018). In other words, vegans are looked down on for the perceived altruism embedded in their dietary choices. To further compound the stigma experienced by veg*ans, Phua et al. (2019) found that both men and women are more likely to have a positive view of celebrity vegans when the celebrity's ostensive motivations are altruistic rather than egoistic.

METHODOLOGY

This study investigates the rhetoric of altruism and egoism in veg*an diets. This expression can be located in the rhetorical moment of the disclosure; that is, the answer to the question that often follows: “are you veg*an? why?” The moment of disclosure is an especially apt rhetorical moment to study. Eating and foodways are expressions of cultural belonging in both every day and culturally significant moments. For example, most major holidays come equipped with a ceremonial food tradition. These traditions can be culturally or family-specific, but they function as moments of community building (Engelhardt, 2013). In addition, significant life events such as weddings, funerals, and milestone birthdays are accompanied by food-based celebrations. To abstain from eating the foods associated with one’s culture is not just passing the meat plate. It is a refusal to participate fully in a culturally significant moment (Greenebaum, 2018).

Another unique attribute of studying a diet culture is its everyday salience. Because eating is a necessary, life-sustaining bodily function, deviations from normative eating can be difficult, if not impossible to hide. This hypervisibility means that disclosure of dietary preference is a common feature of a veg*an social life. Any time a veg*an wishes to share a meal with their omnivorous friends in a meat-centric culture, their diary choice becomes a limitation. Restaurant menus must be perused ahead of time and special replacement meals must be prepared, all the while reminding both the veg*an and their loved ones that their choice is deviant.

I define the moment of disclosure as the announcement of veg*anism to people who previously did not know their companion’s dietary preference. This announcement is

accompanied by an explanation, either offered unprompted by the veg*an or at the behest of their confidant. This explanation is an offering of why the person chose to become a veg*an. These usually take two routes: an altruistic description or an egoistic explanation. Altruistic motivations include reasons external to the veg*an, such as animal welfare and environmental advocacy. Egoistic explanations include reasons internal to the veg*an, such as their health and well-being. Disclosure allows veg*ans to actively shape their identity rather than simply accepting the assumed attributes ascribed to veg*anism. In other words, it is an opportunity to constitute their identity as an altruistic person or a person motivated by egoistic interests. The kind of reason the person offers is quite important, as it is more socially acceptable to offer egoistic explanations than altruistic ones (Judge & Wilson, 2018; Phua et al., 2019).

This reaction discrepancy results from an implied accusation when a veg*an cites altruistic motivations. A person who offers an altruistic explanation represents an embodied questioning of the moral implications of the practice of eating meat that their omnivorous company must navigate (Twine, 2017). In positing that they believe eating meat is morally wrong, veg*ans imply that meat-eaters are committing that moral offense. Comparatively, an egoistic explanation requires no such dissonance on the part of the meat-eater because the choice is framed as personal. Indeed, egoistic justifications do not imply any wrongdoing and do not cause meat-eaters in the presence of vegetarians to consider the ethical implications of their diets.

The disclosure of veg*anism undoubtedly plagues interpersonal interactions, but it also occurs in various situations. For example, some individuals such as public figures and influencers who adopt the diet, must disclose publicly. Disclosure can also occur on behalf of a group, such as when entire companies or activist groups announce their stance and explain it as a

method of raising awareness or even advertising their products and services to the public. I investigate these instances of identity disclosure in this study: celebrity identity and group identity. Through a rhetorical framework consisting of constitutive rhetoric, I look for similarities across these rhetorical situations in order to discover what similarities and differences exist among them and their implications for constructing a veg*an identity.

Constitutive Rhetorical Frameworks

Identity is an influential factor in human motivations. In his classic work, Charland (1987) argues that subjects' identities are constituted through language, building from Althusser's (1971) concept of the interpellated, always-already subject. The always-already subject exists in pre-rhetorical state and is called into being in the rhetorical moment that they respond to discursive practices, a moment when they become subjects of that discourse. Charland (1987) crafts the idea that identity is both product and production of discourse, and constitutive rhetoric emerges as an autonomous system of identity production. People come to exist through the rhetorical discourses they choose to participate in and construct their identity through this discourse, determining what elements future rhetorics may appeal to in hailing this identity (Charland, 1987). Charland (1987) further holds that successful, novel constitutive rhetorics solve some problem, some contradiction that the subject has previously faced. Charland (1987) takes the concept a step further to describe the ways that identity is created in discursive actions to maintain a consistent ideological narrative. Charland describes this as a three-step process.

First, the subject must be successfully interpellated. That is, the subject must already exist in a pre-rhetorical moment but become the subject of discourse when they choose or are called to participate. This process is not always successful, as subjects may not identify with the narrative

of discourse; indeed, it must be freely chosen (Charland, 1987). Because of this identification, qualities are ascribed to the subject's character as inherent. Second, constitutive rhetorics must represent a call to action for the subject. In other words, constitutive rhetoric requires its subjects to act in a way that provides consistency with the narrative they have chosen to identify with (Charland, 1987). Finally, Charland (1987) emphasizes the importance of material action in successful constitutive rhetorics, as he locates both power and ideology in the material action of discourse. In other words, the third step of constitutive rhetoric is encouraging others and recognizing the complexity of identity.

Constitutive rhetorics can occur at two levels, according to Charland. First, it is found in narrative representations and stories that mold the subject according to their ideological principles and motivations. In other words, people act in such a way as to preserve the narrative cohesion of the discourse surrounding their interpellated identity. The second way constitutive rhetoric occurs is at the aesthetic and affective levels. In other words, subjects can use discourse to develop, create, and constitute new identities they wish to identify with.

Identity Formation through Food Practices

Participation in food culture and traditions defines identity and identifies oneself as part of a region and its culture (Stokes & Atkins-Sayre, 2016). In their 2016 book, Stokes and Atkins-Sayre (2016) explore the role that food and consumption play in constituting identity in the Southern region of the United States. In this area, food traditions and identities often collide. They find that maintaining food traditions is used to preserve cultural identity and perform acts of care, especially among southern women in the context of baking. In a rhetorical analysis of the Slow Food PR movement, Stokes (2013) also applies constitutive rhetoric to the rhetoric of foodways. She argues that language is used to promote Slow Food as a new American food

identity, and that symbols define food and food production to create a new version of reality (Stokes, 2013). Likewise, Beardsley (2022) analyzes how community cookbooks use constitutive rhetoric in order to cultivate a shared sense of community identity, mainly how women use these texts to create community.

Atkins-Sayre (2010) also addresses the role of rhetoric in creating food identities. In a study of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals' (PETA) advertisement campaigns, she describes how PETA attempts to constitute a shared identity between humans and animals. Similarly, Derkatch and Spoel (2017) utilize constitutive rhetoric to analyze health promotional documents and to describe how they constitute health citizenship. In this study, the identity of a good health citizen is characterized as a citizen responsible for maintaining their own health, ultimately deemphasizing the role of policy in health interventions (Derkatch & Spoel, 2017). This idea of health citizenship is consistent with rhetoric that frames food as medicine and food choice as an individual responsibility, largely ignoring the economic and demographic disparities that ultimately govern such choices.

I utilize a constitutive rhetorical framework to investigate how people form an identity associated with veg*anism and their motivation for that diet. I argue that people constitute themselves as a particular kind of person through their discursive representation of their motivation for following a veg*an diet. In other words, altruistic veg*ns constitute their identity as altruistic through participation in veg*an foodways. In contrast, people also avoid forming an identity associated with veg*anism to preserve their identities. Some of these other identities can be constructed as antithetical to veg*anism, such as masculine gender identities. In addition, I examine how disclosure calls different identities into question and how it appeals to identities as a method of conversion in some cases.

To investigate instances of rhetorical disclosure, I take a rhetorical media studies approach to this study of disclosure of veg*anism. Three case study chapters rhetorically analyze textual artifacts, including those representing Gordon Ramsay's celebrity identity and those representing activist groups' collective identity. Ramsay's identity as a white, cishet male celebrity affords him privilege in navigating two contradictory identities: hypermasculine celebrity chef and explorer of plant-based alternatives. In contrast, activist groups who lack the imperviousness of fame face far more substantial challenges in constituting their group identity. Ramsay can explore unencumbered, even as he continues to ridicule the moral underpinnings of the diet. At the same time, lesser-known activist groups press back against the culinary injustices that catapulted Ramsay's career.

Activist groups build identities and resultant calls to action through either altruistic or egoistic perspectives. Altruistic veg*an identities are constituted through expressions of care, a feminine trait, whereas egoistic veg*an identities are considered more masculine. Interestingly, egoistic explanations are privileged over altruistic ones, reinforcing the idea that caring is feminine and therefore devalued in a patriarchal society. Constitutive rhetoric is the best method to study the rhetoric of altruism and egoism in veg*an diets because it allows for the analysis of the way that identities are constructed in and by discourse. This construction occurs through the interpellation of responding to discursive representations of veg*ans, and through intentional constitution of identity by the subject, such as when people explain motivation for following a veg*an diet.

Celebrity Identity Disclosure

Building on MacInnis and Hodson's (2015) examination of the reclamation of the term "soyboy" by men on Instagram, I will study Gordon Ramsay's surprising soft launch into plant-

based cooking. Ramsay, a hypermasculine celebrity chef, is well known for his carnistic views and famous derogatory statements about meatless diets (Kondal, 2019; Leer, 2016; Nilsson, 2012). Recently, he made waves with his YouTube "Veganuary" series and his participation in TikTok's Vegan Challenge. Despite this digital content, a partnership with the popular non-dairy milk brand Silk, and his growing repertoire of vegan recipes, he still speaks disdainfully of veg*an food.

This trivializing language is important because it reflects Ramsay's effort to distance himself from the identity of veg*anism. In other words, Ramsay constitutes his identity as a hypermasculine chef discursively and actively avoids constituting himself as a veg*an by ridiculing the diet, despite the content he has been producing. This choice supports discourse that conceptualizes veg*anism and veg*an foods as incompatible with masculine identity. At the same time, Ramsay's identity as a force of hypermasculinity allows him to navigate his inconsistency. In other words, Ramsay's fame and privilege as a white male celebrity smooths the path between his incompatible identities. He can simultaneously develop veg*an recipes and continue to ridicule the ethical underpinnings of the diet. His contrariety only adds to the shock value and maintains his relevance in the culinary world.

I analyze his past public statements regarding veg*anism and vegetarianism and compare the rhetoric he used then with his more recent rhetoric, even as he capitalizes on plant-based eating and product promotion. Specifically, I analyze a moment of disclosure he makes on an episode of Master Chef, wherein he admits that he loves vegan food and insinuates that he has privately enjoyed it throughout his career despite his highly publicized public disdain. Using a constitutive rhetorical framework, I identify appeals to identity, the (non)construction of veg*an identity through disclosure, and a call to action. I investigate whether Ramsay's existing identity

as hypermasculine and therefore carnistic, prevents him from forming an identity related to plant-based eating (Gough, 2007; Mycek, 2018; Rogers, 2008). Through this analysis I illuminate how the rhetoric of altruism and egoism in veg*an diets creates and constitutes identity.

Altruistic and Egoistic Group Identity Disclosure

Unlike this study's examination of celebrity disclosure, my investigation of group disclosure does not focus on an individual's explanation of their dietary choices. Instead, I focus on the rhetoric used in social media campaigns designed by two different activist groups to encourage viewers to convert to veganism. Using a constitutive rhetorical framework, I look for appeals to identity, the (non)construction of vegan identity through disclosure, and a call to action. This call to action is an important aspect of this study because it provides yet another rhetorical moment of disclosure, this time for a group of people and an organization. Similar to individuals, animal rights groups must disclose their stance on meat-eating and animal testing and offer reasons for these stances. Notably, this communication aims to encourage others to consider the diet as well. The rhetorical method of this disclosure still takes two forms: altruistic and egoistic.

I analyze Instagram posts from two popular animal rights groups to study group identity disclosure. The first group is Forks Over Knives, well known for producing a documentary of the same name. This group advocates for vegan lifestyles primarily through egoistic motivations such as health and weight loss and shares seasonal recipes. I also examine the Instagram presence of a second group, Farm Sanctuary. This group advocates for vegan lifestyles primarily through altruistic motivations such as animal rights, as it is a rescue and advocacy group specifically for farm animals.

I utilize a constitutive rhetorical framework to analyze the rhetoric used by both of these groups. Specifically, I investigate the identity the groups attempt to constitute in their rhetoric and how it endeavors to get people to identify with these identities. I also look for masculine and feminine attributes within their appeals. For example, existing literature on gender and meat consumption suggests that egoistic motivations, especially those centered around logic and reason, are considered more masculine than altruistic motivations, especially those rooted in care and compassion (Mycek, 2018; Wright, 2015b). I would expect to find such differences reflected in the rhetoric each group chooses to establish the identity with which they wish their audience to identify. This aspect of the disclosure is important because it illustrates how activist groups constitute their identity and ask others to relate to that identity.

(DIS)CLAIMING IDENTITY: GORDON RAMSAY AND PLANT-BASED CELEBRITIES

Celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay epitomizes the quintessential masculine chef. In addition to being a masculine-presenting, cisgender man, he shouts, curses, turns red in the face, and seems to have little regard for the feelings of others (Kondal, 2019; Leer, 2016; Nilsson, 2012). His empire of television shows is built on this storied, tough-but-effective disposition. This temper has become his trademark, a caricature of the head chef who keeps his kitchen staff on their toes, the crass leader who turns out good food and garners rave reviews by any means necessary. In addition to his reputation as a hypermasculine celebrity chef, Ramsay is well known for his carnistic views and his famously derogatory statements about meatless diets (Kondal, 2019; Leer, 2016; Nilsson, 2012).

Over the course of his career, he has made this distaste for vegan food abundantly and emphatically clear. Ramsay has claimed he is “allergic” to vegans and admitted that his worst nightmare is for his children to come to him and tell them they want to be vegetarian (Kondal, 2019). He once tricked a vegetarian into eating meat by hiding it beneath cheese on a slice of pizza he offered them, laughing as he revealed the prank (Kondal, 2019). He declared himself a member of PETA - that is, People Eating Tasty Animals (Ramsay, 2018). Throughout his long career as a judge and host of various competitive cooking shows, he’s known to chastise chefs who serve him “rabbit food” or dishes that do not feature meat.

Ramsay’s hypermasculine celebrity persona and his dismissive attitude towards veg*an diets might seem unrelated; however, this is far from the case. As previously stated, masculinity and meat consumption are rhetorically linked (Rogers, 2008; Rozin et al, 2012) and meat functions as a status marker (Fiddes, 1991; Hamilton, 2006; Schleifer, 1999; Sobal, 2005).

Moreover, meat-eating is used to perform masculine gender identities (Sobal, 2005). The nature of the trivialization of meatless diets in men usually consists of accusations of femininity (Gough, 2007; Rogers, 2008; Rozin et al., 2012). In other words, choosing not to eat meat is effeminate, and femininity is devalued to such an extent in patriarchal societies that some men will knowingly consume foods they do not like and that may cause them health problems in order to avoid emasculation (Gough, 2007). To that end, Ramsay's antipathy and public ridicule of veg*an diets make all the more sense as a way to uphold and perform his hypermasculine identity in the public eye.

