Abstract

In the current epoch the concepts of climate change, environmental crisis and sustainable living have become well-integrated into the collective consciousness of individuals, and on an overall level, risks and uncertainties have taken up a different meaning for people in post-modern Western society. The previous faith and trust in institutions, experts and scientists has collapsed as the technological advancements and developments which where once provided to rid humanity of scarcity in basic needs and fight diseases, are now to blame for the current situation of global warming, overpopulation, and pollution. The future of humanity and the planet is consequently uncertain, and while the incentive to take action among laypeople is present, this is to some degree inhibited by a lack of adaptable concrete step-by-step solutions paired with an overall absence of global consensus regarding the magnitude of the problem. Nevertheless a number of relatively new tendencies suggests that individuals are taking matters into their own hands. The anthropocene marks a new geological era where human activities have come to play a powerful role on global climates and the environment, and this has given rise to new sustainable lifestyles, where the agenda and common vision often revolves around making conscious everyday choices with the least possible environmental impact. While the altruistic messages, ideas and values behind new sustainable lifestyles may seem praiseworthy, there are scholars who suggest that affiliations to such fixed identities serve other purposes, as a strategy of maintaining a unified sense of self in a world marked by fragmentation, insecurity and chaos. Elaborating further on this assumption, environment-friendly ways of living come to function as ready-made identities for modern individuals as a replacement for genuine self-development and reflection. Veganism and minimalism are examples of such lifestyles, where a certain way of way of being and doing is defined, which encourage individuals to live in alinement with strict moral standards, and scrutinize their relationship with every aspect of human life. Every-day life choices are the building blocks of identities, and as the faith in knowledge of experts has declined, the truth, facts and evidence that this community is build from is thus derived from other sources, such as documentaries and various media platforms. Significantly, internet blogs have become an arena for debates regarding facts, knowledge, truth and false. A closer examination of the vegan and minimalist blog-universe reveals a community with similar language patterns, moral standards, and repeating discourses through which the world and people in it are categorized and labeled. This thesis delves into these areas with a particular interest in the discursive constructions of members and non-members in the vegan/minimalist community.

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1. Introduction

In contemporary global society, the topics of climate change, global warming and sustainability have become embedded in collective consciousness. Thus individuals in the modern world are confronted with discourses and imagery on a frequent basis, which convey the messages that global temperatures are rising, that it is almost certainly caused by human activity, and if this development continues, it will result in grave repercussions for global ecosystems and future generations of the human species. Different conceptualizations, facts and frameworks have been established by the United Nations, and governments have been encouraged to take appropriate action in alinement with these frameworks. Despite the fact that global warming is generally agreed to be a serious future threat to humanity and the planet, the responses from governments around the world are multifaceted, varied and many times contradictory. Hence, even within specific country contexts, the political responses vary from region to region, and it is not uncommon for different municipalities to implement different strategies to encourage citizens to lower their emission of carbon dioxide.

Until relatively recently, climate change and the topics related to it have been debated mainly in the scientific community in a language which allowed fewer people to get a hold of evidence, assess risks, and take part in the discussion. Hence a change has happened within the past couple of years when it comes to nonprofessional's access to the debates surrounding climate change. Along with this development, awareness about the global impact of climate change, risks, and sustainability is reaching individuals throughout practically every corner of the Earth, through daily news influx from various media platforms. Climate change risks, sustainability and related phenomenons have thus arguably become significant matters in the conscious and every-day life choices of individuals, at least in the Western hemisphere.

 A number of factors have contributed to new tendencies among the global population's urge to take matters into their own hands. Hence, Increasing exposure to information about climate change and it's possible future implications, absence of concrete solutions or step-by-step instructions one can follow, and a contemporary distrust in the knowledge and predictions of experts, are examples of reasons why people choose to carve out their own route towards sustainable living. More recently, a number of trends have gained popularity, according to which sustainable living and awareness of human activity's impact on the environment has taken up a meaning and a language of it's own. Lifestyles such as ethical veganism, minimalism and zero-waste are manifestations of such modern tendencies where

particular socially agreed principles and ways of living are prescribed. Hence there is a clear sense of socially established norms which attribute membership to some people, and non-membership to others. Moreover, these social conventions determine what types of actions should be considered right and wrong, and what statements of 'knowledge' should be categorized as 'true' or 'false'.

This thesis has been motivated, and driven forward by an impetus to examine how individuals in the modern world respond to new risks associated with climate change, a current crisis introduced by the technological developments and advancements in living conditions that were once set up to minimize the challenges faced by humanity and create abundance. It is feasible that ways of living such as ethical veganism and minimalism are examples of identities which people subscribe to in order to outwardly convey an image of environmental awareness and maintaining an inwardly sense of wholeness in a world marked by fragmentation and chaos. In this thesis, the method of discourse analysis has been selected as a research tool for the purpose of examining the language pattern used by actors in the vegan and minimalist community, to construct sustainable identities. While various social platforms of expression could have been selected for analysis, the vegan and minimalist blog universe has been assessed as a discursive plane. Hence, the blogosphere offers a promising glimpse into a virtual space where people share their own personal experiences and journeys towards leading a more ethical, green, and environmentally friendly existence in alinement with the well-being of the planet. Many vegans, minimalists and zero-wasters can be found on blogs, sharing different resources, inspiration, beliefs and thoughts. Skimming casually through a number of blogs created by minimalist and vegan bloggers, it appears that certain themes, concepts and categories are repeated in this particular sphere to define the world, social relations and people. It is the purpose of thus thesis to answer the following problem-formulation:

"Which discourses do actors in the vegan blogosphere articulate to construct an identity and community with certain standards, based on labeling and categorizing of members and non-members?"

In order to establish a well-balanced analysis, a number of elements and perspectives have been implemented in the thesis. First, a literature review will be presented where some of the most current debates regarding climate change and discourses is outlined. In the following chapter named

"background" a brief introduction is given of the lifestyles under scrutiny, along with a description of the umbrella term of "voluntary simplicity". This should serve the the purpose of illuminating some of the most basic elements of the lifestyles, which are often adopted in conjunction. After this step, it is the intend to integrate a solid theoretical foundation, where a number of concepts and theories which are relevant for the study of identity construction in late modernity are pinpointed. The theory chapter should also function as a guideline for the selections of research tools in the following methods section, The methods chapter of the thesis contains methodological considerations about what choices have been selected and dismissed in preparation for in the analysis. Moreover, the methods section consists of a research design and a specification of operationalization aids. The presentation of blogs as a discursive plane, and reflections concerning the importance of studying blogs has also been placed in the methods section, and before heading to the actual analysis, the blogs and blogposts which have been selected for analysis will be introduced.

The three blogs which have been used as empirical data in the thesis have been selected on the premise that they were written by authors from different geographical locations, hence Germany, Australia and the United Kingdom. This was done, not to make a cross-cultural assessment as such, however more so for the purpose of getting as broad a perspective as possible, in the examination of tendencies in language patterns within the vegan/minimalist blog universe. Also, the three blogs selected for analysis share the common feature that they have committed themselves to both ethical veganism and minimalism as part of their lifestyles since they both aim at creating less waste and part-taking as little as possible in the exhaustion of the planet.

Each analysis is followed up by a sum up of reflections about the overall message of the discourse strand. Finally, in the conclusion of the thesis, the answer to the problem-formulation will be given, and the main findings of the analysis will be connected with some of the broader dimensions presented earlier in the thesis.

2. Literature Review

Before heading towards a closer examination of the selected research area, a basic overview of some of the ways in which climate change and sustainability has been researched by academic scholars will be presented. This should help specifying some of the most recent developments within the field of discourse and climate change.

Starting off with the earliest accounts, it has been argued that the topic of climate change has been part of scientific discourse since the relationship between atmospheric carbon dioxide and air temperature was analyzed in 1896, for the purpose of explaining the existence of ice ages. This led the Swedish chemist Svante Arrhenius to predict that if atmospheric carbon dioxide doubled, the mean average annual temperature of Earth would become warmer by several degrees. However, according to academic scholars David Etkin and Elise Ho, only in the past few decades increasing amounts of attention has been given to the issue of climate change and the degree to which increased greenhouse gas concentrations might alter future climates, with possible detrimental repercussions for human kind and natural ecosystems. As the authors explain, it is natural for the climate system to vary over time, and over the past million years there has been around ten ice ages, each lasting about 100,000 years. Currently, the globe is in a so-called interglacial period, which would be approaching it's end soon if it was not for the changes in atmospheric chemistry induced by human activities. According to Etkin and Ho, impacts of this development are expected to include rise of sea-levels, changes in storm paths and frequency, more frequent floods from heavy rainfall and more extreme droughts. As these impacts would cause dramatic and negative consequences for human society and ecosystems, many individuals are concerned with these developments[1].

Climate change and the modern individual

Professor Mike Hulme describes climate change, not as a "problem" waiting for a solution, but an environmental, cultural and political phenomenon that is reshaping the way in which individuals think about themselves, the society that surrounds them, and about humanity's place on Earth. In his book, entitled "Why we disagree about climate change", Hulme dissects the idea of climate change. He examines where it came from, what it means to different people in different geographical locations and

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1   Etkin, David, and Elise Ho. "Climate Change: Perceptions and Discourses of Risk." *Journal of Risk Research* 10, no. 5 (2007), page 624

why people disagree on it. As Mike Hulme argues, humanity has now entered into a period where the engagement with the idea of climate change is impossible to avoid. Hence, in every sphere from politics, law, development, business, to art, religion, ethics, music and literature the idea of climate change circulates anxiously[2].