What comes as a surprise given both Ramsay's hypermasculine identity and his track record of veg*an contempt is his recent foray into plant-based cooking; indeed, the chef who famously claimed to be "allergic" to vegans is now the face of Silk Oat, a prominent non-dairy milk brand (Kondal, 2019). This about-face has received mixed reviews among veg*an audiences, as some take any celebrity representation as a win for the movement while others see Ramsay as a greed-propelled opportunist (Kondal, 2019). Meanwhile, meat-eaters see Ramsay's plant-based cooking as his bid to capitalize on the latest dietary trend. Whatever the reaction to his unexpected venture into plant-based food, there does seem to be one universal response: surprise.

If audiences are surprised, then Ramsay is flabbergasted; indeed, his vegan recipes and much of his vegan social media content is accompanied by metacommunicative quips and jabs at the absurdity of his participation in plant-based food trends (Ramsay, 2021). This self-awareness and humor can be interpreted as a struggle to manage his identities. Ramsay must continually reconstitute himself as the same red-faced, virile chef who keeps the censor button operator at the ready while also cooking vegan food - two identities that fundamentally contradict one

another. These anxieties regarding the rise of veg*anism and reduction of meat consumption are shared by many meat-eating Western consumers, for whom meat consumption has symbolized wealth, power, and abundance for generations (Fiddes, 1991; Ogle, 2013).

The tension between masculine gender identities and meat consumption is one made discursively and perpetuated through performance. Just like refusing to eat meat is emasculating, refusing to prepare meat is similarly effeminate in the world of culinary arts and competitive cooking. For those that do choose to eschew meat preparation, stigma results. One way this stigma is expressed is humor and ridicule; indeed, many products marketed towards veg*ans are mocked for being "fake." This trivializing language is important because it reflects Ramsay's effort to distance himself from the identity of veganism using humor and ridicule. In other words, Ramsay constitutes his existing identity as a hypermasculine chef discursively. He actively avoids constituting himself as a vegan by ridiculing the diet, despite the vegan social media content he has been producing for TikTok and YouTube. This choice supports discourse that conceptualizes veganism and vegan foods as incompatible with masculine identity. Paradoxically, Ramsay's well-established heteronormative masculinity and his white male celebrity status grant him the privilege of exploring veg*an diets with minimal compromise to his masculine identity.

An example of masculinity performance in food celebrities can be found in Guy Fieri. As previously mentioned, Contois (2020) identifies Fieri's successful portrayal of an alternative "dude" version of masculinity. While dude masculinity provides an avenue for men to step into the kitchen and break masculine norms of eating, it still requires navigation. In keeping with the stigma surrounding male dieting, dude food is decidedly anti-diet, featuring large portions of meat-forward dishes. Fieri's celebrity persona breaks some rules of hegemonic celebrity chef

masculinity, such as his middle-class approach to ingredients and his garish dress and food presentation styles, while doubling down on others, such as decadence and portion sizes (Contois, 2020). Like Fieri, Ramsay's famous performance of celebrity chef masculinity makes his identity construction around plant-based diets an important cultural phenomenon that can either open the door to plant-based masculinity or further the stigma associated with veg*an identities.

Building on MacInnis and Hodson's (2015) look at the reclamation of the term "soyboy" by men on Instagram, this chapter investigates Gordon Ramsay's surprising turn to plant-based cooking, and what this means for the expression of gender identities through food consumption. Through this analysis I explore how the rhetoric of altruism and egoism in veg*an diets creates and constitutes identity. This analysis focuses on mediated platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and the television show MasterChef. I chose these platforms for analysis because they represent Ramsay's most current and widespread channels to both reach and interact with his followers. The following section lays the groundwork for the constitution, maintenance, and commodification of celebrity identity, specifically concerning food in general and veg*anism. This understanding is essential to address the context of publicized identity in which Gordon Ramsay is constituted.

Celebrity Foods and Food Celebrities

The purpose of celebrity endorsement is to create a lifestyle with which people can identify, a brand personified by individual celebrities and activist groups. Compared with celebrities, activist groups are less popular. Celebrity culture finds its home in several every day facets of life. Dreissens (2013) points to celebrification as the convergence of mediatization, personalization, and commodification. In other words, celebrity personas are born of a felt

connection between the celebrity and their audience that is reached through mediated platforms, such as television. Because audiences feel they "know" the celebrity on a parasocial level, their celebrity lifestyles can be commodified and used to sell products. Lewis (2010) describes the "ordinary expertise" of celebrities, who often convert their lifestyles into brands and go on to endorse products that fit the aesthetic and affective evocations of that brand. Moreover, while celebrities lend credibility to the endorsement of products that fit their lifestyles, however loosely, these commodities are becoming increasingly intangible (Lewis, 2010; Lewis & Huber, 2015).

Unlike celebrity endorsements of the past, celebrity brands are an abstract commodity, a practice or mode of living recommended and exemplified by the celebrity rather than a product for sale (Lewis, 2010). Additionally, Lewis (2010) traces the conflation of expertise and celebrity, concepts associated with personal values, to a greater extent than ever. These changes to the nature of celebrity point to public interest in the personal lives of celebrities as well as a demand for authenticity in celebrity identity. Lewis (2010) offers Jamie Oliver and Martha Stewart as examples of celebrities who have turned their lifestyles and the values underpinning those lifestyles into brands. Stewart and Oliver rose to fame for their gourmet food, but have remained prominent for their lifestyles. Stewart is known for her idyllic take on domestic life, while Oliver is known for his casual food made with high quality and sustainable ingredients. Both celebrities lend their personal brand to products they choose to endorse, essentially commodifying the lifestyles they represent (Lewis, 2010; Lewis & Huber, 2015).

Selling lifestyles through celebrity branding reflects a neoliberal turn in consumerism. According to Lewis (2008), fashions of interest in individual consumption effectively establish ethical behavior as an individual responsibility reflected in monetary choices. In other words,

ethics are enacted in the checkout line. The distortion of consumerism and citizenship is epitomized in food media, which glamorize ethical living as a choice made by consumers rather than an issue occupying the time and minds of gubernatorial bodies, ultimately promoting consumer self-surveillance. Media achieve this introspective sense of responsibility by appealing to empathetic distress, which Hoffman (1990) defines as "an aversive feeling contingent in another's physical, emotional, or economic distress" (p. 151). That is, witnessing injustice produces guilt in the observer, who then feels called upon to ameliorate that injustice despite the fact that they have not caused it. In the case of food media, mitigation means spending more at the store for ethically produced food, which means that ethical consumption is a luxury commodity.

Food celebrities occupy a pivotal role in promoting neoliberal ethical foodways. Their perceived authenticity and accessibility lend them an air of everyday expertise and makes their advice seem reliable. While many food celebrities, like Jamie Oliver, promote sustainable and quality food and foodways, the advice offered by such figures is "highly individualized, exceedingly technocratic, and silent on the structural conditions surrounding health and hunger, eating and wellbeing" (Johnston & Goodman, 2015, p. 212). That is, promoting kind and healthy lifestyles by framing them as a series of personal choices and often, a willingness to shell out the extra cash, ignores socioeconomic and other barriers to these lifestyles.

The responsibility of ethical choices is commodified, capitalizing on consumer guilt. While this shift of responsibility induces guilt equally among consumers, it does not offer all consumers an equal opportunity to alleviate this guilt, as the high cost of ethically sourced products means that they are not available to those with lower socioeconomic status. Not only do

consumers have to purchase lower-quality products, they are also made to feel guilty for buying what they can afford while those with greater means can claim a moral high ground.

The emergence of commodified celebrity lifestyle brands coupled with the turn to neoliberal consumerism afford celebrities a considerable influence on the habits of their followers, including their consumption choices. Gordon Ramsay's choice to prioritize his masculine identity and model a particular kind of masculinity while eating vegan foods and creating vegan social media content provides an identity that his followers are able to adopt. The success of his public identity navigation is a blueprint for other men who wish to eat vegan while maintaining an overall masculine gender performance.

*Celebrity Veg*anism*

Some media appeal to altruistic tendencies while others appeal to egoistic tendencies. When it comes to veg*an advocacy in the media, films such as *Forks Over Knives*, *Eating Animals,* and *Earthlings* (Fulkerson, 2011; Monson, 2005; Quinn, 2017) all benefited from the endorsement of celebrities like Leonardo DiCaprio, Joaquin Phoenix, and Natalie Portman. In her assessment of the narrative strategies of these films, Weik von Mossner (2021) identifies two primary strategies: empathetic distress and personal health. As mentioned previously, Hoffman's (1990) concept of empathetic distress induces innocent bystanders who witness injustice to act in order to ameliorate that injustice. Films that use this strategy implore viewers to participate in a veg*an lifestyle in order to protect innocent animals. Other films advocate the same actions from the perspective of another brand of lifestyle, the neoliberal health conscious "clean" aesthetic.

While celebrities lend credibility and project their identities onto lifestyles and movements, sometimes important elements of the movements they represent are lost or toned down. For example, a common strategy for mainstreaming veg*an diets is a shift in focus from

ethicality to personal wellbeing (Doyle, 2016). In other words, egoistic veg*anism is easier to sell than ethical veg*anism, so while celebrities do help spread awareness, they wipe it of its ethicality. In this way, celebrity brushes against its limits regarding ethics. Maintaining a consistent brand identity is crucial to celebrity marketing, and controversial diets can easily take over an identity, so caution must be exercised (Doyle, 2016).

For example, Doyle (2016) analyzes the identities maintained by two vegan celebrities, Ellen DeGeneres and Alicia Silverstone. Silverstone built a brand centered around her ethical veganism, one marked by heteronormative perspectives; that is, emphasis on weight loss, narratives of motherhood and kindness, and promoting the diet to pursue the idealized female body. In contrast, DeGeneres arranges her ethical veganism as merely a piece of her celebrity identity, a facet of her kind and caring celebrity brand (Doyle, 2016). Kindness and care, as previously mentioned, is associated with female gender identities, placing women at the center of lifestyle decision-making even as their preferences are often overridden (Cairns et al., 2010; Doyle, 2016).

While celebrities can boost the popularity of veg*anism with their perceived credibility, they can also promote it for unethical reasons. For example, veg*anism in female celebrities is often marketed as a weight-loss method, a way to look like the veg*an celebrity promoting it (Wright, 2015c; Fegitz & Pirani, 2018; Phua et al., 2019). For example, Wright (2015c) compares spokespeople for PETA, observing that female spokespeople, such as Pamela Anderson, are highly sexualized in their campaigns, often promising weight-loss and physical desirability. In contrast, male spokespeople, such as Mike Tyson and Mac Danzig, are often athletes, and such campaigns promise virility and athletic performance (Wright, 2015c). In a

similar study, Fegitz and Pirani (2018) analyze Beyoncé's highly publicized, temporary vegan diet which commodifies and sexualizes Beyoncé's appearance.

This discrepancy in marketing strategies based on the gender of the spokesperson reflects the value placed on thinness and the idealized female body rather than on the pursuit of an ethically motivated diet. In other words, the campaigns promise that if consumers buy the products necessary to sustain their lifestyle, they will look like conventionally attractive celebrities and perform like professional athletes. This shift in marketing from individual products to a brand of lifestyle as an entity further places the formation of celebrity identity at the forefront of marketing campaigns.

Gordon Ramsay: A Surprising Celebrity SoyBoy

In this section I rhetorically analyze textual artifacts, specifically those representing Gordon Ramsey's celebrity identity, in order to reveal how he constitutes his identity as masculine and egoistic. I locate the construction of his identity in moments of disclosure. The moment of disclosure of veg*an diets is important because it is one of the few opportunities in which a veg*an can shape their dietary identity as either altruistic or egoistic, depending on the explanation they choose to share. While veg*an identities and masculine identities remain at discursive odds with one another, Ramsay occupies a unique place and enjoys a unique freedom in his identity formation. Because Ramsay is a white, cisgender, heterosexual male celebrity, he enjoys a level of freedom to deviate from his expected behavior that others in less privileged positions do not possess. In other words, it is more socially acceptable for Ramsay to be socially unacceptable.

Additionally, Ramsey's inconsistency does not strike him as it does for others, even compared to other celebrities. For example, female veg*an celebrities are chastised for any

perceived inconsistency while such change is celebrated in men (Wright, 2015c). Natalie Portman was a vegetarian for two decades before becoming vegan and participating in veg*an activism. When she chose to suspend her veganism during her pregnancy, she came under fire in the veg*an community for this inconsistency despite her immediate return to veganism upon the birth of her child (Wright, 2015a; 2015c). Likewise, Ellen DeGeneres faced backlash in response to her very public position as an ethical, or altruistic, vegan while simultaneously working as a spokesperson for Covergirl. This brand utilizes animal testing for their products (Wright, 2015c). In contrast, Ramsey's inconsistency is treated as a dramatic twist in his story. His past belittlement and current use of humor do not preclude him from taking part in vegan food culture.

Analysis

Gordon Ramsay's journey from tricking vegetarians into eating meat to conducting vegan challenges on TikTok has baffled many in the veg*an community. Interestingly, despite Ramsay's recipe developments, partnerships, and digital content involving veg*an foods, he remains reluctant to claim veg*anism as an identity. Instead, he cites an overall effort to eat healthier and to reduce his meat consumption (Gruffydd, 2022, Moreton, 2018). One important aspect of a successful, novel constitutive rhetoric is that it solves some problem, some contradiction that the subject faces. I argue that Ramsay must reconcile his identification with two adverse identities: hypermasculine chef and veg*an. He likely accomplishes this reconciliation in a few key ways. First, he is interpellated by discourse surrounding veg*anism as he develops plant-based recipes. As this practice is incompatible with his hypermasculine image, he uses discourse to formulate a new aesthetic identity in order to preserve his narrative fidelity, an action he is called to perform given the inconsistency of his actions and words. Additionally,

Ramsay's social position as a white, cisgender heteronormative male celebrity allows him to navigate these warring identities.

Interpellation

The first step of any successful constitutive rhetoric is the interpellation of the subject. According to Althusser (1971), the subject exists in an always-already state of pre-rhetorical being. In other words, people and their qualities exist outside of discourse, however they are made into subjects through their participation in discourse. This participation must be voluntary in order to constitute identity. Gordon Ramsay's celebrity identity also exists in an always-already state. He becomes the subject when he chooses to respond, to be called into being by this discursive participation. Because participation in foodways is a method of discourse and performing identity, Ramsay's decision to participate in discourse about veg*anism calls him forth as a potentially veg*an subject.

An important aspect of constitutive rhetoric is that the subjects' interpellation is freely chosen (Charland, 1987). That is, the subject is a willing participant in the discursive constitution of their own identity. Ramsay freely chooses to participate in this discourse by making veg*an digital content, developing recipes, and endorsing products like Silk Oat. He does not have to navigate this discourse at all. The option remains for him to simply choose not to take an interest in veg*an cooking, or to choose to keep his dietary preferences private. Ramsay's privilege as a cisgender, heteronormative celebrity chef affords him the privilege of *not* disclosing or explaining his reasoning for the inconsistency of his dietary preferences. This privilege is not enjoyed even in other female celebrities, such as Natalie Portman and Ellen DeGeneres (Weik von Mossner, 2021).

Interestingly, there has been little explanation for his actions aside from press coverage of his weight loss, which he attributes to diet and exercise to achieve his health goals (Gruffydd, 2022; Moreton, 2018). Of course, Ramsay's privilege as a masculine-presenting person means that he does not have to explain his new culinary directions. In an interview with *Daily Mail,* Ramsay explains his lifestyle changes that led to a significant weight loss, one of which was a massive cut down on his dairy intake (Moreton, 2018). In the same interview, Ramsay expressed his fear that a fast-paced kitchen lifestyle would lead him to an early grave, a fear that grows the closer he gets to the age that he lost his father (Moreton, 2018).

In an interview with *Delish,* Ramsay clarifies his reasons for going plant-based. He frames his turn to plant-based eating as an essential choice to maintain his health while enduring the demands of his work (Morillo, 2021). In this same interview, Ramsay claims that plant-based recipe development keeps himself and his brand at the forefront of culinary innovations and creativity (Morillo, 2021). Nevertheless, Ramsay has certainly not made any altruistic claims about the value of animal life or the preservation of the environment to contradict his past ridicule of brands like PETA. To that end, his decision to incorporate plant-based food is an egoistic, personal health-related choice. This narrative is consistent with how men typically present their decision to follow veg*an diets (MacInnis & Hodson, 2015; Mycek, 2018; Oliver, 2021; Wright, 2015b).

Ramsay's interpellation as a subject of the discourse is consistent with Charland's (1987) description of constitutive rhetoric. The first step is for the subject to freely choose their own participation, to respond to a potentially veg*an subject's call when he discloses his new position on veg*an food repeatedly and publicly, using both familiar platforms, like MasterChef, and new platforms, such as TikTok. His decision to use humor and feigned surprise to mitigate his

explanations is also a choice that reflects his interpellation; indeed, it suggests a reluctance to be constituted as a veg*an subject and a controlled effort to control the nature of his subjectivity.

Call to Action

Season 12, episode 7 of MasterChef USA, aptly titled "Gordon Ramsay Loves Vegans!" opens with a dramatic revelation from titular executive producer, host, and star, Gordon Ramsay. As Ramsay presents the contestants with their challenge, he reveals that he has been keeping a secret. "It's a secret that's so big, I'm almost afraid to say it on national television," Ramsay states as dramatic music swells (Ramsay, 2022a, 2:08). His co-host, Aarón Sánchez jokingly reassures him that he will be supported. Ramsay continues, "After all these years, I can finally admit that I actually love vegan food," his laughter breaks through this final word as he finishes this revelation, and the contestants gawk, exclaiming their disbelief (Ramsay, 2022a, 2:08). Once the competitors' guffaws have subsided, Ramsay goes on to reveal that it has taken him 20 years to stop hating vegan foods, as flashback reels replay his anti-vegetable sentiments on past seasons of MasterChef.

Ramsay struggles to perform both masculine and vegan identities simultaneously, as the two are incompatible and require some kind of navigation or modification to exist at the same simultaneously (Mycek, 2018; Rozin et al., 2012). To that end, Ramsay is called to reconcile his existing identity as a hypermasculine chef with his desire to cook and promote vegan foods. To navigate these conflicting identities, Ramsey utilizes humor in the moment of disclosure, as seen in his announcement on MasterChef, to bridge the gap between his warring identities. As I have stated elsewhere, the moment of the disclosure of dietary preference is crucial for identity formation. It is one of the only opportunities in which a veg*an can actively shape their own identity in the eyes of their companions by explaining their dietary choices. In this moment, they

may choose to explain their motivations as either altruistic, accepting the compounding stigma this represents, or they may choose to explain their motivations as egoistic, a more masculine and socially acceptable set of motivations.

Ramsay uses humor to integrate his identities, but most importantly, he uses ridicule and mockery of vegan diets to establish his hypermasculine identity as dominant. In other words, he allows his new culinary direction to be a joke in order to make sure everyone knows he is still the manly chef known and loved by his fans and that his interest in vegan food does not take away from his masculinity. The irony of the changes to his own dietary preferences is not lost on him, as his dramatic revelations reveal. This use of humor offers Ramsay a way to maintain both identities, while establishing one of them, his hyper masculinity, as superior and primary. This choice to prioritize and preserve masculine gender identity rather than disrupt this power structure furthers patriarchal oppressions and trivializations of veg*an diets.

By continuing to joke and make fun of vegan foods even as he establishes himself as a contributor to vegan foodways, he is able to maintain narrative fidelity while simultaneously softening his launch into vegan cooking. This is evident in Ramsay's *continued* use of humor; indeed, his vegan content is saturated by this moderating comedy, a combination which he continues to use even as the public has repeatedly been made well aware of his new culinary directions. Notably, Ramsay has chosen to announce his changing opinion of vegan food on various platforms multiple times. This repetition suggests that shaping the narrative of his participation in plant-based cooking is critical. In other words, Ramsay wants to set the record straight: he might be cooking vegan food now, but it is still beneath him.

Locating Constitutive Rhetoric in Celebrity Identity

Narrative Representation

According to Charland (1987), people are called to act in ways which preserve the narrative fidelity of their chosen and interpellated identity. Ramsay has constituted himself as a hypermasculine chef, a narrative which he supports by continuously performing this identity, as he has for decades. Because meat is so synonymous with masculinity, consuming meat is a method of performing masculine gender identity (Sobal, 2005). As a result, Ramsay's hypermasculine persona not only includes cursing and yelling but producing recipes that are meat-forward and advocating for "real" masculine dishes that prominently feature meat. Another way to perform this gender identity is to ridicule meatless diets and construct them as lesser and insufficient (Truath et al., 2021).

Ramsay's participation in plant-based discourse departs from this prolonged performance of masculine identity, an ostensive break from his chosen, hypermasculine image. It complicates his identity in two ways. First, he is no longer using meat consumption and the production of meat-forward recipes to perform his masculinity. Second, not only is he not performing gender in the same way, he is doing the opposite - advocating for less meat consumption. This narrative incoherence calls for two things: a continued masculine gender performance by alternative means, and the creation of a new aesthetic identity.

One method of preserving his narrative is to cook many of the same foods in the same style, just veganized versions. In the episode of MasterChef, after revealing that the challenge du jour is to make a vegan dish, Ramsay offers the still-reeling competitors a demonstration of how to make a beet wellington, which is a veganized version of one of his most famous signature dishes, beef wellington (Ramsay 2022a). He jumps right into the demonstration, with his trademark, no-nonsense demeanor, as the contestants watch excitedly from across the room. Finally, Ramsay sets the chefs to their one-hour task. The rest of the show proceeds as normal,

without any further acknowledgement of the first-ever vegan challenge on MasterChef. He makes the dish in the same manner as any of his meat-based dishes, with perfunctory, no-nonsense directions and efficient techniques.

Ramsay's turn to veganism is also recorded on TikTok, where he continues to perform his aggressive, scathing reviews of food for which he is famous. In a short clip, he calls for submissions to a "vegan challenge," part of a more extensive series where he reacts to other TikTok creator's culinary ventures in his signature, scathing style. These reviews are delivered in a joking manner, as he is not actually tasting the food. Instead, he finds parts of the food's cooking process or visual aspects to criticize.

At the beginning of one clip, he says, "TikTok, over the past year, you've turned me slightly vegan." The clip then briefly cuts to a video previously posted to Ramsay's TikTok account that features a vegan BLT sandwich recipe. "That's right!" he shouts, "you've made me all plant-based! Now, and thanks to the amazing reactions, I've decided to do a TikTok vegan challenge" (Ramsay, 2022b). He goes on to describe the challenge and calls for submissions so that he can review them. In one such review of vegan mozzarella, the aspect he chooses to taunt consists of the food's imitative or "fake" qualities. In the video he chides the creator, "There's no such thing!" (Ramsay & Coassin, 2022). Ramsay uses consistency in other aspects of his personality to maintain an overall narrative fidelity.

The New Aesthetic Identity of Gordon Ramsay

While people are called to act in ways that preserve narrative coherence, constitutive rhetoric also provides a framework for people to create new aesthetic and affective identities that help solve contradictions (Charland, 1987). In other words, people can avoid constituting an identity through discourse just as they can constitute themselves through discourse. Ramsay does

this in order to avoid constituting a vegan identity by using a different term: plant-based. Ramsay is not alone in this labeling; indeed, many people who eat veg*an foods do not claim a veg*an identity, but rather describe their food as plant-based (Truath et al., 2021).

Though Ramsay has moved towards plant-based cooking, he has not sworn off meat entirely, far from it. In a revelatory video posted to Gordon Ramsay's official YouTube Channel on March 19, 2021, he announces his changing opinion on veg*an food. The video, titled "Gordon Ramsay Goes Vegan…for steak??" has garnered over a million views at this time. Interestingly, of the many videos uploaded to this YouTube channel announcing their contents as vegan, many of their titles are formulated as questions, with multiple question marks and even exclamation points. The titles of these videos suggest that their content is surprising, perhaps even shocking to the viewer.

This particular video shows Ramsay standing in a commercial kitchen. He states, "um, I've got a confession," as he glances around the space, avoiding looking into the camera, "after three decades of cooking…I-I'm turning vegan" (Ramsay, 2021). His eyes finally meet the viewer through the screen, and the video cuts to the preparation of an eggplant steak topped with mushrooms, narrated in a voice-over by Ramsay. After the food is plated, a record-scratch sound effect halts the proceedings of the video, and it rewinds to Ramsay's shocking announcement. "I-I'm turning vegan," he repeats, followed by a loaded pause, "for lunch only." he finishes with a smirk (Ramsay, 2021). Ramsay makes it clear that his stint of veganism is temporary and conditional.

In both the YouTube video and the TikTok video in which Ramsay announces his vegan challenge, he distances himself from veg*an identities, as he makes it clear that he does not claim veg*anism as an identity (Ramsay, 20212; 2022b). In other words, he rejects the ethical

philosophy of veg*anism while performing the behaviors that define veg*anism. Ramsay's ability to bifurcate his veg*an actions from the identity and traits of veg*anism demonstrates his privilege. Stigmatized behaviors tend to tarnish, and sometimes take over, one's identity, and this is often the case for veg*ans (Goffman, 1974; Truath et al., 2021). Ramsay's ability to behave as a vegan without claiming the identity or the associated stigma is a privilege afforded to him by his social position as a white male celebrity.

This avoidance of the vegan identity makes sense given that Ramsay constructs himself as hypermasculine; however, this choice has significant implications. Ramsay could choose to embrace his own disruptive behaviors and attempt to create a new version of masculinity that allows for such disruption as "the dude" who diets do (Contois, 2020). Instead, he has chosen to keep his identities discrete. This implies a rigidity to his stance. In other words, he wants no confusion about his essential masculine and aggressive nature. Identification with veg*anism implies asceticism, femininity, and, for some, altruistic outlooks. As his use of humor and mockery suggests, his participation in the dietary trends of veg*anism is as absurd as it is surprising and serves to distance him from the ethicality of the diet. Instead, Ramsay frames his plant-based diet as a begrudging choice made for the sake of health conscientiousness. This choice ultimately upholds both patriarchal oppressions and continues to trivialize the ethics of veg*an diets.

Conclusion

Gordon Ramsay is a culinary icon well known for his hypermasculine image and disdain for veg*an diets. After two decades of merciless ridicule, his turn to plant-based foods came as quite a shock to his followers. An important aspect of this turn is his use of humor to navigate these warring identities; indeed, Ramsay continues to trivialize veg*ans even as he develops new

plant-based recipes and lands promotion partnerships with prominent non-dairy brands. This turn does not indicate a change of personality so much as a change of performance. Ramsay's performed, hypermasculine gender identity has always been boosted by his carnistic take on food and ridicule of the philosophy of veg*anism.

Whatever Gordon Ramsay's internal or personal feelings about veg*an diets are, his performed identity as a hypermasculine chef is more salient. For years, this performed identity has included ridiculing veg*an diets to demonstrate masculinity (Kondal, 2019). For what can be interpreted as egoistic motivations, including personal health and well-being, Ramsay has chosen to embrace veg*an cooking; however, he has chosen not to embrace veg*anism as an identity.

Ramsay still ridicules veg*ans; however, he now does this while eating and cooking plant-based foods. An important aspect of a veg*an identity, as opposed to a plant-based diet, is an emphasis on altruistic veg*anism, which is associated with concern for the well-being of animals and the environment. In contrast, plant-based diets are associated with an egoistic concern for healthfulness. Ramsay actively avoids constituting a veg*an identity by continuing to make fun of veg*anism, while cutting back on meat and dairy to be healthy rather than to be kind. This identity constitution occurs in the moment of disclosure of dietary preferences. This crucial moment is one of the only opportunities a veg*an has to shape their dietary identity as either altruistic or egoistic.

Ramsay enjoys a unique privilege in navigating his masculine identity with his new dietary preferences. Compared to female celebrity vegans and non-celebrity vegan men, Ramsay faces less stigma and backlash for his new personal and career trajectories (MacInnis & Hodson, 2015; Wright, 2015a; 2015c). It is easier for him to defy expectations and social norms than it is for others to do the same. Instead, Ramsay reconciles his hypermasculine image with his interest

in plant-based eating by using humor and ridicule of veg*an diets in his disclosure in order to maintain his narrative fidelity as a masculine figure. Ramsay also enjoys the option not to constitute his identity by controlling his disclosure. Celebrity identity construction and lifestyle branding are also important in the constitution of the identities of the celebrity's followers.

For fans of a particular celebrity, their lifestyle brand becomes a blueprint for constructing their own identity, a neoliberal consumerism strategy that capitalizes on celebrities' everyday expertise and the parasocial relationships between fans and their favorite celebrities. Ramsay could have embraced his disruption and forged a new discursive identity, a new kind of masculinity. This novel identity could have created a space for others to occupy, perhaps even working towards a discourse that accepts masculinity and veg*anism together. Instead, Ramsay chose to eschew the vegan identity in favor of eating plant-based foods. This choice is significant because it ultimately upholds patriarchal values of violence and domination over nature perpetuated by normative meat-eating.

Compared to celebrities, activist groups who seek to constitute identities that they wish for others to adopt must meticulously craft their identities through discourse and public awareness campaigns. In the same way celebrities commodify their lifestyles into brands, activist groups also seek to present a cohesive brand image. In both cases, the goal is to get people to identify with the lifestyle brand created and embodied by individual celebrities and activist groups. In essence, because activist groups do not enjoy the same celebrity privilege as celebrities like Ramsay, the question the audience asks shifts from "why do you eat this way?" to "why should I eat this way?"

FORKS OVER KNIVES: EGOISTIC INSTAGRACTIVISM

Forks Over Knives is an organization best known for producing a documentary of the same name. The organization began when its founder, Brian Wendel, decided to share information he had learned about the benefits of plant-based diets by creating a documentary (Forks Over Knives, 2023a). The documentary focuses on the detrimental effects of the Standard American Diet (SAD) on the health of individuals. Subsequently, the organization has produced several resources and products following the documentary's success, including a magazine, a book and a cookbook, as well as online resources, meal planners, cooking courses, and food products.

The focus of this study is Forks Over Knives' Instagram presence. At the time of this writing, @forksoverknives (Forks Over Knives) boasts a following of 1.5 million, a sizable portion of the 9.7 million vegans reported to live in the U.S. as of 2020 (Ipsos Retail Performance, 2020). Buddle et al. (2017) identify social media as the platform of choice for health influencers and animal rights activism. Instagram is a tool of identity construction, especially through dietary choices and lifestyle "branding." There is ample existing research on constructing individual identity as an influencer with a lifestyle brand using Instagram as a platform. In addition to individual use, organizations and companies also use Instagram to construct an aesthetic and an identity for their brand. In the case of activist organizations, this use of Instagram is especially interesting because the goal of the group is to induce behavior change in their followers. To specify further, vegan activist groups ask their followers to refrain from culturally significant practices of food preparation and consumption and follow the diet they promote instead. Similar to individuals disclosing their veg*an identities and choosing either

altruism or egoism as a primary means for explanation, organizations must also constitute their group identity at the moment of disclosure.