Multiple conflicting policies

According to Mike Hulme, there are multiple and conflicting policy responses to risks associated with climate change, and a need of investing in the discursive and procedural preconditions for antagonistic politics to work constructively, to enable ways of implementing politics when people do not agree[3]. While global warming and climate change in general are physical phenomena, the battle over the real or presumed developments on this front is a cultural and social phenomenon, according to Hulme. Elaborating further on this, he mentions how the notion of climate change has spurred the narrative of the so-called 'anthropocene', which marks a new geological era where human actions have become dominant in planetary functioning[4]. However, as Hulme argues, merely constructing scientific truth or establishing expert consensus about the 'bio-geophysics' of the climate system is too limited a basis to act in the world. Moreover, according to his arguments, the future risks associated with human-caused climate change are severely undetermined by science. Hence while it does reveal that humans are powerful actors when it comes to influencing the climate system, scientific predictions of future climates are poorly constrained. As Hulme argues, facts about climatic and human future are undetermined. Moreover, people judge these facts in different ways and because of this, the strategic goals of policy interventions developed in response to the presumed risks associated with future climate change are inevitably multiple and conflicting. Hence, they are shaped by different worldviews, ethical systems and different accounts of 'good human living'. In light of these circumstances, moving forward on climate change becomes a matter of investing in discursive and procedural preconditions for opposing politics to work constructively, to enable ways of implementing policies when people disagree[5].

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2   Hulme, Mike. "Why We Disagree About Climate Change." *The Carbon Yearbook*, 2009, page 41

3   Hulme, Mike. "(Still) Disagreeing About Climate Change: Which Way Forward?" *Zygon®* 50, no. 4 (2015) Page 893

4   Ibid., page 894

5   Ibid., page 895

Climate change action framed in the language of risks

As Hulme argues, the most that can be safely stated is that human actions on the atmosphere are changing existing environmental and social risks, and introducing new ones. He furthermore explains that the language of 'risk' is one that the Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change adopted in its Fifth Assessment Report as a linguistic move to characterize climate change as a challenge in managing risks opens doors to a variety of options for solutions. In other words, characterizing climate change as a challenge of managing risks creates opportunities for different ethical, political and economic judgements to be made about different courses of action to alleviate or tolerate these risks[6]. The association of climate change with "risk society" stems from a modernist reading of climate change, which places it as a future risk which disciplines the present, Hulme argues[7].

David Etkin and Elise Ho discuss some of the issues that affect risk awareness with respect to climate change and what their impact have been on people's attitudes. As they suggest, there is a large gap between the scientific community and the general public, regarding their understanding, awareness, and perception of risks linked to climate change. According to Etkin and Ho, awareness is steered by both environmental values, or political and economic agendas, however particularly relevant are people's worldviews and 'myths of nature', which the authors argue, have a significant impact on their risk perception. They further view climate change as a problem which needs to be understood holistically with consideration of the feedbacks between the climate system, the human system and ecosystems. While they all bring legitimate perspectives, it is still impossible to fit these into a traditional linear problem-solving model and the absence of collective action impinges on individual people's impetus to act[8]. According to Etkin and Ho, the discussion of risk perception is first and foremost predicated on the assumption that risk is a socially constructed concept. Therefore, estimation of risk is a value-dependent social process, and inherent social values determine which risks are selected for assessment, and what methods are selected to measure them. This has implications for risk awareness since it accepts, and may generate uncertainty and gives legitimacy in the resulting social discourse to a broad specter of possibly contradictory viewpoints and value-systems. Uncertainty about magnitude and type of risk can greatly affect an individuals' motivation to undertake mitigating actions[9]. According to Etkin

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6   Ibid., page 895-896

7   Ibid., page 897

8   Etkin, David, and Elise Ho. "Climate Change: Perceptions and Discourses of Risk." *Journal of Risk Research* 10, no. 5 (2007), page 623

9   Ibid, page 627

and Ho, factors such as perceived benefit, ideology and environmental and social values contribute importantly to individual's risk perception[10]. Furthermore the fundamental manner in which nature is viewed in terms of it's resilience and link to human society. Different disciplines and ideologies tend to emphasize different myths, according to Etkin and Ho. Elaborating further on this, they argue that historical Western perspectives tend to place humans outside and in control of the natural world, an idea which stems from the 17th and 18th century paradigms of Newton, Descartes and other rationalist thinkers. This argument partially rests on the assumption that science can understand, predict and even perfectly engineer the natural world, and it is also based on the notion that it is humankind's natural right to control nature[11].

The Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change

While a scientific consensus has been established by The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change about the physical transformation happening to the World's climates, according to Hulme, there is no comparable consensus or vantage point which allows people to understand what this conglomerate notion of climate change means for individuals on the planet and their descendants. As Hulme argues, engaging with climate change demands a broader assessment than the physical observations that are observed, modeled and predicted by natural scientists. In other words, there is a need for new ways of viewing the phenomenon of climate change, which circulates in the social world, and a need for new ways of making sense of the many different meanings attached to the idea of climate change. Because instead of just being about a change in physical climate, when traveling and encountering new cultures, politics, economics, and religions often through the interposing role of the media, climate change takes on new meanings and serves new purposes according to Hulme. He argues that during his 25 years as a professor researching climate change, a shift has occurred. As Hulme describes it, climate change has become the key narration within which all environmental politics from local to global is now framed. However, he argues that while it has been established as a desired goal internationally, to control climate change by limiting the emissions of greenhouse gasses, the opposite has happened since the Kyoto Protocol. Hence, emission of greenhouse gasses have accelerated. Examining some of the underlying causes for this development, Hulme has applied the concepts, tools, and languages of the

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10 Ibid., page 628

11 Ibid., page 630

sciences, social sciences and humanities, as well as the discourses, and practices of politics, religion and economics. Thus as he explains, from these different positions it becomes evident that the idea of climate change carries different meanings, and imply different action efforts depending on who one is, and where one lives. To shed further light on these claims, Hulme mentions four contemporary and contrasting ways of narrating the problem of climate change[12].

First, Hulme mentions how climate change is used as a battleground between different philosophies and practices of science and between different ways of knowing. Secondly, he mentions how climate change is used as the justification for the commodification of the atmosphere and especially for the commodification of the gas carbon dioxide. As a third example, Hulme mentions how climate change is used as the inspiration for global networks of new or reinvigorated social movements, and finally Hulme suggests that climate change discourse is used to reveal threats to ethnic, national and global security. However, Hulme argues for a way of addressing the issue of climate change from a different vantage point, an approach which moves away from political and technical resources and focus on the potential of climate change in provoking new ethical an theological thinking about our relationship with the future. Elaborating further on this argument, Hulme encourage a revelation of the creative psychological, spiritual and ethical work that climate change can and is doing for humanity. This, he sees as a potential for arousing new interest in how science and culture interrelate [13]. He further argues that this more creative application of the idea of climate change, does not necessitate global agreement, however thrives in conditions of pluralism and hope, instead of universalism and fear[14].

According to Hulme, Climate change is also sometimes seen as a euphemism of the evils of global capitalism, and thus used as decisive weapon in an ideological struggle. In this narrative the enemy is the capitalist system, that prioritizes profit over the world climate, and the battle is to be fought by working people around the world who have no interest in supporting such a system[15]. A third framework from which people understand climate change, is through the language of "lost nature" which, according to Hulme resonates across deeply across many cultures. Essentially this framework understands climate change as a lost order and stability in a natural world and disturbs a previously

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12 Hulme, Mike. "Why We Disagree About Climate Change." *The Carbon Yearbook*, 2009, page 41

13 Ibid., page 42

14 Ibid., page 43

15 Hulme, Mike. "(Still) Disagreeing About Climate Change: Which Way Forward?" *Zygon®* 50, no. 4 (2015), page 898

presumed purity or separateness of the natural world as being beyond the reach of humans[16]. A fourth way of speaking of climate change, is to see it standing in for the larger idea of the anthropocene, a presumed epoch in which the collective force of human activities have left irreversible change in the geological strata. With this particular narrative, the changed relationship between humans and nature is revealed, one which invites techno-managerial planning and expert administration at the cost of democratic debate[17]. In light of this, it is reasonable to question what steps to take in order to move forward.

Communicating climate change effectively – what works?

Thomas E. Bowman discusses different dimensions related to climate change, with a particular interest in the American context. Bowman argues that the year 2008 marked a potential turning point for communicating with the public and policy makers about climate change. In the previous years, the message that climate change was likely mostly due to human activities was mostly reached by an audience of science-educated individuals and important actors in the policy arena. Hence, as Bowman argues, the language which was used to narrate the problem of climate change at this point in time, could have never convinced the general public that global warming represents an urgent and serious threat[18]. However, around 2007 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change issued the statement that climate change is occurring, and that human activities are almost certainly the main cause. This, Bowman argues, created a shift in the way climate change was debated in the mainstream media. Whereas climate change had previously been debated critically in the media, and centered around controversy about the scientific evidence, it has since the mentioned shift been treated as an established fact by the mainstream media[19]. Looking at the attitudes and concerns expressed by the public towards climate change in America, Bowman argues that their sense of urgency is high, and even higher than that of policy makers[20]. However, at the civic level, scientists and communicators have yet to convey

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16 Ibid., page 898-899

17 Ibid., page 899

18   Bowman, Thomas E. "A Turning Point in Climate Change Communication Priorities." *International Journal of Sustainability Communication*, 2009 page 64

19 Ibid., page 65

20 Ibid., page 66

the message that climate risks are immanent, and that effective, affordable solutions are achievable[21]. Elaborating on the specific aims of climate change communicators, Bowman explain how they develop campaigns for a variety of different reasons. Their audience consist of policy advocates, educators, technical experts, business, media outlets and citizens, and the overall goal is to help humanity respond effectively to the threats posed by climate change. What predisposes long-term management of climate change, according to Bowman, is the establishment of shared understandings about common interests in society, and a shift in peoples understanding of the world, the nature that surrounds them, and their aspirations for 'The Good Life'[22].