Instagram is a social media platform that is foundational to modern media for its use for personal, professional, and organizational purposes. Curiously, despite the prominence of the platform, it has yet to be explored much in academic literature (Contois & Kish, 2022). Instagram is well known for its emphasis on stylized visual media and carefully composed aesthetics (Harris & Phillips, 2022). Tracing the history of the platform's use, Contois and Kish (2022) note that Instagram has a long history as a medium for crafting identity, especially through food; indeed, in their book, the authors explore the ways in which Instagram functions not just to constitute individual and collective identity, but also to produce and make visible food systems such as livestock production and aesthetic consumption.

Instagram is an excellent platform on which to study constitutive identity disclosure for a few reasons. First, Instagram is a popular platform well studied for the way it is used to build identity, curate a brand, and craft a lifestyle. Second, Instagram's algorithm is loosely chronological, showing users the most recent post first when visiting an individual user page and recent posts when viewing one's follower feed. In other words, each post an activist group makes is a call to action. For vegan activist groups, this call is accompanied by disclosure of identity in each post, similar to the way an individual constitutes their vegan identity when disclosing to a new acquaintance. This frequency of disclosure allows for ample public moments of disclosure to study. Additionally, given the deep association with gender performance that veganism has, Instagram is an apt platform to study identities formed around the diet and lifestyle of veganism because it shares this association with gender performance. Forks Over Knives establishes their

identity as an egoistic activist group through its use of online masculine gender performance and "soft," or food-focused interpretations of veganism to establish its brand.

Instagram's unique emphasis on visual media and food culture coupled with the emergence of social media activism points to an intersection of the two: Instagram food activism, or Instagractivism. Instagram, free to use provided that the user can access the internet, has become a hub for lifestyle influencers, amateur and licensed nutritionists, and activist groups to perform their identities. At the same time, Instagram offers space for subversion and the representation of marginalized groups. Individuals and groups perform authenticity in defiance of the app's aesthetic culture, and the app allows digital communities to form (Contois & Kish, 2022). Contois and Kish (2022) argue that, despite the potential for defiance, like traditional celebrities who use broadcast platforms, Instagram ultimately reifies cultural power imbalances.

Food Activism on Instagram

According to Frye and Bruner (2012), "food has always been a preoccupation of the symbol-using human animal," an observation that serves two purposes for this analysis. First, Instagram is another platform for symbol use, so it is no wonder that food has found prominence. Second, in the case of Instagractivism, human animals are continually preoccupied with the role of nonhuman animals in food practices. Ethical food production and the importance of nutrition both find representation in Instagram's culture of idealization and influence, especially around diets like veg*anism.

Buddle (2022) indicates a turn to sourcing food that represents one's values as opposed to seeking maximum food availability and variety. These concerns with food's ethicality are especially true when it comes to meat consumption. Some consumers seek meat products that claim the animals were treated ethically prior to their deaths. Instagram provides producers of

"happy meat" a platform to show their potential customers how happy their animals are (Buddle, 2022). In a study of the Instagram accounts of Australian "happy meat" farmers, Buddle (2022) found that farmers shared photos of idyllic landscapes, personified their animals by sharing their names and personality features, and showed themselves and their families directly involved in the animals' care, especially their children. These images evoke the simplicity and innocence of the bygone small, family-run farm. The Instagram accounts also featured the butchers who process the meat, highlighting their skill and artisanship.

The documentation of animal births, growth, and the process of butchering suggests a beginning-to-end account of the lives of these animals; however, Buddle (2022) noticed one major event in the lives of livestock missing: their slaughter. While most people know that the animal's death is necessary in order to consume it, this important piece of the farm-to-table food cycle is regularly avoided. Interestingly, the only time death is addressed is in mourning of the natural deaths of beloved animals used for breeding (Buddle, 2022). The absence of death in an industry that relies on slaughter reflects the aforementioned discomfort people feel in engaging with the death of their meat sources.

This discomfort caused by the apparent deaths of animals in order to produce meat products is assuaged in two main ways. First, as previously stated, by calling for transparency and choosing meat that consumers believe has been ethically produced (Buddle, 2022). Second, consumers may abstain from meat consumption altogether. Wrenn & Johnson (2015) offer veganism as an all-in-one package solution to the issue of activist overload. In other words, in a world where the call to various activist movements can often overwhelm and emotionally tax buyers, veganism is a comprehensive solution, a one-stop-shop to feel like an ethical consumer.

Despite their simplicity, veg*an movements have not gained as much traction as other food activist movements, such as the organic movement (Hahn & Bruner, 2012; Wrenn & Johnson, 2015). Resistance to meat abstention is owed to the rhetoric of sacrifice involved in veg*an diets does not appeal to Western imperial cultures (Hahn & Bruner, 2012). Meat has grown to be symbolic of patriarchal Western civilizations, where success and abundance is represented by meat consumption (Fiddes, 1991; Ogle, 2013; Schleifer, 1999). According to Hahn and Bruner (2012), "the organic movement has politics on its plate, whereas veg*an movement has identity shift on its plate" (p. 49). In other words, asking people to eliminate meat from their diet is akin to asking them to renounce part of their identity.

In response to this reluctance, some people promote a "soft" version of veganism. Wilson (2019) differentiates between "hard" veganism, described as both altruistic concern for animal welfare as well as an egoistic, individual responsibility for personal health. On the other hand, "soft" veganism is described as a nonpolitical, food-focused appeal (Wilson, 2019). In other words, "soft" veganism concentrates on how delicious and nutritious vegan food is, rather than on all of the things that veganism excludes and opposes. Wilson (2019) argues that "soft" veganism on Instagram both allows the space for people to construct their own identities within veganism and makes the diet more attractive to people to whom the dietary restrictions feel like loss.

Performing Gender on Instagram

Despite the affordances for identity construction and navigation on Instagram, the platform suffers from many of the same issues as its predecessor, blogging. While blogging remains a feminized online activity, Instagram as a platform privileges visual elements over all else, reflecting patriarchal glorification of sight and hearing as opposed to feminized senses such

as smell, taste, and touch (Classen, 1998). Given the feminization of food production and the necessity of the feminized senses to enjoy food, it is no surprise that food Instagram is a site of gender identity navigation.

As previously stated, production, service, and food consumption are all methods of performing gender (Cairns et al., 2010; DeVault, 1991; Doyle, 2016). Likewise, Contois (2020) points to blogging as a similar kind of gender performance. Blogs are personal autobiographical websites authored by individuals. Some are centered around specific topics, such as hobbies like cooking, while others are more like journal or diary entries published online. Blogs are part of a feminized digital space, and the act of blogging is a performance of feminine gender identities (Contois, 2020). Contois (2020) identifies these feminized spaces as places where ideals of domesticity are constructed and celebrated. In contrast, blogs written by men are marked by excessive consumption (Contois, 2020). Taken together, personal blogging follows well-established gender performance norms.

Instagram shares many of the same attributes as feminized blogging spaces. Accounts can be a documentation of an individual's personal life, as well as centered on topics such as food. In fact, Instagram is but the latest date in a long-term relationship between food and photography (Contois & Kish, 2022).While Instagram is a platform marked by its potential for relatively easy distribution of information, it also offers the space for textual media in the captions of photos. According to Ketchum (2022), captions of Instagram reflect a prolonged history of feminist text-based political expressions. Moreover, Instagram is also the home of intersectional digital gatherings; indeed, during the COVID-19 pandemic Black women gathered around food in the digital space provided by Instagram (Caldwell, 2022).

David and Allard (2022) identify the prominence of the "meal gaze" on food Instagram. The meal gaze is a concept based on Laura Mulvey's classic concept of the male gaze in media representation (Mulvey, 2000). The meal gaze extends this concept to food media in order to describe how images of food are fetishized and commodified (David & Allard, 2022). This fetishization sometimes involves a sexualized body presented alongside the food, though Schuwerk and Cramer (2022) argue that even images of food absent a human subject suggest the female form. In a study of the Instagram account @hotdudesandhummus, Newman (2022) found that often, food is paired with sexualized bodies in order to maximize the food's desirability.

Another trendy way to make food desirable on Instagram is to make it seem as healthy as possible. Woolley and Worth (2022) found that on Instagram, food is categorized as either good or bad, dirty, or clean. The authors note that consumer morality is deeply rooted in food choices, and Instagram is no exception. Foods that evoke goodness and clean eating are vegetables and fruits, usually raw, while bad and dirty foods consist of overly processed or meat-forward foods (Woolley & Worth, 2022). That is, feminine-coded foods were also associated with healthfulness and moral superiority. Such appearances and conflations of moral goodness with certain kinds of foods call into question the actual healthfulness of food. In other words, is it healthy, or does it only appear that way?

This aesthetic performativity of health makes it difficult for consumers without specialized nutrition knowledge to assess the actual nutritional value of certain foods and diets. Instagram is brimming with inexpert dietary advice, with very little oversight to validate factual advice and debunk spurious claims. Tracy (2022) examines the role of critical eating literacy on Instagram. According to their study, the perceived healthfulness of foods and diets is merged

with cultural ideals and beauty standards. That is, foods that offer only minimal calories are perceived as healthy because Western beauty standards emphasize and value thinness.

Because Instagram combines masculine-coded sensory experiences like sight with feminine styles of text and blogging, it is a space for gender navigation and performance. Gender is performed in several familiar ways. Schewerk and Cramer (2022) studied the posts of health, food and diet lifestyle influencers on Instagram and discovered gendered differences in the content of these posts. In their study, male influencers used more harsh language, aggressive textual styles including capitalizations and superimposed text, and posted more informational rather than stylized images. The influencers themselves rarely appeared in the images they posted, and when they did, they were typically pictured outside and in active situations that suggested adventurousness. Male influencers also referenced scientific facts about their chosen lifestyle more frequently, dismissing the influence of emotion on food choice. Finally, the male influencers in Schewerk and Cramer's (2022) study ridiculed diets and nutritional advice that differed from their own teachings. On the other hand, the women influencers in Schuwerk and Cramer's (2022) study pictured themselves in the photos they posted far more frequently, with much more consistent content than their male counterparts. Women influencers coordinated their clothing, backgrounds, and food, and featured feminized foods like salad more often (Schuwerk & Cramer, 2022). The women of the study were also more open in acknowledging the role of emotion in food choice.

On the whole, Schuwerk and Cramer (2022) found that "almost all of their posts are firmly rooted in an individualized perspective of food and health with minimal, if any, discussed connection to a larger food system" (p.149). Another topic the influencers avoided was food politics, even in politically motivated diets such as veg*anism; indeed, veg*an influencers

avoided mention of any altruistic motivations for their dietary choices (Schuwerk & Cramer, 2022). According to Véron (2016), even recipes and blogs that feature "soft" or food-focused veg*anism can be powerful, as veg*anized recipes can still promote animal rights in a roundabout way. This reluctance to acknowledge the larger food systems and their own consumption speaks to the privilege these influencers enjoy. All of the influencers in Schuwerk and Cramer's (2022) study were cisgender, white-passing people younger than 40, and in their posts they do not acknowledge the cost of food or the class privilege they enjoy.

Food Celebrities on Instagram

Another way that Instagram produces both individual identity and food systems simultaneously is through celebrity food content. Celebrities utilize food to perform their elite status while simultaneously disrupting class structures. For example, LeBesco and Naccarato (2008) identify Martha Stewart and Julia Child as prime examples of culinary capitalists of a different channel: entertainment television. Both Stewart and Child offer their audiences a glimpse into celebrity lifestyles through their cooking shows, where they speak to working or middle-class audiences about how to prepare the foods of the elite. For some viewers, preparing the recipes demonstrated by figures such as Stewart and Child is about performing the status that the recipes represent rather than eating the food (LeBesco & Naccarato, 2008). LeBesco and Naccarato (2008) argue that despite the humble beginnings of homegrown celebrities like Stewart, their presence in the culinary world ultimately upholds dominant class structures rather than challenging them, as the access they promise via the foods of the elite is as temporary as the food itself.

Instagram allows individuals to craft their individual identities in similar ways. Harris and Phillips (2022) state that the self is extended in digital media. In other words, people create

representations of themselves on social media by choosing which parts of their lives to magnify, placing their best moments in the best light. This identity crafting has resulted in the emergence of microcelebrity. A microcelebrity is a celebrity well-known by a smaller, more intimate audience. A smaller audience allows for more interaction between the microcelebrity and their audiences, who perceive them as more accessible compared to traditional celebrities (Marwick, 2016). Microcelebrities typically participate in the process of branding themselves; that is, they monetize their crafted identities into lifestyle "brands." Anderson (2022) conceptualizes this branding of the self as a method of self-expression in addition to the potential for monetary gain.

Social media also makes more traditional celebrities seem more accessible. Because of the platform's interactive nature, fans feel like their interactions with celebrities are more authentic, with fewer walls between themselves and the celebrity. Likewise, celebrities and other influential people use food media to bolster their popularity. For example, Santamaria (2022) examines how politicians in Brazil feature photos on their Instagram pages wherein they pose with classic comfort foods in an effort to appeal to common people and perform authenticity.

Instagram is uniquely conducive to branding the self through its emphasis on visual aesthetics. Contois and Kish (2022) highlight the role of prosumption on the platform; indeed, Instagram relies on user-generated content. That is, consumers double as producers and consumers of content, creating a self-sustained system of consumption (Contois & Kish, 2022; Buddle, 2022). On the other side of the celebrity-fan dichotomy, fan studies are interested in understanding how people see themselves as individuals within their respective communities, or "fandoms" (Reinhard et al., 2020). Reinhard et al. (2020) emphasize food because it "exists at the intersection between biological sustenance, physical goods, and sociocultural meanings" (p.

2). That is, food culture functions as a major player in popular media, both as a constituent piece of fandoms and as an organizing principle in itself.

Individuals craft their identities and extend them to brands, but so do professionals such as chefs and businesses who seek to craft their professional and business brands in similar ways. The "identity" of these brands is exemplified in the challenges they face; that is, questions of authenticity on a platform marked by its ersatz effortlessness. Truman (2022) notes that when it comes to food, branding on Instagram is defined by the intersection of captivating visual presentation and cultural trends, allowing audiences to both relate to and participate in their content. In their study of YouTube as a celebrity platform, Marwick (2016) delineates celebrity from fame, observing the link between media and celebritization that sets it apart from fame. The turn to celebrity as opposed to fame reflects a broader cultural shift from broadcast media to participatory media, with social networking at the helm (Marwick, 2016). Participatory media, as the name suggests, allows audiences to actively participate in the lifestyles and brands that appear on their feeds, a feature that consumers of this type of media have grown to expect (Anderson, 2022; Jenkins et al., 2013). Moreover, group identity and individual identity formation on Instagram culminate in social (media) movements.

Social network sites, like Instagram and its parent company Facebook, have hosted numerous social movements and brought together numerous online communities (Foust & Hoyt, 2018; Leer & Krogager, 2022; Sormanen & Dutton, 2015). According to Sormanen and Dutton (2015), social movements that organize via social network sites are unique in that they are freed from the constraints of geographic and organizational ties. At the same time, despite being free of these constraints, social movements founded on social media platforms lend the movement a

sense of materiality (Foust & Hoyt, 2018). In other words, social media platforms make movements feel more real, yet remain free and fluid simultaneously.