3. Background

An increasing number of people around the world are making changes in their everyday lives, as an active response to contemporary global challenges. In broader terms such practices can be defined as "voluntary simplicity"[23], and what this definition entails, is that individuals are actively inventing new ways to live within the material limits of the Earth[24]. There are many reasons why people might choose lives of greater simplicity, hence feeling that one's life is out of balance, feeling too busy to connect meaningfully with friends and family or seeking a more harmonious relationship with the Earth are a few examples of reasons behind[25]. The principle concern of the simplicity movement, is to build a sustainable future for the Earth, and the lifestyles that have emerged from the movement indicate that individuals are taking personal responsibility for how their lives connect with sustainability and the future[26]. As the concern for ecological sustainability is widely shared there are many ways of expressing more sustainable and meaningful ways of living, where people are inventing words and

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21 Ibid., page 68

22 Ibid., page 69

23 Elgin, Duane. "Voluntary Simplicity – A Path to Sustainable Prosperity." *Social Change Review* 11, no. 1 (2013), page 69

24 Ibid., page 70

25 Ibid., page 71-72

26 Ibid., page 75

phrases to characterize their approach to living, as they go. Instead of 'voluntary living', one might use the phrases green life-ways, earth-friendly living, sustainable lifestyles, and so on. While they stand for more or less the same, they might differ in the emphasis they put on certain aspects of living sustainably[27]. However a common feature is the notion that people take personal responsibility for the well-being of the planet and the future[28].

Minimalism

Minimalism is a lifestyle that is characterized by an anti-consumerist approach combined with the quest for seeking a meaningful life by other means than consumer-oriented attitudes. The basic philosophy behind the lifestyle is the "less is more" - mentality, which implies that having less is a means of achieving more in the non-materialist aspects of life. This mentality also steers a specific pattern of life changes, and comprehensive instruments for carrying them out. These involve criticism of consumerism, discovering of "real" values, and methods of restructuring one's prior lifestyle[29]. The life transformation proposed by minimalism starts with a recognition of what is unnecessary in life and getting rid of it, limiting or reducing reliance on such things. Next step is to identify what one finds important in life, and this will vary for everyone. The discovery of what is 'excess' in a material sense is difficult to distinct from 'moderate' consumption, and requires an individual assessment[30]. In it's essence however, minimalism is a negation of mindless, compulsive purchasing and a critical examination of the quantities of objects owned together with the social meaning ascribed to them. Becoming a minimalist, and creating one's own self-definition is a process. Hence, it is often emphasized on blogs that people understand them differently and choose the elements that correspond with their personal needs. Also, minimalism is often combined with vegetarianism and related variations, and it corresponds with the 'zero waste' attitude as well[31].

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27 Ibid., page 76

28 Ibid., page 80

29   Renata Dopierala. "Minimalism – a New Mode of Consumption?" *Przegląd Socjologiczny* 66, no. 4 (2017), page 67 + 68

30 Ibid., page 68

31 Ibid., page 69

Veganism

Veganism can be understood as the most restrictive form of vegetarianism, as it implies not consuming any animal products[32]. It is frequently associated with an alternative lifestyle as it challenges the most prevailing assumptions about food, health and morality. The three most commonly seen motivations for adopting a vegan or vegetarian lifestyle can often be separated into three primary reasons, hence religious beliefs, concerns about animal welfare, personal health, and environmental sustainability. However, broadly speaking, the underlying motivations can be narrowed down to ethics, and health[33]. Vegans and vegetarians that are motivated by ethical concerns often contribute their choices to animal welfare issues. These ethics are grounded in the idea that animals alike humans, should be considered moral beings. Those who are motivated by health benefits seek improvements in overall health, and prevention of disease. However, the health oriented vegans are sometimes criticized by the ethical vegans, who cast their health-motivations as egotistical and deprived from altruistic thoughts. Nevertheless, both ethical and health motivated vegans and vegetarians commonly express environmental concerns, such as negative ecological impacts of the livestock industry[34].

3. Theory

In this part of the thesis, the intent is to introduce a number of concepts relevant to the selected research area. In sum this chapter should function as a theoretical framework through which the research topic and the concepts related to it can better be comprehended, discussed and reflected on, in later chapters. Also this section, contemplates the ontological and epistemological premises on which the research has been established.

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32 Portraits of Veganism: A Comparative Discourse Analysis of a Second-Order Subculture, page 3

33 Ibid., page 2

34 Ibid., page 2

Ulrich Beck, Risk society, reflexive modernity and the individual

According to German sociologist Ulrich Beck we live in an age where the social order of the national state, class, ethnicity and the traditional family is in decline and with this, the most powerful current has become the ethic of individual self-fulfillment and achievement. In other words, the compulsion to lead a life of one's own and the possibility to do so, emerge when a society is highly differentiated. In the post-modern society, people are forced to take their lives into their own hands, and in doing so they need to become the actors, builders and managers of their own identities and biographies, along with their social links and networks[35]. In Becks words, modern guidelines compel the self-organization and self-thematization of people's biographies, and living a life of one's own means that standard biographies become elective biographies, or do-it-yourself biographies, where there is always the possibility for slippage or collapse. Moreover, life's events are ascribed as not only outside causes, but to aspects of the individual, such as decisions, non-decisions, achievements, compromises and defeats[36].

Reflexive Modernity and Risk

Ulrich Beck has brought forward the concept of risk and risk research in contemporary sociology and social theory. The risk society thesis captures the paradox of modern society, hence that risk might actually be increasing because of technology, science and industrialism, instead of diminishing due to technological and scientific progress[37]. This has resulted in a remarkable transformation in social attitudes and fears, and out of this, a wave of recidivist movements promoting organic food, natural herbal medicines, environmental protection and a return to nature have emerged. Supporters of the movements referred to, broadly reject the progressivist thesis of science and technology and its profit-driven outcomes. Beck seeks to understand this noticeable shift in social attitudes and examine the interplay between, as well as internal contradictions of technology, science, political and social institutions[38]. He argues that the revolutions in thinking, technological development and political

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35   Beck, Ulrich, and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim. *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and Its Social and Political Consequences*. SAGE Publications, 2002. page 23

36 Ibid., page 35

37 Darryl S. L. Jarvis: Risk, globalization and the state: A critical appraisal of Ulrich Beck and the World Risk Society Thesis, page 23

38 Ibid., page 24

organization stirred by the rationalist epistemologies from the Enlightenment laid the foundations of the modernist project. This project was aimed at conquering nature, rid humanity of edge of scarcity in food, shelter and basic needs, and fight disease. While not equally distributed, the project has delivered progress, technological breakthroughs and material improvements that are enjoyed by increasing numbers of humanity. Thus, Beck claims that much of the modernist project has succeeded, however industrial modernity has not only reached it's limits, it has moved irreversibly to a new historical epoch that he has termed "reflexive modernity"[39].

Individualization

According to Beck's observations, the historically dynamic role of the welfare state and the way in which it has changed, has affected social relations and provided individuals with greater choice and freedoms. For instance the provision of public goods such as education, economic and social support has increased 'individualization' and broken down the roles of traditional social institutions such as marriage and family. The freedom from these constraints by greater choice, social mobility through public education and travel through globalized work practices, the institutions of modernism are threatened, as the support networks of family are replaced by reliance on one's own ability to establish support networks. Greater individuality, Beck argues, may be viewed as an emancipatory process, however it is also accompanied by greater individual risk, and the urgency to find and invent new certainties for oneself[40].

While the success of industrialization have laid the foundations for a liberated individual, it has also introduced ecological crises, destruction of natural habitat and pollution which impacts both global and local ecology, to a point of threatening irreversible destruction, as is seen with global warming[41]. In the global risk society, Beck further argues, no one no longer knows with certainty the extend of the risks we face through collective technologies and innovations. Hence, science has proven to fail us with conflicting reports, and variance in risk calculations. This has led to increasing skepticism in the risk technocrats and expert's estimates, and overall consumers's faith in the predictions which "experts" can supply regarding the unintended consequences of complex technologies, is weakened[42]. The nature of

39 Ibid., page 25

40 Ibid., page 26-27

41 Ibid., page 29

42 Ibid., page 32

"risks" for Beck can only become visible when socially defined within knowledge, or knowledge processing forums. Given the increasing production by technologically advanced capitalism of risks that threaten us all, new antagonisms and social conflicts arise. At the centre of these conflicts is the contestation that surrounds and informs public knowledge and debate about these risks and their implications, and the media is the key arena through which social contests over definitions, knowledge and risks are played out[43]. Hence, the mass media is by Beck identified as a crucial domain in which processes of social definition take place in an era where scientific claims have lost their credibility and power to control the unprecedented nature of contemporary risk-society[44].

Social Identity Theory and the post-modern "Self"

It has been argued by theorists of modern identity, that the twentieth-century subject, is an 'over-socialized self'. In an uncertain world where concepts such as 'fluidity', 'migration', and 'de-centering' have gained increasing prominence, much attention is paid to individual's strategies for building up an authentic sense of self in an uncertain world. The modern era in which we live has also been termed post-modernity, and is frequently characterized by fragmentation and relativism. Moreover, the process of globalization has implicated the juxtaposition of completely distinct events or intrusion of distant events into the consciousness of ordinary people. By extension, 'lifestyle' and commodification takes on special significance for modern identity construction under late Western Capitalism. Thus, the consumption of goods has become a substitute for genuine development of the self[45]. There are theorists who view the condition of identity in 'high' or 'late' modernity with skepticism and thus conceptualize it as a 'crisis of identity'. However, there are also those who embody a more positive stance towards modernity, who are interested in people's abilities to accommodate the new demands and utilize their creative potential. Ulrich Beck has argued that in a society which is overshadowed by a staggering sense of personal insecurity, fragmentation and risk, we respond to the loss of these traditional certitudes by the process of 'constructed certitude', which may be realized for instance, by affiliations to identities such as gender, nationalism, and religion. Constructed certitude, is a means of maintaining and bolstering a clear and unified sense of identity and ideology, which is achieved in part

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43 Cottle, Simon. "Ulrich Beck, `Risk Society and the Media." *European Journal of Communication* 13, no. 1 (1998), page 8

44 Ibid., page 10

45 Benwell, Bethan, and Elizabeth Stokoe. *Discourse and Identity*. Edinburgh University Press, 2006, page 21-22

by ignoring ambiguity[46].

The in-group and the 'out-group'

In Social Identity Theory, the social identity is defined by individual identification with a group. This process is primarily constituted by a reflexive knowledge of group membership, and secondly by an emotional attachment or specific inclination to this belonging. Social identity theory examines the phenomenon of the 'in-group' and the 'out-group', and is premised on the idea that identities are established through a process of difference. In simple terms, the in-group, is one to which an individual 'belongs', and the out-group is seen as outside, and different from this group. This process of social categorization, is achieved cognitively by such operations as attribution and the application of existing schemas relating to the group, and it's operation serves particular social and psychological goals[47]. Another central element of social categorization, is that 'out-groups' are more easily and reductively characterized than in-groups, which implies that in-group identification often leads to stronger stereotyping and prejudice towards 'out-groups'.

Exploring the links between discourse and identity

According to Benwell and Stokoe, a discursive view of identity can be realized in two ways; as a discursive performance or construction of identity in interaction, or as a historical set of structures with regulatory power over identity[48]. With a particular focus on the former, a scholar by the name of Butler has developed an approach which argues that identity can be seen as a discursive practice, or a discourse which individuals both inhabit and employ. However, within this premise, discourse is also viewed as a performance. In this context, an earlier framework also relying on some of the same principles is mentioned, hence Goffman's ' impression management', or 'the representation of the self'[49]. Butler and Goffman share the viewpoint that interaction is a form of 'performance' formed by the demands of the setting and addressee and fabricated to maintain a mode of representation correspondent with participant's goals. However, unlike Butler, Goffman's idea of 'performance' is unproblematically premised on a rational, intending self capable of managing carefully an often

46 Ibid., page 22-23

47 Ibid., page 26

48 Benwell, Bethan, and Elizabeth Stokoe. *Discourse and Identity*. Edinburgh University Press, 2006, page 30

49 Ibid., page 33

idealized, consistent persona or 'front' in order to promote his or her interpersonal objectives[50].

Identity, performance and social constructivism

Teun Van Dijk argues that human communication is about exchanging information, expressing feelings and emotions, and importantly it is also about conveying to one another what kind of people we are. Hence, which geographical, ethnic, and social communities we belong to, and also our ethical, moral and political standpoints. While we use language to convey images of ourselves, we also use it to identify and classify others and signal our similarities, or distance ourselves from them, emphasizing our differences. In these cases, the significance of language and discourse are fundamental to the construction and negotiation of identities, Van Dijk points out[51]. Zooming in on the topic of identity, Van Dijk argues that, it is not something one 'has', however, it is rather something one 'does' or 'performs' and recreates through concrete exchanges, discourses and interactions between individuals[52]. According to Teun Van Dijk, the concept of identity has relevance in the field of discourse analysis, which is a social constructionist, interactionist paradigm. Thus studying identity within discourse bring together theorization on the self, the role of interaction in the creation of personal and social worlds, and the contribution of language to socio-cultural processes[53]. The focus on identity as 'doing' rather than 'being' and the de-essentialization of the self are two key elements of social constructionism. The fundamental idea proposed within this movement is that social reality does not exist as an independent entity, but is socially constructed. According to Van Dijk, the social constructionist paradigm entails that one should look at identity as a process (identification) more so than an attribute, or series of attributes. Focusing on the process allows for a consideration of the particular ways in which individuals will assume identities, attribute to others the membership of various categories, or resist such attributions. Hence, they point to 'constructing identities' as kind of social and 'discursive work'[54].

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50 Ibid., page 34

51 Dijk, Teun A. Van. *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*. London: Sage, 2011, page 264

52 Ibid., page 265

53 Dijk, Teun A. Van. *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*. London: Sage, 2011, page 264

54 Ibid., page 267

Communicating identities through Discourse

Van Dijk argues that identities are communicated in different ways, and may be either openly discussed and focused upon, or indirectly and symbolically conveyed. Thus, when a person claims to be for instance 'a good mother' that person is openly embracing a certain identity. However, identity work is also to a great extend done indirectly through meaning associations. Elaborating further on this, Van Dijk argues that for instance sounds, words, expressions of a language and styles are repeatedly associated with qualities, ideas, situations, social representations, and entire ideological systems. These are linked to social groups and categories that can be viewed as sharing or representing them in a process of meaning creation that is founded on accepted social meanings while continuously adjusting them. This process is known as indexicality, and is based on the idea that symbols will 'index' or point to elements of the social context. As these symbols and associations are constantly repeated and circulated, they become part of socially shared representations about groups and categories[55].

Van Dijk suggests, that in order to make sense of the salience of discourse in contemporary social processes, it must be recognized that discourse and society/culture are mutually constitutive. This implies that every instance of language use makes it's own small contribution to reproducing and/or transforming society and culture, including power relations. Van Dijk further argues that it makes sense to distinguish three broad spheres of social life that may be discursively constituted: Representations of the world, social relations between people, and people's social and personal identities[56].

Discourse analysis as a theory and method

There are many different approaches to discourse analysis, which is seen as both a theory and method. According to Jørgensen and Phillips, in discourse analysis theory and method are intertwined and researchers must accept the basic philosophical premises in order to use discourse analysis as their method of empirical study. That being said, the authors stress that while the content of the package should form an integrated whole, it is possible to create one's own package by selecting and combining elements from different discourse analytical perspectives, as different dimensions provide diverse forms of knowledge about a phenomenon, and produce a broader form of understanding. This form of multi-perspectivism requires the researcher to weigh each approach up against each other, and identify what kind of knowledge each approach can supply. To construct a coherent framework, it is important

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55 Ibid., page 269

56 Ibid., page 370

to take into consideration the ontological and methodological differences and similarities among the approaches[57] Jørgensen and Philips suggest that the struggle between different knowledge claims can be empirically examined as a struggle between different discourses, which represent different ways of understanding aspects of the world and construct different identities for speakers[58]. While social constructionist approaches are manifolded, Jørgensen and Phillips outline four basic premises of all social constructivist approaches[59]:

1) Our knowledge about the world should not be treated as objective truth. Reality is accessible to people only through categories, hence our knowledge about the world are not reflections of the world 'out there', but a product of our ways of categorizing the world.

2) Our accounts of, and knowledge about the world are the products of historically situated interchanges among people, thus our ways of comprehending and representing the world are historically and culturally specific and contingent. Discourse is a form of social action that plays a role in shaping the social world, including knowledge, identities and social relations.

3) The ways in which individuals understand the world, are created and maintained by social processes. Knowledge is created through social interaction through which people construct common truths and compete about what is true and false.

4) Within a certain worldview, some types of action become natural, and others unthinkable. Diverging social understandings of the world result in different social actions, hence the social construction of knowledge and truth has social consequences[60].

According to Jørgensen and Phillips, discourse analytical approaches take point of departure in the claim of structuralist and poststructuralist linguistic philosophy, that our access to reality is always through language. Language is a 'machine' that generates and constitutes the social world, and as a result, also shapes social identities and social relations[61].

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57 Jørgensen, Marianne, and Louise Phillips. *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. Sage, 2002 page 4

58 Ibid., page 2

59 Ibid., page 5

60 Ibid., page 5-6

61 Ibid., page 8-9

4. Methods

When a researcher studies blogs, which may contain thousands of posts and comments, he or she must assess which text to analyze. This depends on the focus of the study[62], the research question and hypotheses, however most blog-researchers who analyze content collect data by sampling one of three objects of study, hence blog-entries, comments that readers post, or conversational strings or threads. If the focus of research lies on blog-entries, which is the case in this thesis, the researcher undertakes an examination of opinion-maker's discourse. The focus can thus revolve around decoding, sense-making, information-processing and other human activities that are centered on influence and persuasion. A study of blog text is relevant for a researcher who aims to study human behavior, by looking at the textual trail left behind[63].

4.1 Methodology

With the aim of structuring a coherent method for analysis, Jørgensen and Phillip's four premises for social constructionist research have been used as the point of departure. Hence in alinement with these, methods are first and foremost selected on the criteria that they can help specify 1) the categories through which reality becomes accessible in the vegan/minimalist blogosphere 2) The discursive construction of common 'knowledge', and ways in which statements of true and false are conveyed, And finally 3) that they can help clarify what types of action have become 'naturalized', while others unthinkable within the particular worldview and community that is examined. The main preoccupation of the thesis lies on the social identities and communities which are discursively constructed in the vegan/minimalist blog universe. As has been suggested by scholars of social identity theory, the social identity is created through a persons identification with a group due to emotional attachment and inclination to belonging, and the avoiding of ambiguities. Identities are thus divided into 'in-groups' and 'out-groups'. Furthermore, identities are communicated in different ways, hence they may be either openly discussed, or indirectly and symbolically conveyed. Indexicality, in other words the categories which are used to index people, will be of primary relevance in the analysis. Beyond an examination of the categories used to define 'in-groups' and 'out-groups'. the analysis will be conducted with a number

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62 .Sappleton, Natalie. *Advancing Research Methods with New Technologies*. Information Science Reference, 2013, page 211

63 Ibid., page 212

of selected themes and tendencies in focus. Hereunder the construction of truth and false, claims of knowledge, and the discursive construction of morals and ignorance. However, tools to identify and discuss visual and graphical layout have been discarded. The textual units which have been selected from blog-entries are given a headline or theme, and is written in citation-marks and italics, for the purpose of being able to distinguish the actual text from the analytical perspectives and comments, which are written without specific visual features.