The fluidity of social media movements are also their greatest point of contention. Sormanen and Dutton (2015) question whether such movements actually result in meaningful change, or if instead they merely enable performative activism. Further, while social movements that are already well organized thrive even more on social media platforms, social media spaces remain primarily used for entertainment purposes (Sormanen & Dutton, 2015). Similarly, Foust and Drazner (2018) criticize movements that originate in social media, stating that such representations constitute the identity of a group of individuals, not the group's identity by and of itself.

Methodology

Charland's (1987) constitutive rhetoric is the best way to rhetorically analyze the identity construction of activist groups because of the emphasis the approach places on a call to action, as well as the stipulation that a successful constitutive rhetoric solves a previous contradiction that the subject has faced. Instagram is a well-known platform used for the construction of identities and brands, so it is an appropriate site to locate these constructions. Vegan activist groups construct an identity not only to establish their brand, but to present an identity that others who join their movement may also adopt and take up for themselves. The way the groups choose to construct this identity is important because it can disrupt or promote existing power structures.

I chose Forks Over Knives as an object of study because it advocates for plant-based, or vegan, dietary choices exclusively using what Wilson (2019) calls "soft," or food-focused, and egoistic constructions of veganism. In other words, Forks Over Knives represents a quintessential egoistic vegan identity. In this section I rhetorically analyze the content of the

posts on Forks Over Knives' Instagram. Using a constitutive rhetorical framework, I analyze both the images and captions of posts from a six month period (August 21 - February 21). This time frame includes many of the holidays celebrated in Western countries, such as Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Eve and Day, and Valentine's Day. Six months is an appropriate span of time because in previous studies of Instagram pages, six months' worth of content provided sufficient data saturation. Also consistent with previous studies of Instagram pages, I only include the permanent, grid-style posts on the Instagram page. I exclude the impermanent "stories" feature on Instagram. Through this analysis, I look for appeals to gender identity, the (non)construction of vegan identity through disclosure, a call to action, as well as evidence of gender performance via masculine and feminine aesthetic and communication styles.

Analysis

Activist groups such as Forks Over Knives constitute their identities as brands in much the same way that celebrities and microcelebrities do. In the construction of veg*an identities, the moment of disclosure is an important moment to consider because it represents one of the only times that veg*an subjects can shape their identity in the eyes of their confidant. For activist groups, this disclosure repeatedly occurs because not only are the groups establishing their own stance as either egoistic or altruistic, they are also creating an identity with which others can identify. On a social media platform such as Instagram, this identity disclosure occurs in each post as each is meant to reach existing and potential followers and members.

I argue that Forks Over Knives, a vegan activist group, establishes its identity as strictly egoistic, utilizing established patterns of online masculine gender performance as well as appeals to "soft," or food-forward veganism in order to establish their particular brand.

As previously stated, egoistic veg*anism is enacted on behalf of oneself. That is, egoistic veganism is a diet for perceived individual health benefits. This stance is both more socially acceptable and indicative of masculine gender identity. On the other hand, altruistic veganism is veganism enacted on behalf of forces outside oneself, such as environmental concerns and animal welfare. This stance is less socially acceptable and aligned with feminine gender identities and feminist principles.

Of the more than 300 posts made to Forks Over Knives' Instagram page in the study timeframe, the vast majority of them are single images of colorful, stylized food accompanied by a brief caption describing the food pictured in the post (Forks Over Knives, n.d.). In addition to these appetizing photos of food, there are several other kinds of posts featured far less frequently. The following analysis explains these ten kinds of posts in greater depth.

Interpellation

As in the construction of Gordon Ramsay's celebrity identity, the first step of any constitutive rhetoric is interpellation. Interpellation of the subject is conceptualized as their voluntary participation in discourse, an act that calls the always-already subject into being. Activist groups are both interpellated as subjects and act as agents of interpellating other subjects. In other words, activist groups choose to participate in the construction of identity through food choice when they build an aesthetic and cohesive "brand" represented by their Instagram pages. Further, activist groups are not just subjects themselves, but also entities that call others to participate in the discourse and become subjects of discourse as well. One way that users can interpellate themselves is best captured in promotional posts made by Forks Over Knives.

The category of promotional posts promote products and books affiliated with Forks Over Knives. Only nine posts of this kind were uploaded to the Instagram page. These vary in format, some simply featuring an image of the latest issue of the Forks Over Knives magazine. Others feature cookbooks written by authors outside *Forks Over Knives* but whose ingredients and recipe styles align with Forks Over Knives' oil-free, vegan dietary preferences. One post from this category features a stack of Forks Over Knives' publications, accompanied by a caption promoting a sale that was going on at the time. Like most captions on the page, those accompanying these images are short descriptions detailing the content of the product, such as the number of recipes they include. There were a few outliers in terms of visual style in this category. First, one featured a testimonial quote from an individual following the Forks Over Knives Meal Plan available for purchase on their website. The quote mentioned how easily the diet plan eased the transition to a plant-based diet. Finally, a post advertising a summit concerning weight loss also appears in this category. Both matched the visual styles of the other text-based images on the page (Forks Over Knives, n.d.).

On an interaction-based social media platform like Instagram, interpellation of the subject can happen in several other ways as well. Users can "follow" the activist group's page, opting in to seeing all future posts of the group and join the group's public following, where other users can see that they have chosen to follow the activist group. Second, users can "like" individual posts on the group's Instagram page, which does two things: first, the action of liking a post from a food activist group adds food activism and veganism to the individual's algorithmic profile, essentially meaning that they will see more posts like that one in the future. Second, the "like" is also publicly available for other users to see, and even if the user's profile is set to private, the post may show up on their follower's pages as a suggested post with that user listed as the first

person who "liked" it. In sum, the choice to interact with an activist group's page is a willing interpellation of the subject, both by the activist group and in those users who interact with the group's page.

For Forks Over Knives specifically, interpellation of the subject comes in two forms. First, the group interpellates themselves as a subject by choosing to participate in the rhetoric of veg*anism, and moreover, by selecting an explanatory stance. The explanatory stance it has chosen to construct its identity is an egoistic, masculine construction of identity. Second, Forks Over Knives presents the stance of egoistic veganism, choosing not to discuss animal welfare at all on their Instagram page instead of focusing on nutrition, science, and athleticism. In over 300 posts to their Instagram page, only one post references an altruistic vegan argument: which plant-based milk is best for the environment (Forks Over Knives, n.d.). This one outlier notably does not mention animal welfare. Forks Over Knives call to other potential interpellated subjects, allowing them to construct a vegan identity that is not predicated on altruistic arguments, which are seen as radical and feminine.

Call to Action

Forks Over Knives both answers and represents a call to action on their Instagram page. By using logical arguments and "soft," food-forward veganism accompanied by recipes and informational guides designed to make plant-based eating easier, Forks Over Knives calls people to constitute their identity in line with the one they have already curated. The language used in their posts, specifically in expert testimonials and personal anecdotes, suggest that vegan diets just make sense.

The posts in the expert testimonial category feature images consisting of all-caps quotes superimposed over simple, color-coordinated backgrounds. This kind of post is featured five

times on the page. The quotes are attributed to experts such as medical doctors, PhDs in nutrition, and public health policymakers. The subject of the quotes concerns the effectiveness of plant-based diets for improving overall health. Notably, two of the five expert testimonials are taken from Dr. Micheal Greger, a medical doctor of nutrition, creator of NutritionFacts.org, and author of *How Not to Die,* a volume detailing the research supporting the effectiveness of a plant-based diet. The captions accompanying these quotes typically encourage readers to try a plant-based diet, and direct them to a link to the Forks Over Knives website. Some also provide additional statistics, such as the number of Americans who suffer from heart disease. For example, one quote reads "We should all be eating fruits and vegetables as if our lives depend on it - because they do" (Forks Over Knives, 2022d). The quote, attributed to Michael Gregor, MD suggests that if we know the "best" way to eat, the answer is simple: eat that way (Forks Over Knives, n.d.).

Another post that exemplifies the call to action through logic and reason is personal anecdotes, stories of people who have achieved their health goals via the plant-based diet promoted by Forks Over Knives. Over the six months, Forks Over Knives shared seven posts of this kind. All but two of these posts featured weight loss due to the person's adherence to a plant-based diet. The two posts that did not mention weight loss focused instead on athletic performance. In these posts, the subjects are shown running, and the captions of the photos denote the advanced age of the slender, active individuals.

All but one of these personal anecdote posts included multiple photos: an image of the individual, sometimes a "before and after" style shot of their physiques before and after going plant-based, as well as a testimonial quote from the individual, often describing how much better they felt after making the switch. The captions on these photos share more information about the

individuals, including how much weight they lost, diseases they beat, and their reason for trying the diet in the first place. According to Forks Over Knives, science and nutrition call upon people to eat a certain way, which is interpreted to be an oil-free, plant-based diet (Forks Over Knives, n.d.). Using expert opinions and stories of real people who have reached their goals serves two purposes. First, it further proves the efficacy of plant-based diets. Second, it allows the viewer to project themselves onto the stories of others and see themselves achieving the goal they share with the individual featured in the post. Essentially, Forks Over Knives says if you want to be like these people, do what they did: eat plant-based.

Interestingly, contrary to other masculine dietary patterns that avoid animal products, Forks Over Knives embraces the vegan label in many of their posts, using the term most frequently in their hashtags. Nevertheless, their diet is defined best by the acronym WFPB, which stands for Whole Foods Plant Based. On their Instagram page, plant-based and vegan are used interchangeably. While "vegan" is used on their Instagram page rather frequently, it is rarely used to describe people. Instead, the term "vegan" is mostly used to describe foods that traditionally include dairies, such as lasagna and baked goods. This is a break from what has been observed in previous studies that found that typically, "vegan" describes the person while "plant-based" describes the food (Truath et al., 2021). Forks Over Knives utilizes these veganized versions of familiar foods to make the diet seem more approachable and easy to adopt. In addition to these, several different types of posts form their call to action and make vegan diets seem easy, including the aforementioned expert testimonials and personal anecdotes, as well as recipe roundups, brief recipes, ingredient-specific infographics, "Is it healthy?" posts, and how to live plant-based posts.

The language of many of the posts answers the call to eat a vegan, or plant-based diet by providing resources to do just that. Indeed, the majority of the posts provide links to the recipes for the foods pictured, as well as other resources and how-to guides for eating plant-based in specific situations. For example, a fourth kind of post on Forks Over Knives' Instagram are recipe roundups, or posts intended to link the viewer to blog-style posts that list themed recipes. The recipes may be grouped by type, such as recipes for salad dressings or recipes utilizing a specific ingredient, or they may be grouped by cuisine. Some posts in this category are situation specific, such as holiday celebrations, hotel-room cooking, budget-specific meals, meals that can be made in less than 20 minutes, meals that can be made without heat, etc. These posts utilize a visual aesthetic similar to the quotation and testimonial posts, using all-caps texts on simple backgrounds. One way these posts differ is that most of them feature images of the foods they discuss (Forks Over Knives, n.d.).

A fifth type of post featured on the page are brief recipes contained within the posted image. In other words, the whole of the recipe is featured in the image itself rather than requiring the viewer to follow a link to another website in order to view the full recipe. These posts are the most visually different from all the other posts on the page, containing more text in cursive-style fonts and more color variation. The recipes in these posts include veggie burgers, salsa, non-dairy whipped cream, and pesto. The font and background color choices also break from the otherwise consistent pattern of the page. The captions accompanying these kinds of posts list the features of the recipes (oil-free, dairy-free, etc.) and list ideas for foods to accompany the featured recipe (Forks Over Knives, n.d.).

Similar in concept to the informational posts, a sixth category of posts are informational posts for specific ingredients. These infographic posts feature more words overall and less

consistent formatting than the others. In terms of visual features, these posts are closer to the brief recipe posts than any other category. The purpose of these posts is to provide information on specific ingredients and foods. For example, one of the posts explains the difference between the different kinds of tofu available at supermarkets, while another details how to choose produce based on the season, and another explains how to de-seed a pomegranate. Other posts in this category explain the differences in certain types of produce, like apples and potatoes. The captions of these posts merely reference the highlighted ingredient and direct the reader to a situation-specific link for more information (Forks Over Knives, n.d.).

In addition, a seventh kind of post, which I refer to as *Is it Healthy?,* references research concerning certain food groups' healthfulness. These posts were only made twice in the six month period. Both posts mirror the recipe roundup posts in visual style - featuring all-caps text superimposed on a neutral background, and both are formatted as questions. The first asks, "Should you avoid nightshades? A look at the research / Link in bio to learn more" (Forks Over Knives, 2022e). The second similarly inquires "Is soy bad for you? Here's what the science says" (Forks Over Knives, 2022c) The captions on these posts are brief restatements of the same questions posed in the accompanying images, and both direct the reader to links where they can read more on the subject (Forks Over Knives, n.d.).

A final category of posts that exemplifies Forks Over Knives' call to action consists of guides for how to live a plant-based lifestyle. These posts are visually consistent with the recipe roundup style of posts. One post claims to teach the viewer "how to order WFPB [Whole Foods Plant Based] from any restaurant" (Forks Over Knives, 2022b). A second post in this category provides a link to a list of ways to save money while shopping for plant-based food. Another linked out to a list of community-favorite vegan products sold at the popular Trader Joe's

grocery store chain. Like many other categories, the captions featured with the images, are simply brief restatements of the claims in the image accompanied by a link to learn more (Forks Over Knives, n.d.). These posts promise to make a plant-based lifestyle easier to achieve.

All of these categories of posts are both an answer and a call, as they also call other users to try a plant-based diet as well. Just as Forks Over Knives frames the diet it proposes as the logical answer to the call of nutrition science, their resources also represent a call to action. Forks Over Knives provides resources for eating the diet it proposes in the form of both free resources, such as the links provided for recipes, as well as paid resources, such as meal plans, books, and cookbooks. Essentially, viewers are called to follow the diet if they wish to identify with the lifestyle brand Forks Over Knives has curated. Words like "easy," "quick,"and "perfect," populate the descriptions of recipes offered in some of the posts. This suggests that not only is plant-based eating the right way to take control of one's health, it is not difficult to do.

Locating Constitutive Rhetoric in Instagractivism

Narrative Representation

Constitutive rhetoric stipulates that one way to constitute identity through discourse is by maintaining narrative fidelity. In other words, people act in ways that are consistent with the identities they wish to maintain. As mentioned previously, participation in foodways is a method of constituting identity, especially when it comes to constituting gender identity (Stokes & Atkins-Sayre, 2016). Forks Over Knives provides a platform for maintaining masculine gender identities while participating in vegan foodways. By using "vegan" and "plant-based" interchangeably and rarely to describe people as opposed to food, Forks Over Knives deemphasizes veganism as an identity and instead frames it as a lifestyle choice, an adjective as opposed to a noun.

Forks Over Knives appeals to egoistic veganism and masculine gender identities and allows social media users to maintain their existing identities while participating in food practices that might otherwise contradict those identities. Because of the extremism and femininity associated with veganism mentioned elsewhere in this work, Forks Over Knives offers a new vegan identity for consumers to adopt, allowing them to maintain their narrative representation of their own identity as logical, rational, and in some cases, masculine.

For example, the majority of the arguments that Forks Over Knives makes for the relevance and efficacy of veganism in each instance of disclosure centers on scientific evidence and appeals to logic and reason. This offers Instagram users who wish to follow veg*an diets a way to do so without associating themselves with the extremism that has come to define veg*an identities. Someone who considers "healthy" a principal part of their personal identity can maintain this with the vegan identity that Forks Over Knives crafts in the rhetorical moment of disclosure on their Instagram page.