4.2 Operationalization aids

Ruth Wodak and Micheal Meyer suggest using a number of operationalization aids, in order to identify the structure of discourses. First, they talk about 'discourse strands', which are thematically uniform discourse processes. Secondly, they use the term 'discourse fragments'. Which they identify as a text, or part of a text which deals with a particular theme, for instance foreigners/foreigners' affairs, and this implies that discourse fragments combine to constitute discourse strands[64]. Explaining the concept of 'discursive planes', Wodak and Meyers argue that the respective discourse strands operate on a number of discursive planes, hence science, politics, media, everyday life, and so on. In other words such discourse planes could be called the societal locations from which 'speaking' takes place[65].

4.3 Research design

In congruence with Wodak and Meyers methods, before the analysis, a brief characterization of the discursive plane will be given. After this has been established, a general characterization of the selected discourse strand, meaning each individual blog, including readership and circulation will be outlined along with a list of articles which are relevant to the theme of research[66].

From here the analysis will be centered around the following points:

<u>Thematic Analysis</u>

- Examination of frequency of certain themes
- Outlining sub-themes

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64 Wodak, Ruth, and Michael Meyer. *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Sage, 2001, page 47

65 Ibid., page 48

66 Ibid., page 54

Analysis of rhetorical strategies used in the selected discourse strands with a particular focus on the following questions:

- What strategies and forms of argumentation have been used?
- Is collective symbolism, metaphors, sayings and clichés used?
- Examine pronominal structures. Are the use of pro-nouns such as 'we', 'you', 'our' inclusive or exclusive"
- Are there references to scientific sources?

This point in the analysis also implies an examination of the logic, implications and insinuations that underlies the article[67].

When summing up the analysis, one should take into consideration the following questions:

Concluding reflections:

- What notion of the human being underlies the article?
- What understanding of society does the article convey?
- What is the general message or major statement of the article?[68]

4.4 Characterization of Discourse Plane

Defining blogs

Over the past decade the number of weblogs on the internet, also known as 'blogs' have drastically accumulated[69]. According to Mary Garden, while the world wide web is considered a medium, or a system that supports communication, there are divergent views as to whether blogs should be seen as a medium or a web genre[70]. Some scholars argue that a blog is a continuously evolving genre of online

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67 Ibid., page 55

68 Ibid., page 54-56

69 Garden, Mary. "Defining Blog: A Fool's Errand or a Necessary Undertaking." *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism* 13, no. 4 (2011): page 483

70 Ibid., page 490

communication. Rather than deriving from a single source, blogs are a hybrid of existing genres. However there are those who insist that blogs should be defined as a medium, which can be defined as a channel or system of communication, information or entertainment. According to this view, blogs provide channels to share among many other things links, personal stories, news and photographs, and as such the blog as a medium allows for a large variety of genres[71].

Why Study Blogs?

According to Stewart Barr, internet discussion forums and virtual social networking media are progressively being used as sites of discursive practice. He argues that discussion forums, blogs and social networking sites provide new opportunities for social researchers to gather data in this cultural context[72]. The expansion of interactive, multimedia internet services has significantly changed the ways in which individuals are able to network, both in spatial and temporal capacities, according to Barr. The internet presents a particular cultural context where people and groups can interact, however it can also be seen as a cultural artifact, and a community of practice in its own rights, and as Barr argues, the internet provides a discursive space[73].

Elaborating on the relevance of studying blogs, Greg Meyers presents a number of arguments. First, if blogs are becoming important in political, social and economic life it is appropriate for us to know how they work, in the same way as we need to know how political speeches, journalistic texts and advertisements work. In other words, the persuaded have to know what the persuaders are doing. Second, looking at an emerging medium allows us to discover elements of other media that we take for granted. For instance, the linguistic conventions and rhetorical moves they use for locating themselves, dealing with others and stating facts and opinions. Meyers furthermore claims that it is reasonable to focus on writing in blogs, as a close examination of the language allows us to take a step back and get an intense view of how people say things, and what they day. Blogs lead out from linguistic issues to wider questions about the use of language in society, including the ways we use language to locate ourselves, state facts, and to argue and define ourselves in relation to other people. According to

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71 Ibid., page 491

72 Barr, Stewart. "Climate Forums: Virtual Discourses on Climate Change and the Sustainable Lifestyle." *Area*, 2010 , page 14

73 Ibid., page 15

Meyers, many of the tools developed for analyzing advertising, political speeches, newspaper articles or essays, work just as well for analyzing blogs[74]. While blogs are ephemeral, that is reason enough in itself to take a snapshot and take a closer look at them and gain knowledge about the similarities and social acts that repeat themselves. According to Greg Meyers characteristic, blogs are genres of texts defined not so much by their form or content as by the kinds of uses to which they are put and the ways these uses construct social identities and communities[75].

4.6 Characterization of Discourse Strands

Blog 1: The minimalist Vegan[76]

The blog named "The minimalist vegan" is created by a married couple from Canberra, Australia. Since starting their blog, the authors write that the blog has grown to reach over 40,000 people each month and continues to grow. They furthermore write in the "about" section of the blog, that they are on a mission to inspire millions of people to live with less stuff and more compassion. They describe how the underlying theme which links the two values together is conscious consumerism, and the topics that they write about in their blog, is everything which falls under this topic, including simple living, veganism, recipes, productivity, health and sustainability[77].

Articles relevant to research topic:
1. Willful ignorance and veganism
2. Get outside of your vegan bubble
3. 3.Why you're struggling to stay vegan
4. Finding the humanity in non-vegans
5. 8 common 'excuses' for not being vegan:
6. How could I be so stupid?

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74 Myers, Greg. *Discourse of Blogs And Wikis*. 1st ed. Continuum International Publishing, 2009, page 3-4

75 Ibid., page 15

76 https://theminimalistvegan.com/

77 https://theminimalistvegan.com/about/

Blog 2: A Considered Life[78]:

This Blog is created by Sophie, who describes herself as a simple living and sustainability writer and jewelery designer based in Birmingham, United Kingdom. Sophie writes about living a low waste, plant-based, minimalist lifestyle, and in her own words, the blog is a place to discover practical tips on simplifying your life, adopting low waste habits, wearing sustainable clothes and cruelty-free beauty, to work towards living a considered life that is more purposeful, sustainable, and compassionate[79]. Sophie has been voted the number one Minimalist blogger in the United Kingdom, and also the best vegan, cruelty-free blogger. She has 23297 followers on 'Bloglovin'[80].

Selection of Articles relevant for theme of research:
1. Talking about veganism:
2. Eating Sustainably:
3. What is 'a considered life'?
4. Start living a considered life:
5. Go Vegan, what, why and how?
6. The connection between veganism and minimalism

Blog 3 "Nutriciously"[81]:

This blog is created by a couple from Germany, Lars and Alena, who have adopted ethical veganism and "zero-waste" as part of their lifestyle. As they state in the introduction: "Ever since we turned our lives around with the help of whole, plant foods and a positive mindset, we are eager to spread the message of health and wellbeing."[82]

It does not state directly in the blog how many subscribers they have. However information from other

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78 www.aconsideredlife.co.uk/

79 https://www.aconsideredlife.co.uk/p/about.html

80 https://www.bloglovin.com/blogs/a-considered-life-19186479

81 https://nutriciously.com/blog/

82 https://nutriciously.com/about-us/

websites state that they have 11,881Facebook fans and 19,597 Twitter followers[83]. Furthermore, they are featured as recommended links on various ethical vegan websites, including the minimalist vegan's list on high quality vegan blogs[84].

The blog is created for anyone who wants to learn about the vegan, zero-waste lifestyle. As they describe on their site: "Our aim is to make a healthy plant-based diet and compassionate lifestyle work for you. We love sharing complex nutritional information in a simple manner, post our favorite whole food plant-based recipes, and answer common questions around this way of living here.
This is a place for information, motivation, and open-mindedness."[85]

Selection of Articles relevant for theme of research:

1. 10 steps to beginning a zero waste vegan lifestyle
2. Living with non-vegans: a how-to guide
3. 5 surprising side-effects of my vegan Lifestyle

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83 https://blog.feedspot.com/plant_based_food_blogs/

84 https://theminimalistvegan.com/high-quality-vegan-blogs/

85 https://nutriciously.com/start-here/

6. Analysis

6.1 The Vegan Minimalists

Article 1: Willful ignorance and veganism[86]

Truth Claims

In this article the bloggers explain a concept which they have characterized as "willful ignorance". It is described as: *"the practice or act of intentional and blatant avoidance, disregard or disagreement with **facts**, empirical **evidence** and **well-founded arguments** because they oppose or contradict your own existing personal beliefs."[87]*

It is argued further below in the blog-entry that:

*"It's hard to get people to take on the **truth** of their actions."*

*"Ironically, the visuals in advertising consists of animals living happy and free lives – when it couldn't be further from **the truth**."*

*"Instead of looking for a reason not to eat animals, we instead remain willfully ignorant because we don't want **the truth** to mess with our pleasure".*

*"When we look into the eyes of an animal, we feel **connected** with them.... It's this **connection** we feel with the animals that will help us meet **the truth** head-on."*

*"I could no longer turn a blind eye to the **truth**. And giving up animal products became easy as a result."[88]*

The use of pro-nouns

Initially, the author makes use of the inclusive pro-nouns, "we" and "us", and it is implicit in the understanding, that this discourse fragment incapsulates human-kind as a whole:

*"kids and adults alike from a young age are taught that animals are slaughtered for **our** consumption.*

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86 https://theminimalistvegan.com/willful-ignorance/

87 https://theminimalistvegan.com/willful-ignorance/

88 https://theminimalistvegan.com/willful-ignorance/

*However **we're** also fed animals from a young age, and **we** become addicted to the taste of animals on our plates".[89]*

However, later the writer shifts pro-nouns, and instead refer to I/They:

*"**I'd** like to believe most humans are compassionate towards animals. **I** know this is to be **true** because of the love and generosity **I** see humans display with **their** pets."[90]*

In these examples of a shifting pro-noun use, the writer of the text is insinuating that he is no longer a member of the category 'humans'. However as an observer of humans, he capable of stating truths about 'humans'. The truth in this instance, is that he *would like to* believe that most of them are affectionate towards animals, and the statement contains a form of argumentation that indirectly speaks to the conscience of non-vegans

Connection versus disconnection

There is a stable tendency among the bloggers to present a community of practice, that is defined by their connection to truth, animals and the planet. Others, or non-members are accordingly defined by their disconnection. This tendency can be seen in the following sentence:

*" The packaging of animal products makes us **disconnected** from how they land on **our** plates".[91]*

Whereas there is the underlying assumption in the article that the writer is somewhere separate from the 'humans' category, the idea of two separate realities, are also introduced in the following sentence, where the writer advice other vegans to sometimes experience reality:

*"This also means getting outside of your bubble and immersing yourself in **reality,** so you can better empathize with people"[92]*

This sentence gives life to the imagery of vegans living in almost a parallel world, which is separate from "realty" and "humans".

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89 https://theminimalistvegan.com/willful-ignorance/

90 https://theminimalistvegan.com/willful-ignorance/

91 https://theminimalistvegan.com/willful-ignorance/

92 https://theminimalistvegan.com/willful-ignorance/

<u>**Article 2: Get outside of your vegan bubble**</u>[93]

In this blog entry, the author memorizes an experience of shopping in Woolworths, a place which he describes as the largest supermarket chain in Australia, similar to that of the American Walmart. The article is written for the purpose of encouraging vegans to once and a while step out of their parallel reality, mostly for the sake of re-connecting with their personal reasons not to live in the same way.

Compromises

*"I was on a mission to find organic tofu, which was unfortunately wrapped in plastic – but we were willing to make the **compromise** this time around".*[94]

This discourse fragment contains the logic that there are certain times, where a sacrifice of principles can be justified and negotiated.

Moral standards

The writer then describes the scenario which takes place in the supermarket, and after a while of people watching, he concludes:

*"it was quite **horrifying** to watch folks buy products that are not only **harmful** to the planet and animals but also to themselves."*[95]

In this statement about the actions of people, the writer who has just compromised on his own moral standards when purchasing tofu wrapped in plastic, is now judging others for buying harmful products. The logic behind this sense-making thus implies, that because he is able to demonstrate a level of reflection about his 'unfortunate' choice, he is still in the right position to moralize over the actions of others.

Connection versus disconnection

The writer elaborates further on his own strong reaction, and concludes that he lives in a vegan bubble, because that is what he lets himself experience. However, as he puts it, *"grounding yourself in **reality,***

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93 https://theminimalistvegan.com/vegan-bubble/

94 https://theminimalistvegan.com/vegan-bubble/

95 https://theminimalistvegan.com/vegan-bubble/

reconnects you to why you started living differently.'"[96]

Elaborating further on his reaction, he also claims the following:

*"Maybe it's because I got used to reading labels as part of our business, or because I had a **heightened awareness** of the impacts of waste."[97]*

This statement indicates that his awareness operates at a higher level, and the argumentation justifies why he is in a position to pass judgement.

Desensitization.

*"I remember being one of the many people in the supermarket, **blindly** buying products"[98].*

In this sentence, another frequently occurring tendency among vegan/minimalist bloggers becomes apparent. Thus, the writer insinuates that other people have become desensitized, and that this manifests itself in their buying habits. The reference to other people's senses and/or willingness to use them has similarities to the argumentation around willful ignorance mentioned in the first article by the minimalist vegans. This will be further debated in the concluding remarks at the ending of the first analysis.

Article 3: Why you are struggling to stay vegan[99]

In this blog-entry, one of the creators of the blog elaborates on some of the reasons why people may find it difficult to transition into vegans or maintain a vegan lifestyle.

Moral Standards

*"Before I get into it, I want to note that I'm **not judging** others for their **journeys.** I'm just hoping to help you relate with some of the reasons that may be holding you back". ...." any **progress** is progress in **the right direction**".[100]*

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96 https://theminimalistvegan.com/vegan-bubble/

97 https://theminimalistvegan.com/vegan-bubble/

98 https://theminimalistvegan.com/vegan-bubble/

99 https://theminimalistvegan.com/struggling-to-stay-vegan/

100 https://theminimalistvegan.com/struggling-to-stay-vegan/

This discourse strand contains a number of insinuations regarding morals. There is an implicit logic operating, where the writer claims that there is such a thing as "the right direction" to go in. Non-vegans or people struggling to maintain a vegan lifestyle, are according to this logic being held back by "reasons" which prevent them from making "progress". While she is directly saying to the audience that she is not judging, she is making judgements about what progress into the right direction is, and hence also indirectly stating that there is stagnation, de-route and a "wrong" direction which should be avoided.

Under a headline reading "The convenience trap", the indirect moral preaching continues:
 *"Sometimes **laziness** gets the better of us. And before you know it, one **poor choice** has lead to eating chicken two nights in a row and having a cheese and ham sandwich for lunch."*
*"Again when you **educate yourself** more deeply, it will be easier to make the **right choices**."*
*"As I discusses above, in a few other examples, **knowledge** is so valuable. In many ways, it creates the strong why behind the interest that sparked this lifestyle, to begin with.*
*"**Educate yourself**". "information is abundant everywhere you look![101]"*

Here it is insinuated that non-vegans are lazy, they are trapped by convenience and this leads them into making poor choices in their lifestyles. It is argued that educating yourself is the solution, which leads to right choices, and that knowledge about the "right choices" is abundant everywhere.

Symbolism/Metaphors

*"Every single time you're purchasing something, **you're voting with your dollar to change that suffering or keep it going.[102]**"*

Here is an example of a symbolic reference to political discourse. The writer uses this metaphor to persuade the reader into contemplating, that spending money is equal to voting for change, or voting for suffering.

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101 https://theminimalistvegan.com/struggling-to-stay-vegan/

102 https://theminimalistvegan.com/struggling-to-stay-vegan/

Article 4 : Finding the humanity in non-vegans[103]

The headline in itself conveys the message that it is difficult to find the humanity in non-vegans. In the article, some reflections are made about how vegans can reach non-vegans with their messages:

Vegans versus non-vegans

*"Can **we** persuade others to embrace a vegan lifestyle through mockery?**"***

*"I argue that to maximize **our** outreach, and to truly make progress towards ending animal oppression, **we** need to find the humanity in **non-vegans**."[104]*

In these discursive strands, people are divided into categories of vegans and non-vegans. It has been taken as logical and common-sensical that vegans should reach out to non-vegans, and persuade them to embrace a vegan lifestyle, which is equated with "truly making progress".

Senselessness/Ignorance

*"In retaliation, you might want to lash out in frustration. The **willful ignorance** that such people demonstrate makes you want to mock **non-vegan** public figures..."*

*"**People** are **unknowingly** (and sometimes knowingly) perpetuating an endless cycle of intense suffering — a cycle that could end if only **they** would listen!"[105]*

The behavior of non-vegans is frustrating for vegans. They are deliberately ignoring "the truth", which according to the inherent logic of this sentence is that they are perpetuating an endless cycle of intense suffering. Once again, a reference is made to the senselessness of non-vegans: They do not want to listen.

Moralizing

*"When **moral and ethical** concerns arise concerning practices such as animal testing and factory farming, **we understandably** feel alarmed. We feel compelled to stress the importance of mindful*

103 https://theminimalistvegan.com/finding-humanity-non-vegans/

104 https://theminimalistvegan.com/finding-humanity-non-vegans/

105 https://theminimalistvegan.com/finding-humanity-non-vegans/

consumerism.'' [106]

Here another type of sense-making has become naturalized. First, it is assumed that all people share the same moral and ethical standards, and that it is only logical that vegans feel compelled to stress their values.

*"While it is important that we all know **the truth** about industries that harm animals, remember that not everyone will learn or accept this information as quickly as you did."[107]*

In other words, non-vegans may be slower to learn "the truth".

Article 5: 8 common 'excuses' for not being vegan[108]

In this article, the writer outlines some of the most commonly used arguments that hold people back from pursuing a vegan lifestyle:

Excuses and defense mechanisms

*"Today, I want to discuss with you all those reasons and **'excuses'** that people use for not changing their lifestyle."[109]*

*"Some use different **defense mechanisms** to oppose why they are eating meat, dairy or eggs."[110]*

Here it is insinuated that 'people' should change their lifestyle if they eat animal products. Moreover, the behavior of non-vegans is explained with a reference to psychological concepts.