Forks Over Knives' emphasis on aspects of health and dietary choice reflects a more socially acceptable vegan identity. Despite the fact that the vast majority of their posts focus on food choice and nutrition, the inclusion of other aspects of health allow space for veganism to become merely a part of an overall "healthy" lifestyle for people to follow, one that does not overtake their existing identities but merely becomes a function of what it means to be a "healthy" person. These arguments are best illustrated in an eighth kind of post, categorized as non-food health recommendations.

The non-food related health recommendations include a few awareness posts for National Alzheimer's day and the prevalence of autoimmune diseases. Again, these posts match the style of the recipe roundup posts in visual strategy. Their captions, consistent with the caption styles

so far, are brief restatements of the text presented in the image followed by a direction to an outward link. Many of these posts focus on exercises. A few posts reference yoga, including poses recommended to relieve indigestion and links to “the best” yoga content creators. Another post pictures a disembodied foot clad in a runner’s shoe, offering viewers advice on “How to stay fit / no gym required” (Forks Over Knives, 2023b), while another boasts tips for better sleep (Forks Over Knives, n.d.).

By featuring exercise tips, yoga, awareness posts for autoimmune diseases, etc. Forks Over Knives establishes a holistic take on a healthy lifestyle. In addition, the emphasis on logic, reason, and science absent emotion that can be seen in Forks Over Knives’ posts is consistent with masculine gender performances, both online and offline. As mentioned previously, the navigation of masculine gender identity and vegan identity is typically achieved by citing egoistic reasons, using logical arguments, and rejecting the identity of veganism while still following the diet.

Masculine Aesthetic Identity

Constitutive rhetoric also provides a framework for creating novel identities. Specifically, constitutive rhetoric establishes a method for reconciling contradictions in identities. As in the case of Gordon Ramsay's celebrity identity, the novel identity created in Forks Over Knives’ disclosure on Instagram reconciles masculinity and veganism. In order to integrate the two warring identities, Forks Over Knives utilizes many online masculine performances that are regularly seen in male Instagram influencers in order to establish masculinity as a principal identity, one with which veganism can be compatible. This creation of a compatible identity is significant because rather than disrupting patriarchal norms that make the caring aspect of

veganism incompatible with masculinity, the identity constituted by Forks Over Knives instead creates a version of vegan identity that is not predicated on care or morality.

For example, Forks Over Knives utilizes many of the same expressions of online masculinity that male lifestyle influencers have been observed demonstrating. People are rarely pictured on the Forks Over Knives page, and those that are pictured are typically shown outdoors in athletic contexts. There is also an emphasis on capitalization and text superimposed over images, which is also consistent with masculine gender performance in online spaces. Additionally, the captions associated with the images on the page are all short and informational. Finally, like Gordon Ramsay's social media presence, the philosophy of veganism and its ethical underpinnings in sustainability and animal welfare are decidedly absent with the exception of one post from the "other" category.

There are three outlying posts on the page. One such post offers six steps for eating in ways that boost skin health, using a visual style that matches the recipe roundup style of posts. Another outlier provided a link to a list of Black Friday gift ideas for people who like to cook, again consistent with the recipe roundup post style. One singular post about food choice in relation to climate change stood out from the others. This post, like the other outliers, matched the visual aesthetics of the recipe roundup-style posts. The text reads "which non-dairy milk is best for the environment/link in bio to find out" (Forks Over Knives, 2022a). The caption alongside the image denotes the rise of non-dairy milk sales, and repeats the question in the image before encouraging the reader to click the link featured in the page's biography. Notably, this post is accompanied by the hashtag #WorldPlantMilkDay. This post stands out because it is the only post within the six-month time frame that does not feature egoistic or "soft" veganism. The one post offered by Forks Over Knives that does disclose altruistic motivations is not

concerned with animal welfare, but instead with environmental sustainability. This absence of animal welfare arguments from a group that advocates for veganism, a diet deeply rooted in philosophical considerations of personhood and the right to life, speaks volumes to the masculinization of veganism (Forks Over Knives, n.d.).

Where Forks Over Knives differs from performances of masculinity in digital spaces is their highly consistent, highly stylized aesthetic. According to previously mentioned studies, color-coordination and highly stylized images are consistent with femininity in online blogging spaces. Forks Over Knives features a consistent overall color scheme of blue, green, and teal, and the majority of their posts follow a very consistent format, both visually and in the captions offered. In addition, the page promotes "soft" veganism, by emphasizing what veganism is and can be rather than what it is not; that is, Forks Over Knives emphasizes visually appealing food and highlights the ease of its preparation. This angle is more of a glass-half-full approach as opposed to an emphasis on what vegans choose to eschew. Like egoistic arguments, this "soft" approach to veganism is more socially acceptable than "hard" approaches to veganism, which frame the diet as an ethical choice.

Conclusion

Forks Over Knives is an activist group promoting its version of a "healthy" lifestyle that includes the practice of veganism. The group has enjoyed widespread success, amassing 1.5 million followers on their Instagram page alone. Using Instagram as a platform for identity construction, each post made to the Forks Over Knives page is a moment of dietary disclosure wherein the group identifies their motivations for choosing veganism and crafting an identity surrounding that dietary choice. Notably, Forks Over Knives curates an egoistic vegan identity using masculine gender performances and "soft" appeals to veganism. It is strategic to take this

egoistic, “soft” appeal to veganism because it is more socially acceptable to approach veganism in these ways as opposed to altruistic and “hard” appeals (Judge & Wilson, 2018; Wilson, 2019; Phua et al., 2019).

Like Gordon Ramsay’s reconciliation of veganism and masculine gender identity, Forks Over Knives emphasizes existing identities and appeals to masculinity instead of forming an identity based in veganism. That is, whereas Gordon Ramsay makes veganism work in relation to his hypermasculine image through humor, Forks Over Knives positions veganism as a logical, rational part of a “healthy” identity, one backed by scientific evidence and expert testimonial. Unlike Gordon Ramsay, Forks Over Knives’ goal goes beyond maintaining individual celebrity identity. Forks Over Knives seeks to create an identity that their audience will not only respect, but identify with and perhaps even adopt.

The significance of the choices Forks Over Knives has made to craft an identity that reconciles masculinity and veganism are twofold. First, in emphasizing veganism as part of healthy identity rather than as part of a kind identity, Forks Over Knives ultimately upholds dominant power structures. In a patriarchal society, care work is attributed to feminine identities. In removing veganism from its roots as a moral diet, veganism is masculinized. Rather than choosing to disrupt such power structures by following a vegan diet, veg*an diets are adjusted to fit within dominant power structures that construct care as a feminine trait. Second, despite ultimately upholding dominant power structure, Forks Over Knives still furthers the veg*an agenda. Despite the overall absence of altruistic motivations, many in the veg*an community still see the construction of egoistic veg*an identities as a win for the movement. Despite the difference in motivation for following the diet, meat and dairy consumption is still reduced, achieving the same goal that altruistic veg*ans pursue in practice if not in philosophy.

FARM SANCTUARY: ALTRUISTIC INSTAGRACTIVISM

Dietary conscientiousness and animal activism are growing areas of public interest. Farm Sanctuary is an activist group that rescues and provides sanctuary to animals rescued from the animal agriculture system. The group's mission statement reads, "We pursue bold solutions to end animal agriculture and foster just and compassionate vegan living" (Farm Sanctuary, 2023a). On its website, it states that its organization seeks to enact its mission statement through rescue, education, and advocacy (Farm Sanctuary, 2023a). The group hosts a number of activist activities, and principal among these strategies are its efforts toward the humanization of animals. The group shares the stories of the animals they rescue and introduces people to farm animals in order to make them and their personhood visible (Farm Sanctuary, 2023a). Farm Sanctuary offers volunteer opportunities, tours of the rescue facilities, the ability to "adopt" a farm animal, and other ways for both members and nonmembers of the organization to enact advocacy.

The goal of the group, similar to Forks Over Knives, is to induce behavior change in its followers. Farm Sanctuary asks its followers to abstain from eating meat, a culturally significant food in Western society (Fiddes, 1991). Just as individuals who abstain from meat-eating, activist groups also choose either altruistic or egoistic as a means of explanations for the choice, and constitute its group identity at the moment of disclosure of dietary preference. As mentioned previously, Instagram is a platform especially apt for the study of the intersection of identity formation, gender expression, and food choice (Contois & Kish, 2022). At the time of this writing, @farmsanctuary (Farm Sanctuary) has a following consisting of 581,000 (Farm Sanctuary, n.d.). This is a third of the following of Forks Over Knives. Of the 159 posts made to

Farm Sanctuary's Instagram page, the vast majority of them feature images of farm animals. Each post on the group's page is a moment of disclosure wherein the group's position on veganism is explained to the audience and asks its followers to adopt the same position. Farm Sanctuary is an appropriate object of study because the group advocates for vegan dietary and lifestyle choices using "hard," value-based, and altruistic constructions of veganism (Wilson, 2019). In other words, Farm Sanctuary is emblematic of an altruistic vegan identity.

Altruistic veganism, as previously stated, is veganism enacted on behalf of the other, such as environmental concerns and animal welfare. That is, altruistic veganism is a diet predicated on care and compassion for other beings. This stance is less socially acceptable than egoistic veganism, which is enacted on behalf of oneself. Altruistic veganism is less socially acceptable and is often aligned with feminine gender identities and feminist principles. I argue that Farm Sanctuary as a vegan activist group establishes its identity as strictly altruistic, utilizing established patterns of online feminine gender performance, feminist activism strategies, and appeals to "hard," or morality-based veganism in order to establish its particular brand.

Context: Comparing Farm Sanctuary to Forks Over Knives

Farm Sanctuary and Forks Over Knives are two activist groups that argue for the same lifestyle and ask for the same behavioral changes from their followers; that is, maintaining a vegan diet as a holistic method of forming a specific identity. While the goal of each group is the same, to convince people to adopt vegan diets, the methods of this conviction are quite literally opposite of one another. As explained in the previous chapter, Forks Over Knives approaches veganism from a strictly egoistic standpoint, emphasizing the benefits of a vegan diet to one's personal health and positioning veganism as a feature of a "healthy" identity. From this perspective, veganism is a position that offers something to the individual following the diet.

In contrast, Farm Sanctuary approaches veganism from a strictly altruistic standpoint, highlighting the benefit of a vegan diet to the environment and vulnerable populations, such as nonhuman animals. Farm Sanctuary positions veganism not as a function of a healthy lifestyle but as a critical piece of an ethical lifestyle. From this perspective, veganism doesn't just offer its followers the opportunity to be healthy; it is something the individual *should* do to benefit the world outside of themselves. While Forks Over Knives seeks to reconcile veg*an identities with masculinity by bringing veg*anism in line with masculine gender performance, Farm Sanctuary combines online feminine gender performance with more aggressive feminist styles of activism, at times disrupting and breaking from established patterns of gender performance in an effort to reify the philosophy of veg*anism in its practice. This approach likely compromises its success when compared with Forks Over Knives.

Methodology

In this section, I rhetorically analyze the content of the posts on Farm Sanctuary's Instagram using a constitutive rhetorical framework, through which I look for the constitution of altruistic and egoistic veg*an identities as well as gender performance in the moment of disclosure of dietary preference. I look for these constitutions in narrative representation, interpellation, and a call to action. As in the previous analysis of Forks Over Knives' Instagram, I analyze both the images and captions of posts from August 21 - February 21 because this six month timeframe encompasses many of the major holidays celebrated in Western countries. As in the previous analysis, I only include the more permanent grid-style posts, excluding the temporary, 24-hour "story" posts that Instagram also hosts. Through this analysis, I utilize a constitutive rhetorical framework in order to examine the constitution of collective identity that Farm Sanctuary establishes through its Instagram presence. This group identity is constituted

through the (non)construction of vegan identity through disclosure, a call to action, as well as evidence of online gender performance via masculine and feminine aesthetic and communication styles.

Analysis

As previously stated, the moment of disclosure is a significant rhetorical moment because it is one of the only times that veg*ans can influence their identity construction surrounding their dietary choice. For activist groups, the rhetorical moment of disclosure occurs regularly, as they must explain their stance to potential members. Activist groups establish their own stance as either egoistic or altruistic in addition to the creation of an identity with which others can identify. On social media platforms like Instagram, this identity disclosure occurs with each post. Compared to Forks Over Knives, the content of Farm Sanctuary was much more difficult to categorize. There was quite a bit of overlap in the qualities of many of the posts. For example, rescue story posts also included frolicking and educational content as well. While the length of the captions vary from a few sentences to several paragraphs, many of the images feature an extended explanation in the captions associated with them. Notably, many of the posts on Farm Sanctuary's page are videos as opposed to still images (Farm Sanctuary, n.d.). In addition, the vast majority of both the still images and the videos posted include a semi-transparent Farm Sanctuary watermark toward the bottom of the image[1].

Despite the homogeneity and crossover in the content of the posts to Farm Sanctuary's Instagram, there were some common themes and repeated phrases that appeared in multiple posts across categories. For example, many posts articulate that the treatment the animals receive at Farm Sanctuary is how all animals *should* be treated (Farm Sanctuary, n.d.). Another repeated

[1] Farm Sanctuary likely includes a watermark in order to avoid the appropriation of its content.

phrase states that “everyone wants to feel loved” (Farm Sanctuary, 2022e). Many posts featured some version of the phrase, “someone not something” (Farm Sanctuary, 2022c). Most notably, the way the animals were discussed greatly concerned their individuality and personhood. In fact, discussions of the animals and the people of Farm Sanctuary were almost indistinguishable apart from denoting species among the animals. Language connotative of ownership is carefully avoided in all discussions of the animals (Farm Sanctuary, n.d.). All of these rhetorical strategies attempt to personify the animal subjects of the posts and attribute to them the rights associated with personhood, such as the right to life, a strategy that can be seen throughout the vast majority of the posts on the page.

Locating Constitutive Rhetoric in Instagractivism

Narrative Representation

As previously mentioned, one way that identity is constituted is through narrative consistency (Charland, 1987). People are motivated to act in ways that reflect the identity with which they wish to associate themselves. Because identity is constructed, or “consumed” through foodways, choosing to follow a veg*an diet is also an opportunity to construct a veg*an identity (Stokes & Atkins-Sayre, 2016). Specifically, veg*ans can construct their identity in the moment of disclosure as either altruistic or egoistic. Farm Sanctuary appeals to altruistic veganism and feminine gender identities and offers social media users the opportunity to maintain their existing identities as “good” or guiltless. Essentially, Farm Sanctuary offers people concerned with the ethical treatment of animals an identity to adopt that remains in line with their existing identity as a good person. That is, good people do not contribute to factory farm practices; therefore, to maintain an identity as a good person, go vegan.

The vast majority of the arguments made by Farm Sanctuary for the adoption of veganism in each instance of disclosure is focused on compassion and appeals to moral, ethical, and value-based claims. In other words, Farm Sanctuary relies on principles of care, work that is associated with feminine gender identities (Cairns et al., 2010; DeVault, 1991; Doyle 2016). These appeals offer Instagram users who wish to minimize their guilt for participating in factory farming methods a way to counteract those feelings of dissonance. Farm Sanctuary offers vegan diets as a panacea to the problem of inhumane farming practices and perceived animal cruelty. Someone who considers "kind" or "ethical" to be a cornerstone of their personal identity can preserve those qualities by adopting the vegan identity that Farm Sanctuary cultivates in the rhetorical moment of disclosure on its Instagram page.