In another point, where eating meat is justified by non-vegans on the grounds that it tastes too delicious to give up, the writer argues that:

*"With all those alternatives, you can't really have that as an **excuse** in my view!"[111]*

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106 https://theminimalistvegan.com/finding-humanity-non-vegans/

107 https://theminimalistvegan.com/finding-humanity-non-vegans/

108 https://theminimalistvegan.com/excuses/

109 https://theminimalistvegan.com/excuses/

110 https://theminimalistvegan.com/excuses/

111 https://theminimalistvegan.com/excuses/

Scientific references

The writer then refers to a scientific study, in order to emphasize her argument, and persuade the reader to drop the 'excuses':

"One of the most comprehensive studies done about diet-related diseases concluded that "counties with a high consumption of animal-based foods in 1983–84 were more likely to have had higher death rates from "Western" diseases as of 1973–75, while the opposite was true for counties that ate more plant foods."[112]

Contradictions

Implementing a message she received from a reader of the blog, who had family members openly expressing their discontent with her choice to transition into veganism, the blog-author writes:

*"When one of our readers wrote in and shared her experience with her family feeling this way towards her, it broke my heart and made me question why that is. **Why is making your own food choices a selfish decision"?**[113]*

This question seems to contradict the overall message which is conveyed, directly or indirectly in some of the other discourse strands. Thus, is generally insinuated that making your own food choices is a selfish decision, if you choose to eat animal products. This point is intensified in the following discourse fragments:

***"Shouldn't we all have the right to eat what we want and not feel hurt or ashamed by those decisions?** Veganism in my eyes is a compassionate lifestyle, and people that follow this lifestyle probably don't want to make others feel like they need special treatment."[114]*

Truth Claims

*"These beliefs have been planted in our heads by the meat, dairy and egg industries. We can get calcium, iron, magnesium and omega 3 from plant sources, in many cases much better ones too! There's so much **research and information** out there about this today that we need to stop buying into*

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112 https://theminimalistvegan.com/excuses/

113 https://theminimalistvegan.com/excuses/

114https://theminimalistvegan.com/excuses/

what the big agricultural business advertise to us.”[115]

*"I watched a documentary on the dairy industry, and it addresses the **myths and truths** and everything in between about this everyday staple. If you want to **educate yourself** a little more, watch the film 'Got the facts on Milk'"[116]*

It is argued here, that the truth can be found in the mentioned documentaries.

Metaphors/Symbolism

*"...So in saying all of that, if **we** slowly but surely started reducing the amount of meat, dairy and eggs **you** consumed, y**ou'd be voting with your dollar** to say that you don't want factory farming and to consume animals.”[117]*

Here, the operating logic, which was stated in a previous article is repeated. Hence the notion that consuming is comparable to voting.

Article 6: How Could I be so Stupid?[118]

Truth Claims

*"But now after watching Cowspiracy, **there's another reason to be vegan** that could be even stronger than the breeding and slaughtering of animals for consumption. The environment.”*

*"The Director's Kip Andersen and Keegan Kuhn, compiled **strong evidence** that the agriculture industry is the number one sector contributing to destroying our environment.”[119]*

This argumentation is a reference to another documentary, which is often referred to in vegan blogs.

Reference to scientific data

"Animal agriculture is responsible for 18 percent of greenhouse gas emissions, more than the combined exhaust from all transportation.”

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115 https://theminimalistvegan.com/excuses/

116 https://theminimalistvegan.com/excuses/

117 https://theminimalistvegan.com/excuses/

118 https://theminimalistvegan.com/how-could-i-be-so-stupid/

119 https://theminimalistvegan.com/how-could-i-be-so-stupid/

"Livestock and their byproducts account for at least 32,000 million tons of carbon dioxide (CO2) per year, or 51% of all worldwide greenhouse gas emissions." "Agriculture is responsible for 80–90% of US water consumption." "2,500 gallons of water are needed to produce 1 pound of beef."[120]

After presenting the following statements taken from scientific research, the writer argues:

*"Seeing this **logical data** triggers the activist in me. And that sucks because I promised myself that I wouldn't be one of those "preachy vegans". But stuff it. **I care too much** about the current and **future** environment for our children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and all the generations to come."*[121]

Pro-nouns

*"If we continue to consume animal products, we ruin the planet. Simple as that. So my question to you now is, what are **you** going to do about it?*

*"I'm not suggesting that you become a green munching hippie overnight. But you do have more **power** than you think."*

"I know where I stand, I hope you do your part too."[122]

In these final remarks it is pinned out that consumption of animal products will definitively cause the destruction of the Earth. From stating this fact, the blog-author shifts the pro-nouns, and starts implementing and persuading the reader to act. His rhetorical strategies speaks to the moral senses of the reader. It is furthermore indicated that the reader is also has a part in "doing something", thus he or she has a responsibility in the prevention of planetary destruction.

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120 https://theminimalistvegan.com/how-could-i-be-so-stupid/

121 https://theminimalistvegan.com/how-could-i-be-so-stupid/

122 https://theminimalistvegan.com/how-could-i-be-so-stupid/

Concluding reflections

First and foremost, it is assumed that reality is divided into two. Hence there is the 'vegan bubble' where all the moral prescriptions of ethical vegan living thrive, and then there is 'unfortunate reality' where cruelty, harmful practices and willful ignorance resides.

Examining people-categories, in the selected texts, it appears that members of the in-group community are vegans while the excluded 'out-group' members are categorized as 'Non-vegans'. They are described as willfully ignorant, in other words, they purposefully avoid confrontation with 'truth', because it interrupts their personal pleasure.

Vegans choose 'cruelty-free' options, unless they are 'desperate' and in need of making 'compromises'. They have a 'heightened awareness' about the impacts of waste. They are considerate of both local and global impacts of their choices. Mindful consumers. They are bright, and quickly learned the 'truth'. They are living with intention. They are compassionate. They care about the future and the environment.

Non-vegans are for the most part indirectly characterized as lazy beings who make poor choices. It is difficult to find the humanity in them, and they are slow learners, who in their ignorance are promoting global suffering and blindly buying 'harmful' products. However, through 'educating' themselves, they can learn to make the 'right choices'.

Looking at the discursive construction of truth, there are many instances in this blog-entry, where claims of truth, knowledge and facts are pinpointed. Also there are a number of references to scientific studies, which function to persuade readers that the arguments are backed up by well-founded empirical knowledge about the greater good for humanity, the environment, and the planet.

Another frequently occurring discourse appears which revolve around people's ability or willingness to use their senses, awareness and ability to 'connect' and become aware of 'the truth'. It is stated that non-vegans are "disconnected" from the truth, and looking into the eyes of animals can help them re-establish this connection, and become more compassionate. Also, in order to re-connect to the truth about what made them vegan in the first place, the authors advice to step out of the "vegan bubble" once and a while.

Progressing in life, and going in 'the right direction' entails transitioning to a vegan lifestyle. Non-vegans need help from vegans to progress. The grand statement about non-vegans which can be lead from these articles, is that non-vegans are deliberately ignorant, therefore, they need help from vegans to 'awaken', become enlightened and educated about "the truth of their actions". While there are many

reasons and 'well-backed arguments' for choosing the vegan lifestyle, it is mostly 'excuses' and 'defense mechanism' which are used by Non-vegans to maintain their habits.

6.2 Analysis - "A Considered Life"

Article 1: Eating sustainably[123]

In this article, the blogger explains the notion of "eating sustainably" and living "a considered life":

Connection

*"Shopping at markets, where you can **see** colorful stalls packed with fresh produce, helps make you feel more **connected** to the food you eat, where it was grown and how it made its way to your plate."[124]* Here is an example of a kind of sense-making which is centered around the logic that shopping locally and engaging one's senses will help people connecting with the food they eat. Furthermore, it is described that:

"*Living a considered life is about being mindful of how we live our lives through the choices we make, and how those choices affect the lives of others. It's about questioning what we do and why we do it so that we can **align** our actions with our beliefs[125].*

Here the writer uses inclusive pronouns such as "we" and "us", to emphasize how the information in the discourse fragment incorporates all. Furthermore the argumentation around aligning values and beliefs is similar to that of the connection discourse.

Compassion

*"A considered life' is purposeful**, intentional**, and sustainable. It's a lifestyle committed to **compassion,**

123 https://www.aconsideredlife.co.uk/2018/11/eating-sustainably.html

124https://www.aconsideredlife.co.uk/2018/11/eating-sustainably.html

125 https://www.aconsideredlife.co.uk/2018/11/eating-sustainably.html

*focused on mindful living and eating well, while being **respectful** of humanity and the environment.*"[126]
A 'considered life' is synonymous with a vegan and minimalist lifestyle. Thus indirectly speaking, people who do not follow these ways of living lack intention and purpose. Elaborating further on the inherent logic in the discourse fragment, and looking up the antonyms of the adjectives used to describe the lifestyle, people who do not follow the prescriptions of 'a considered life' are disrespectful of humanity and the environment, cruel and ignorant.

*"I've become a more **considerate** and **compassionate** person; I have built stronger relationships, become more self-aware, achieved a better work-life balance, reduced stress and made **more** time for self-care."*[127]

*"Making lifestyle changes that reduce our impact on the planet is **empowering.** While our personal **choices** won't directly reverse environmental damage or stop climate change; making more **conscientious** decisions about the food we eat and products we buy can help us live a more **compassionate** lifestyle."*[128]

*"These frequently asked questions about veganism is a good place to start and if you're unable to eat a plant-based diet or aren't quite ready yet, there are still cruelty-free changes you can make to live a **more compassionate life."***[129]

*"A considered life is lived by someone who makes a **conscious** effort to find out about the businesses they support; who made their clothes, where their food comes from, and **the impact** their personal **choices** have on our shared planet. "*[130]

Symbolism/Metaphors

*"Switching to a plant-based diet is the single biggest way we can reduce our impact on the planet. It lowers our **carbon footprint** and it also happens to be more affordable and healthier for us."*

126 https://www.aconsideredlife.co.uk/2018/11/eating-sustainably.html
127 https://www.aconsideredlife.co.uk/2018/11/eating-sustainably.html

128https://www.aconsideredlife.co.uk/2018/11/eating-sustainably.html

129 https://www.aconsideredlife.co.uk/2018/11/eating-sustainably.html

130 https://www.aconsideredlife.co.uk/2018/11/eating-sustainably.html

*"I have lived a plant-based lifestyle since 2004 and started my **journey** towards minimalism in 2012. The process of downsizing was **therapeutic and freeing.** During the move I realized I didn't need any of this stuff to make me content, I was happier with less. **Minimalism changed my life.**"[131]*

The process of shifting into minimalism, is here described as 'therapeutic', an adjective which is typically associated with the healing of a disease. The process towards the healing is expressed with a journey metaphor, during each 'step' of the journey, a persons carbon-'footprints' are lowered.