For example, narrative consistency is most salient in Farm Sanctuary's educational posts, which are designed to highlight the cruelty involved in meat and dairy production in order to position these industries as antithetical to care and kindness. These posts are often videos of animals in ordinary situations as well as humans interacting with animals, with text appearing on some of the videos as well. One post pictures a cow and her calf, while the caption explains that cows do not produce milk by default and that they must be pregnant or nursing to yield the milk used in dairy products. Another post connotes that chickens are social, nurturing, and have individual personalities despite popular beliefs, while a video introduces several chickens in residence at Farm Sanctuary. Another post discusses the prominence of interspecies friendships, depicting a cow and a pig playing together. In another post in this category, the caption details the realities of petting zoos and the dairy/veal industry's practices, as well as live markets (Farm Sanctuary, n.d.).

One of the most notable and visually different posts in this category debunks the claims of labels the group deems humane washing, including free-range, pasture-raised, natural, and organic. This post is one of only two within the study timeframe that does not picture an animal or a person. It is the only post wherein the images are entirely textual. The first image announces the labels as a method of humane washing, a practice wherein companies employ nebulous language and symbolism in order to give the impression that their products are more humane than conventional products. The following images in the post break each label down and explain the legal definitions of the terms. The final image in the post calls the viewer to try plant-based alternatives and to participate in Farm Sanctuary's adopt a turkey campaign. These educational posts offer Instagram users an action to take; that is, to maintain their own narrative consistency as a kind, caring, and ethical consumers, they resist these practices by choosing to be vegan (Farm Sanctuary, n.d.).

Feminine Aesthetic Identity

One important aspect of constitutive rhetoric is its capacity to afford novel identities and to reconcile contradictions in existing identities (Charland, 1987). While Forks Over Knives seeks to reconcile veganism with masculinity, Farm Sanctuary's disclosure rhetoric instead leans into the feminine aspects of identity associated with veganism, including care and feeding. In other words, Farm Sanctuary is not seeking to create a compromise between two existing identities but instead establishing veganism as the principal among existing identities. Forks Over Knives aims to fit identities together, framing veganism as a function of being a healthy person. In contrast, Farm Sanctuary is guided by the philosophical underpinnings of veganism and the ethical treatment of animals, a moral compass that inevitably leads to veganism. In addition, Farm Sanctuary embraces the consequences of activism's association with feminine

gender identity and feminist radicalism, while remaining careful to avoid extremist or angry language. It navigates this balance both by performing femininity and leaning into compassionate emotional appeals rather than outrage, as opposed to shying away from emotional appeals altogether as Forks Over Knives does.

The attention Farm Sanctuary places on the role of emotion in food choice and the animals themselves, making their bodies visible in the food system, reflects feminist styles of communication and feminine gender performance previously established in this work (Schuwerk & Cramer, 2022). Farm Sanctuary embraces the language of care and the identity of altruistic veganism, setting a moral bar for Instagram users to reach. Deemphasizing the benefit to the diet follower compared to the benefit of the animals reflects altruistic concerns as opposed to egoistic concerns. Altruistic arguments and rhetorics of care are typically associated with femininity (Cairns et al., 2010; DeVault, 1991; Doyle 2016). Compared with Forks Over Knives, which frames veganism as a lifestyle choice, Farm Sanctuary frames veganism as a moral responsibility.

Farm Sanctuary utilizes many of the same online performances of femininity commonly seen in female lifestyle influencers. In all but one of the posts that fell within the timeframe of study, every post featured a person or animal, which Farm Sanctuary personifies and intentionally discusses as though they are people. This emphasis on people and personhood is consistent with online performances of femininity, in which people are featured more often when compared to online performances of masculinity (Schuwerk & Cramer 2022). In addition, the majority of the captions on the posts are long and descriptive, featuring emotional stories, information, and quotes from employees about their work and their relationships with the animals (Farm Sanctuary, n.d.). Like the wordier captions seen on female influencers' pages,

these lengthy captions are consistent with the text-based political expressions historically seen in feminist movements (Ketchum 2022).

This online performance of femininity is illustrated in many of the posts on Farm Sanctuary's Instagram. The most abundant posts on Farm Sanctuary's Instagram are the stories of the rescued animals. These posts share the backstories of the animals and how their lives have changed since coming to Farm Sanctuary. Sometimes these stories are broken into parts, presenting pieces of each story across several different posts and announcing the arrival of new animals to the farm. In many cases these profiles of the animals are accompanied by testimonials from their human caregivers, in which these caregivers speak to the animal's disposition and personality. In these cases, the caregiver is often captured interacting with the animal in the video. In addition, the caregivers can be heard speaking about the animal in their care in some of the videos. One important aspect of these posts is the naming and personification of the animals featured. The animals are almost always named, and the language of the text, speech, and captioning all denote individuality and personhood, while terms connoting ownership are carefully avoided. For example "guardian" and "caregiver" are used as opposed to "owner" or even paternal language which is sometimes used colloquially to describe domestic pets. This emphasis on personhood and visibility of bodies is consistent with online feminine gender performances (Schuwerk & Cramer, 2022).

Some rescue story posts feature before and after photos in service of two purposes. First, some simply depict the animal in their youth as compared to their adulthood or old age. These time-focused posts are often made on the animal's anniversary of residence at Farm Sanctuary. Second, other posts of this kind depict the animal as it looked when it first arrived at Farm Sanctuary, often underweight, ridden with some sort of parasite, or otherwise affected by

disease, followed by a photo of them after their rehabilitation (Farm Sanctuary, n.d.). One post of particular interest involves Pippa, a lamb whose leg has been amputated and now uses a wheelchair custom-made for her. In this post, Farm Sanctuary details how the farm on which Pippa was born found the cost of her rehabilitation did not outweigh her potential value, and planned to allow her to die of the complications of her joint infection. This story, detailed in the caption, is in stark contrast to the video accompanying it, which shows Pippa being fitted into her wheelchair and taking off into a run as soon as she is secured to it.

Another kind of post made to Farm Sanctuary's Instagram features the animals, which the posts typically refer to as residents or friends, frolicking and jumping about. In these posts, idyllic farm scenes are foregrounded by the residents of the farm playing together. In one post, baby goats are depicted experiencing snow for the first time, while others show pigs cooling off in mud puddles and turkeys calling. In another, cows are shown prancing around accompanied by a caption likening their play to that of dogs. These posts, like the rescue story posts, name the animals pictured and often share a fact about the species. For example, one post shares that pigs wallow in mud as a way to regulate their body temperature. Like the others featured on Farm Sanctuary's Instagram page, the posts are mostly videos with some superimposed text and lengthy captions explaining the post's content.

Another kind of post that reflects online feminine gender performance are posts dedicated to the people of Farm Sanctuary. In this kind of post, the stories of the people who operate the farm are featured in detail, similar to how the animals' stories are told in the rescue stories post; however, the humans are featured far less frequently. These posts are visually very similar to the frolicking and rescue story posts, often including a video of the people interacting with the animals. What differentiates this style of post is the information is the caption, which focuses on

the story of the Farm Sanctuary employee rather than the life of the animal. These captions discuss how long the person has been working with Farm Sanctuary as well as what the employee enjoys about their job. Most notable about the captions on these posts is that they are usually direct quotes from the subjects themselves, with a few exceptions. One such post features Brooke, a 10-year member of Farm Sanctuary's care team. The video details what her daily routine looks like working for Farm Sanctuary, and rather than quoting her in the caption, her work is narrated via captions in the video, and Brooke does not speak to the audience of the video (Farm Sanctuary, n.d.).

A few posts in this category concern Dan, a "turncoat" of the animal agriculture industry. A former beef cattle farmer, Dan grew fond of the cattle on his farm and decided to leave the industry and take his herd with him. Dan and his story are featured three times on Farm Sanctuary's Instagram, though Dan is never quoted or heard speaking. Instead, his story is detailed both in the post's caption and in text that appears throughout the videos (Farm Sanctuary, 2022a; 2023b; 2023e). In addition, the page features several vintage photos of the president and co-founder, Gene Baur. One of these posts depicts him selling vegan hotdogs at a Grateful Dead concert in the 1980s, while another image depicts him driving a calf rescued from a veal farm to his own farm in his car. Baur also appears in several videos announcing legislation changes, events, and thanking people for participating in events. Baur is denoted as the co-founder, and within the timeframe of this study the other co-founder(s) are not named or depicted (Farm Sanctuary, n.d.).

While Farm Sanctuary is largely consistent with online feminine gender performance, it features some masculine gender performance qualities as well. In some posts, the group uses all-caps, aggressive textual styles superimposed over images, and its posts were not as consistent as

Forks Over Knives in content, style, or timing. While the group maintained a fairly consistent aesthetic, the images in the posts suggested a more candid method of capture as opposed to staging. Where Forks Over Knives promotes "soft" veganism, denoting what *is* vegan and what vegan food can be, Farm Sanctuary instead promotes "hard" veganism, which is predicated on value and morality. Instead of images of delicious, colorful food, Farm Sanctuary argues for veganism by pointing out what veganism is *not*: cruelty. By showing images of rescued animals living the life that the group claims they deserve, Farm Sanctuary illustrates what vegans leave off of their plate rather than what is on their plate.

Interpellation

As previously mentioned, interpellation of the subject is a necessary precursor to constitutive rhetorics. Interpellation stipulates that participation in rhetoric is voluntary and freely chosen by its subjects, whose always-already existence is brought into focus by their participation in discourse (Charland, 1987). Like Forks Over Knives, Farm Sanctuary as an activist group is both interpellated as a subject itself, as well as an agent of interpellating other subjects. Farm Sanctuary constructs an identity, or "brand" through its social media presence and through food choice and encourages others to do the same. As stated earlier in the analysis of Forks Over Knives' interpellation, the act of "liking" and "following" the page and its posts is an example of the willing interpellation of subjects who choose to interact with the activist group's page.

For Farm Sanctuary, similar to Forks Over Knives, interpellation of the subject comes in two forms. First, the group interpellates itself as a subject by choosing to participate in discursive representations of veganism, and further, it constitutes itself as a certain kind of vegan through the explanation the group chooses to share on its Instagram page. The stance from which it has

chosen to construct its identity is an altruistic, feminine standpoint. Second, Farm Sanctuary presents the stance of altruistic veganism, arguing for the rights of animals and their general welfare almost exclusively, whereas for other activist groups, including Forks Over Knives, the opposite is true.

Egoistic motivations such as nutrition and health are absent among the posts of Farm Sanctuary, instead, it focuses on arguments for sustainability and compassion. In over 150 posts to its Instagram page in the period of study, only three suggest egoistic motivations for veganism. One of these is a quote from a D.C. Roundtable with politicians that Farm Sanctuary representatives spoke at, advocating for plant based diets as a solution to concerns for "nutritional security," that is, sustainable farming practices (Farm Sanctuary, 2023c). Two posts about the harm of turkey farming cite the concern for diseases that tend to break out among both turkeys and the humans who work on those farms where turkeys are kept in extremely close quarters. Even these health-related arguments are focused on collective health rather than personal or individual health, and all are situated in posts that primarily focus on altruistic motivations. Unlike Forks Over Knives, Farm Sanctuary calls to other potential interpellated subjects, constructing a vegan identity predicated on altruistic arguments, embracing its reputation as radical and feminine (Farm Sanctuary, n.d.).

Call to Action

Farm Sanctuary both answers and represents a call to action on its Instagram page. As stated in the previous section, the language used to describe the animals rescued denotes personhood, intrinsic value, and compassion. In addition to this use of language to constitute feminine gender performance, these efforts to personify the animals of Farm Sanctuary also contribute to Farm Sanctuary's call to action. For example, one post from Farm Sanctuary calls

for page followers to “ditch dairy” (Farm Sanctuary, 2022b). This post features the story of a cow named Paula and her rescue from a dairy farm. The video features footage from a dairy farm including cows fitted with automated milking technology. The post's caption denotes that Paula would have been killed because she was infertile - and pregnancy is a requirement of dairy farming. Many other rescue stories posts feature captions that provide information about the farm industry from which the animal was rescued and offer abstention from the products produced by that industry as a way to alleviate the injustices performed there.

One assumption that undergirds the arguments and subsequent call to action made by Farm Sanctuary is that personhood and intrinsic value are inherent in all sentient animals. Unlike Forks Over Knives, whose nutritional claims can be authenticated by objective research and expert testimonials, Farm Sanctuary relies on value-based arguments. Aside from denoting that the rescued animals are sentient and possess attributes typically reserved for humanity in popular imaginations, such as personality, hobbies, friendship, likes, and dislikes, the value-based claims made by farm sanctuary rely on the viewer’s agreement that animals’ intrinsic value warrants the same rights that humans enjoy (Farm Sanctuary, n.d.). As far as a call to action, the call to practice altruistic veganism relies on the group’s ability to depict the residents of their farm as people.

Farm Sanctuary attempts to personify the rescued animals in a few key ways. First, it does not use language that implies ownership. For example, animals are called residents or friends. This careful avoidance of ownership language is broken in one notable way: the group’s symbolic use of the word “adopt.” In many of the sponsorship calls, Instagram followers are invited to symbolically adopt a resident by donating money to be used to pay for the animals’ feeding and care. Using the word “adopt” implies ownership, or as Farm Sanctuary calls it,

"guardianship." Second, it takes care to talk about the animals like it would humans, pointing out the similarities between humans and animals, such as in the animal's personality quirks and individual traits (Farm Sanctuary, n.d.). For example, some posts mourn the deaths of animals that have lived at Farm Sanctuary. One of these posts is an end-of-year roundup featuring both still images and videos of the deceased animals. The video begins with a clip of a dandelion shedding its fronds as the wind sweeps over it, accompanied by text that reads "The Friends We Loved 2022," followed by images and videos of the deceased animals (Farm Sanctuary, 2023c). Text appears on the screen along with each new animal, connecting their images with their name and species. The caption accompanying this post mourns these animals but also the animals lost to the animal agriculture system on a whole (Farm Sanctuary, 2023b).

Other posts of this kind mourn individual animals. For example, two posts are dedicated to the memory of Randy the goat and Betty the pig. These individual mourning posts feature videos of the deceased animal with text describing their age and the facets of their personalities featured in the video as well as in the caption. In the captions, the details of their unique rescue situations are also shared, as well as the impact the animal has had on both visitors and employees of the farm. These individual posts also take the opportunity to generalize the characteristics of the deceased animals to others of the same species, and the inspiration that group finds in the lives of these animals. Additionally, many of the donation and membership opportunities offered by Farm Sanctuary are named after deceased residents (Farm Sanctuary, n.d.).

Third, Farm Sanctuary points out what they deem unnecessary cruelty in the factory farm industry. Finally, the format of the posts of Farm Sanctuary are effective in their personification of animals. By choosing to post videos, almost always including sound, the vitality and

vivaciousness of the animals is made the focus (Farm Sanctuary, n.d.). Taken together, the rhetorical strategies used by Farm Sanctuary to formulate its altruistic call to action which asks its followers to choose a vegan diet and to provide support to the group's rescue efforts. These actions are framed as a function of being a kind or compassionate person. For example, many posts feature a version of the phrase "some*one* not some*thing*" [emphasis added] and that all animals "deserve" the same treatment as the residents of Farm Sanctuary (Farm Sanctuary, 2022c). The words "choose" and "choice" are frequently used in relation to dietary decisions, implying that being a kind person. Moreover, a protector of vulnerable animals is as simple as choosing to refrain from the meat and dairy industry (Farm Sanctuary, n.d.).

Another kind of post that reflects Farm Sanctuary's call to action feature event announcements. These events range in both size and purpose. For example, one event featured in these posts is the farm's "Open Your Heart" Valentine's Day event. This small, local, in-person event offered participants food, a presentation by the organization's president, and time in the sanctuary to meet the animals housed there. Another, larger event featured is the farm's Thanksgiving "Turkey Day" Event, which consists of both in-person and digital components. A slew of posts introduced participants to the turkeys in residence as well as called for sponsorship donations. The main event included a feast provided to the turkeys on Thanksgiving. These posts included a mix of the more common videos, as well as still images with text describing each bird and providing facts about turkeys as a species, while another featured information about turkey agriculture. Like the other posts, the visual imagery of idyllic hillsides were prominent, but some posts were text-based and color-coordinated to match Thanksgiving color schemes (Farm Sanctuary, n.d.).

In addition, legislation announcement posts also reflect Farm Sanctuary's call to action. These posts feature both petitions that viewers can sign and news about voting opportunities for animal agriculture legislation. These posts announce new legislation as well as advancements in existing legislation on both state and national levels. These posts are the most visually different from the others, as they feature bold, superimposed text over still images of farm animals (Farm Sanctuary, n.d.). One post announcing the introduction of a bill in New Jersey features the following carousel of images in the same post: the first is a still image of a pig confined in a cage with text superimposed over it that reads: "NEW JERSEY: HELP BAN ANIMAL CONFINEMENT" (Farm Sanctuary, 2023f).

The next two images in the post are also of pigs confined to cages, with the Farm Sanctuary watermark toward the bottom of the image. The next two images show adolescent cows lying down, leashed by a chain to the wall in front of them. Finally, the last image of the post also shows a similarly fettered cow, with the text "ACT NOW! BAN THE CRATES IN NEW JERSEY!" superimposed over it (Farm Sanctuary, 2023f). Farm Sanctuary's emphasis on calling attention to legislative action on behalf of farm animals is further evidence of their values-based claim to vegan identity. In other words, it is not a personal choice but rather the way the world *should* operate, a vision it is actively seeking to carry out.

In addition, Farm Sanctuary's call for service and monetary support also reflects an effort to correct what the group deems to be wrongdoings. Another category of posts on Farm Sanctuary's Instagram are sponsorship and service calls. These posts announce job openings and opportunities to symbolically "adopt" and "sponsor" residents of the farm, as well as for more nebulous monetary donations. In addition, some of these posts feature both paid job opportunities and intern positions (Farm Sanctuary, n.d.). One post is a still image of a group of

young people laughing while stroking sheep, with the text: “Animal Care Intern / 2023 Summer June 1 - August 31” superimposed above the smiling youths (Farm Sanctuary, 2022d). The caption provides a brief history of the internship program and details about the position's location, pay, and duties. Another job posting for a sanctuary guide position features a quote from someone who currently holds that position about their enjoyment of the job. This emphasis on service and monetary support further reflects a call to action. Like Forks Over Knives, Farm Sanctuary’s approach is holistic; however, the focus is on holistic kindness rather than holistic health. In using personified language to describe the farm's residents, they argue that animals are people and therefore deserve all the rights afforded to humans, including the right to life. Farm Sanctuary positions veganism as a function of being a kind person.

Particularly in the legislation announcement posts and its sponsorship and service call posts, Farm Sanctuary invites viewers to participate in animal advocacy in a number of ways, including by voting, volunteer work, and financial support (Farm Sanctuary, n.d.). In addition, educational posts provide a different kind of call. Similar to Forks Over Knives’ *Is it Healthy?* posts, these posts insinuate that there is a “right” way to eat. What separates Farm Sanctuary from Forks Over Knives is that the “right” way to eat is predicated on value systems and morality rather than logic and reason. Despite advocating for the very same diet that Forks Over Knives recommends, Farm Sanctuary’s call to action is to eat in ways that protect others rather than oneself.

While some posts simply call for kindness and dietary abstention, others call for more radical changes, such as policy change and protest activities. While consistent with altruistic veganism, Farm Sanctuary’s moral and ethical arguments draw attention to what veganism is *not* rather than its ease and execution as Forks Over Knives does. These strategies, while effective in

creating an aesthetic identity that features both feminist strategy and appeals to feminine gender identity through caring and altruism, is not as effective in terms of the main goal; that is, to get people to go vegan. This ineffectiveness is partially due to inconsistent identity formation. For example, Farm Sanctuary relies on feminine gender performances, such as care and feeding, in addition to online performances of feminine gender identities, such as featuring people more often, emphasizing the role of emotion, kindness, and care work in food choice, and posting longer captions. While these appeals are effective, they do not match the group's more radical strategies. Farm Sanctuary calls for an identity shift as opposed to a dietary shift. This distinction likely puts people off of veganism, especially in Western societies, which view meat consumption as a symbol of status and prosperity.

Conclusion

Farm Sanctuary is an animal rights activist group that promotes the practice and philosophy of veganism, citing it as a necessary function of an ethical lifestyle. Compared to Forks Over Knives, Farm Sanctuary has enjoyed less popularity, with only a third of the following of Forks Over Knives at the time of this writing. This discrepancy can likely be attributed to Farm Sanctuary's altruistic vegan identity. The gap in the followings of the two groups is consistent with previously mentioned evidence that indicates the stigma attached to veg*anism is associated with its ethical underpinnings rather than the practice itself (Mooney & Lorenz, 1997; Ruby & Heine, 2011) and that it is more socially acceptable to practice egoistic veg*anism rather than altruistic veg*anism (Judge & Wilson, 2018).

Farm Sanctuary cultivates an altruistic vegan identity using feminine gender performances and "hard" appeals to veganism. Where Forks Over Knives reconciles masculinity with veg*an diets by constituting "healthy" as the primary identity of which veg*anism is merely

a function, Farm Sanctuary constitutes “ethical” as the primary identity that the practice of veg*anism serves. Farm Sanctuary actively seeks to disrupt existing power structures through activism, events, and lobbying for policy changes.

It is also important to note that Farm Sanctuary is by no means an extremist group; that is, it does not break laws, steal animals, or destroy property, nor does it campaign using grotesque or sexualized imagery, as other animal activist groups are known for. Instead, the group attempts to make visible the bodies and personalities of the rescued animals and connect members of the community with these animals. In some ways, this approach is less successful than the approach that Forks Over Knives utilizes. While Forks Over Knives does not openly share the motivations of Farm Sanctuary, the diet it advocates is the very same diet that Farm Sanctuary promotes. In other words, the goal of furthering the veg*an agenda is still accomplished.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Despite the rise in popularity of veg*an diets and the emergence of social media activism, ethical philosophies related to meat abstention and veg*an identities remain stigmatized in Western societies. The popularity of the practice of veg*anism absent its philosophical underpinnings can be attributed to the masculinization of veg*anism rather than to growing public compassion. That is, while *eating* veg*an foods has become more widespread and socially acceptable, *being* veg*an and claiming the identities associated with veg*anism remain disparaged. This thesis has demonstrated this discordance by comparing the ways in which various entities constitute their identities in the rhetorical moment of disclosure of veg*anism, and the varying levels popularity afforded to these groups depending on their identity as either altruistic or egoistic. These entities include celebrity Gordon Ramsay and activist groups Forks Over Knives and Farm Sanctuary.

Gordon Ramsay is culinary icon who publicly ridiculed veg*an foods throughout his long career. His recent incursion into the world of veg*an foods has largely succeeded despite its misalignment with his identity as a hyper masculine chef. Ramsay likely successfully navigates these opposing identities by continuing to ridicule veganism and presenting egoistic explanations in the moment of disclosure, a position allowing him to preserve his masculine identity above all others. Similarly, Forks Over Knives constitutes its identity as egoistic, using arguments based in logic and food-forward approaches to veganism as well as masculine gender performances in order to construct an identity wherein followers can eat veg*an without becoming veg*an. In contrast, Farm Sanctuary embraces the identity and philosophical underpinnings of altruistic veg*anism. Farm Sanctuary calls its followers to adopt the identity of veg*anism for its ethical

motivations, and combines online feminine gender performances as well as performances of care work and feeding that are associated with feminine gender identity with more aggressive styles of feminist activism, such as making the bodies of animals visible,

The dissonance between the social acceptability of the practice and the philosophy of veg*anism is further reflected in the two main reasons veg*ans offer in the moment of disclosure, altruism and egoism. Because eating is a socially significant and frequently occurring practice, deviations from the norms surrounding food are highly visible, making dietary disclosure a recurring event in the lives of veg*ans. The cultural significance of food and foodways mean that veg*ans are often met with an understandable question when they disclose their dietary preferences; that is, "why?" This question offers the veg*an the opportunity for a rhetorical moment of disclosure, one of the only rhetorical moments in which veg*ans can constitute their own identity in the eyes of their confidants. In this moment, veg*ans can choose to provide either an egoistic or altruistic explanation.

Egoistic explanations reflect a concern for oneself, such as health and well-being. In contrast, altruistic explanations reflect a concern for beings and entities outside oneself, such as the welfare of animals and concerns for environmental preservation. While most veg*ans practice their dietary abstention for a combination of reasons, the one they choose to highlight in the moment of disclosure has significant implications for their identity construction. Constructing an identity as an egoistic veg*an is more socially acceptable and less radical when compared with constructing an identity as an altruistic veg*an. Additionally, altruistic veg*anism is associated with femininity, whereas egoistic veg*anism is associated with masculine gender performances.

In celebrity lifestyle branding, especially that which results in branding partnerships and activist calls to actions alike, groups and individuals constitute their own identities by explaining veganism in the moment of disclosure. In addition to locating the group or celebrity identity, this identity construction has another purpose. The identities constructed by food celebrities and activist groups offer an identity that fans and followers are able to adopt. In the case of lifestyle branding, celebrities encourage fans to use the products and perform the practices that constitute that lifestyle. In the case of activism, activist groups proffer an identity they hope their audience will adopt in order to further their social movement agendas.

As this work has shown in the egoistic explanations and masculine gender performances of Gordon Ramsay and Forks Over Knives, these approaches to veg*anism garner more fans' approval and result in more commercial success. Eating as an egoistic vegan constitutes an identity as a healthy person, a trait for which veg*anism is a function rather than an identity, making veg*an diets compatible with masculine gender identity. Ramsay and Forks Over Knives also do not disrupt power structures by being veg*an and masculine, but rather uphold existing power structures, altering veg*anism by stripping it of its philosophy and making it fit with existing masculine gender identities.

On the other hand, Farm Sanctuary argues for both the philosophy and practice of veg*anism, in keeping with many performances of femininity such as kindness, care work, and acknowledgment of the influence of emotion about food choice. Farm Sanctuary performs femininity while also utilizing more aggressive feminist activist methods such as making bodies visible and utilizing text-heavy mediums and storytelling. Despite the similarity in naming, feminine gender performance and feminist activist methods do not align perfectly, as feminist activism is traditionally known to be aggressive and disruptive. Farm Sanctuary is less successful

likely because of these nonconforming attributes. For followers of this philosophy of veganism, eating this way allows them to constitute themselves as a good person and their identity is constructed as altruistic.

The implications of associating altruism with femininity in a patriarchal society place this identity at a disadvantage compared to egoistic identities. Altruism is considered feminine; in other words, caring about things is "girly," a trait that is trivialized and devalued in a patriarchal society. This trivialization can be seen blatantly in Gordon Ramsay's ridicule of veg*anism and more subtly in Forks Over Knives' avoidance of altruistic disclosure and the resulting popularity of Forks Over Knives compared with Farm Sanctuary. This association suggests the existence of patriarchal barriers to acting conscientiously and further, to doing the "right" thing and acting following one's morals. The fact that companies and celebrities actively capitalize on the insecurities inspired by perceived femininity and that groups strip their ethical beliefs from their campaigns suggests that preserving masculinity is more socially acceptable than acting on one's ethical stances.

As mentioned previously, Gordon Ramsay, Forks Over Knives, and Farm Sanctuary are all seeking the same goal: to formulate a veg*an identity. From a practical standpoint, the constitution of identity and call to action is more effective when approached through egoistic methods. Since the desired outcome of dietary choice is the same, it may be more beneficial for activist groups to construct veg*anism as egoistic and food-forward rather than as an identity in order to further the movement. On the other hand, if kindness is not the purpose behind the dietary choice, cruelty does not go away; it just changes shape. For example, arguing for veg*an diets from a health standpoint does not address other industries that capitalize on nonhuman bodies, such as fur trading, blood hunting, tanning, and even adhesive manufacturing. Without

the concept of kindness and altruism, the goals of altruistic activist groups like Farm Sanctuary, such as the recognition of nonhuman animal rights, are not achieved.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several factors limited this analysis. One limitation is presented by the type of cases studied; that is, the cases chosen for study were all well-known, popular entities with social media presence and followings. These cases do not fully capture the experiences of all activist groups or masculine-presenting food celebrities. In addition, this study analyzes the messages shared by these entities only. It does not account for the interactions between the entities and their followers or how followers may or may not adopt the identities presented by the entities featured in this study.

Principle among the limitations of this study is a privilege, which is manifested in several ways. First, access to food both financially and geographically is assumed by all the groups studied. Veg*an products, like foods marketed as healthy, often carry a higher price tag or require more time to prepare than conventional foods. The financial and temporal costs of veg*anism preclude people of lower socioeconomic statuses from making food choices for altruistic or egoistic reasons. Second, the vast majority of the publications cited in this work's literature review had predominantly white population samples. While this reflects the makeup of many veg*an populations, it also cannot fully capture the lived experiences of all veg*ans, making the results ungeneralizable regarding nonwhite veg*an populations.

Despite the aspects of this study that limit its generalizability, the information provided in this analysis has the potential to assist in planning campaigns and other persuasive messages for the cause of animal rights activism as well as for other causes. Specifically, activist organizations can work to construct more effective messages and identities by deepening understandings of

identity construction through food choice and highlighting the reasons for which egoistic arguments are more successful and more popular when compared with altruistic arguments. For example, while Forks Over Knives and Farm Sanctuary both advocate for the exact same behavior change, the adoption of veg*anism, they do so in different ways. Forks Over Knives situates its vegan diet as part of a larger identity centered around healthfulness, and relies on logic. In contrast, Farm Sanctuary situates veganism as a principle identity that requires an identity shift, not just a shift in behavior. In other words, the results of this study suggest that effective activist campaigns should align their desired behavior outcomes with an existing, dominant identity rather than call people to adopt an entirely new one.

This study focuses on patriarchal hegemony and the gendered limitations that exist, but this study does not address the cultural limitations that may act as additional barriers to veg*anism. For example, some research suggests that veg*anism's association with whiteness is a barrier to its adoption among people of color (Greenebaum, 2018). In addition, given the importance of food and foodways as a way of performing identity, abstaining from the foods that represent a culture or heritage is akin to opting out of that identity (Greenebaum, 2018). Similar to people who choose to prioritize their masculine identities, some people also prioritize their cultural identity when it comes into opposition with other diets they are interested in, like veg*ans.

Future studies should work to uncover the often complicated relationship between cultural food identities and contemporary dietary choices. Given the important role that food and foodways play in the constitution and performance of identity (Stokes & Atkins-Sayre, 2016), many questions remain unanswered, such as why veg*anism is associated with whiteness and how veg*anism affects the (non)constitution of other identities. As this study has shown, there

are varying methods for maintaining specific identities, like masculinity, while attempting to navigate the constitution or avoiding other identities, like those associated with cultural and racial heritage. I speculate that just as abstaining from meat in meat-centric, patriarchal Western societies results in stigma, so too does abstention from meat dishes that constitute culturally significant celebrations.

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