*"The biggest, most **significant change** in my entire life, has been switching to a plant-based diet and adopting the vegan lifestyle, more so than minimalism. Veganism plays a huge role in my personal self-care and wellness; it's **transformed** my body and mind."*

*"I had no option but to declutter and downsize my belongings. It was a **therapeutic** process that I found to be profoundly **freeing**."*
*"**Unearthing** all the hidden junk and clutter at the back of my wardrobe, in bulging drawers, and on the far reaches of my shelves; **purging** it from my life for good, I felt **a weight was lifted.**"*
*"All that stuff holds us back, **it's an ugly eyesore** that always gnaws away at us draining our bank accounts and causing us stress. "[132]*

The therapy symbolism continues in these discourse fragments, where the author speaks of 'unearthing', which is a verb that in it's literal sense means removing dirt, unburying, finding something in the ground by digging. Moreover, 'Purging' is a verb which is often associated with ridding someone of unwanted feelings. However in this context both are applied to describe the action of decluttering things.

Clutter versus value
*"Slowly and surely, **declutter** your belongings. Don't rush the process but work your way through methodically to strip away at the **excess** leaving you with only the things that **add value or bring joy** to your life."*

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131 https://www.aconsideredlife.co.uk/2018/11/eating-sustainably.html

132 https://www.aconsideredlife.co.uk/2018/11/eating-sustainably.html

*"Consider whether what you're buying is **adding value to your life** or if it's just **cluttering up** your home. There is a difference between buying things we need and buying things we think we need.*"[133]

Here it is insinuated that decluttering one's belongings and removing 'excess' will add value and bring joy to people's lives. However, this argument carries the assumption that people in general have an excess of belongings. The logic and sense-making mostly applies to people who are well-off financially, since homeless people, or those with a with less abundant bank account are likely not to find decluttering either joyful, nor valuable. It is also reductively assumed that things can either add value, or clutter up. There is in this argumentation, a tendency of classifying 'reality' trough binary words, with little room for flexibility.

*"There is a deep connection between veganism and minimalism, both teach us about being **mindful** of how we live our lives through the choices we make so that we can **align our actions with our values.**"[134]*
"The key to living a considered life is mindfulness and making conscious decisions. By consuming less, buying thoughtfully, and learning of how the food we eat is produced and the clothes we wear are made, we can start to build a life that reflects our morals and our values."
*" Minimalism and veganism both encourage us to consider how **our actions have an impact** not only on our own lives but on the lives of others; encouraging us to **make decisions for the greater good**, minimizing consumption to put less stress on our planet; reducing excess, exploitation, waste, and pollution in the simplest way possible. Simply put: combined, they create a lifestyle of **conscious consumerism** - 'a considered life'.'"[135]*
The idea of 'Making decisions for the greater good' one again rests on the assumption that all people share the same morals and values, or that they ought to. Hence it is assumed that there is a 'right' decision which is minimalism and veganism, and not making the 'right' decisions is equivalent with promoting planetary stress, exploitation and pollution.

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133 https://www.aconsideredlife.co.uk/2018/11/eating-sustainably.html

134 https://www.aconsideredlife.co.uk/2018/11/eating-sustainably.html

135https://www.aconsideredlife.co.uk/2018/11/eating-sustainably.html

Pronouns

*"The fast fashion industry is a prime example of how the 'high volume, low quality' system is threatening **our natural resources**, **damaging the social and ecological environment,** and using **unethical** manufacturing methods that threaten human rights. When **you** support these industries by purchasing goods from them, **you're** saying "I'm OK with this."[137]*

In the above discourse fragment, the writer is using the inclusive pronouns "we" and "our" when stating facts about 'reality'. Later the pronouns shifts to "you" implying that the attention is directed at the reader, in a sentence that has undertones of preaching and moralizing over what should not do.

Compassion versus cruelty

*"There are a few **simple** and practical ways to make considered purchases: switch to green household products, buy only **cruelty-free** beauty products, **learn** who made your clothes..."[138]*

Here it is insinuated that the lifestyle shifts associated with becoming a vegan minimalist, are simple. Also, the word cruelty-free figures, an adjective which is often used to describe items that are recommended in the vegan community. Interestingly, the concept only seems to appear when bloggers refer to the absence of cruelty in a product. However, the label of 'cruelty-free' which is given to vegan products, brings compelling connotations that non-vegan purchases are 'cruelty-loaded'.

*"What we **choose** to put on our plate is one of the biggest most practical ways to live a more **considered** lifestyle through owning our personal **responsibility** to make more **sustainable choices**.*

*"It's a more **compassionate** diet where **our personal decision** to not eat something reduces the exploitation, suffering, and damage caused to both animals, humans, and our planet."[139]*

In the above discourse fragment, placing responsibility is used as an argumentation strategy, to

136 https://www.aconsideredlife.co.uk/2018/04/start-living-a-considered-life.html

137https://www.aconsideredlife.co.uk/2018/04/start-living-a-considered-life.html

138 https://www.aconsideredlife.co.uk/2018/04/start-living-a-considered-life.html

139 https://www.aconsideredlife.co.uk/2018/04/start-living-a-considered-life.html

persuade the recipient of the message that certain choices are more 'right' than others. Also the vegan diet is described as "compassionate", an adjective which is more commonly linked with the qualities and characteristics of a person.

*The most **compassionate choice** you can make if you care about our environment, your personal health, and/or the lives of others, is to go vegan."*

The indirect message which can be derived, is that non-vegans do not care about our environment, their personal health and the lives of others. In other words, they are ignorant.

Connection/disconnection

*"The vegan lifestyle has taught me to be a more **compassionate person,** helping me to **connect with our planet,** and to consider my personal impact on the world."*

*"Being vegan is the surety that I am living a life that **aligns my morals with my actions**; what I believe to be the kind, just, and rightful thing to do is reflected in my personal **choices.**[140]*

As seen previously, the practice of veganism is once again linked to a greater ability to connect with the planet, and associated with alinement of moral's and actions.

Concluding reflections

The grand statement about vegans is connected, living in alinement with their values. They make a conscious effort to research the impact of their lifestyle on the world. They are connected with "our planet". Non-Vegans on the other hand, make unethical choices, they are irresponsible., disconnected from nature and ignorant. It is Indirectly stated that if you are a non-vegan, you are making cruel choices, you do not care about our environment, your personal health/and or the lives of others, in other words a non-vegan way of life is unhealthy and selfish.

The Persuasion strategies and argumentation used to promote veganism claim that it is simple, therapeutic and transformative.

 It is argued that making lifestyle choices that reduce our impact on the environment is empowering.

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140 https://www.aconsideredlife.co.uk/2018/04/start-living-a-considered-life.html

There is a strong focus around words that describe how vegan living is about living with intention and awareness. and how this certain lifestyle can make a person more compassionate. Living a more compassionate life is the goal people should strive for, and while they may not be completely ready for that yet, it is argued that there are still "cruelty-free" choices they can adopt.

In the discourse strands selected from the blog "A considered Life", it is established that living a considered life equals striving to align your actions with your values and shopping at local markets, helps you feel more connected to the food you eat.

Living a considered life entails "owning our personal responsibility to make more sustainable choices" Statement indicating that people have a personal responsibility towards the planet, and the extend to which they take this seriously is reflected in their lifestyle choices.

The grand statement is that "our" planet, and "our" environment, depends on "your" choices and responsibility.

6.3 Analysis - "Nutriciously"

Article 1: 10 steps to begin a minimalist, zero waste lifestyle[141].

Cruelty versus Compassion

 *"Environmentally-conscious lifestyles naturally come with restrictions in a world made for single-use convenience, meat and animal products, and fast fashion. Cutting out even one **harmful** habit can seem overwhelming or impossible, let alone multiple."[142]*

Scientific references

*"But, when you look at **the facts**, you may feel like there simply isn't another option than to start changing your habits. Knowing that animal agriculture uses ⅓ of the land worldwide and 1 lb of beef needs 2,500 gallons of water, animal products may not be so appealing."[143]*

The factual statements in this discourse fragment are derived from a documentary named

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141 https://nutriciously.com/zero-waste-vegan-lifestyle/

142 https://nutriciously.com/zero-waste-vegan-lifestyle/

143 https://nutriciously.com/zero-waste-vegan-lifestyle/

"Cowspiracy". It is frequently linked to, as a source of information and facts. The blogger encourages the reader to "look at the facts" and suggests the following:

Stating the facts

*"Watch a few documentaries or read articles from reputable sources. Being informed about your cause and having **some facts i**n mind goes a long way. For me, I tend to think about **the fact** that Americans create waste around 250 pounds per year before I throw out my leftovers."*[144]

Metaphors/Symbolism

"When you are armed with educated information, you can help to inform people who ask questions about your choices."[145]

Here it is suggested that "educated information" serves as "an armor", a noun which in its literal sense means a metal covering worn to protect a person in battle or war. Symbolically vegans are in a battle with non-vegans.

Compromises

*"Last-minute panic, in my opinion, is the downfall of any zero waster vegan lifestyle, because when we aren't prepared, we will most likely go with the fast, **convenient** option. Sometimes there are unavoidable **emergency situations,** which do happen and **there is no shame in prioritizing your health and peace over plastic-free or vegan."*[146]

compromises are allowed in "emergency" situations, where it is argued that "health and peace" comes before plastic-free or vegan options. However it is not specified what situations qualify as emergency. However, later the blogger writes:

*"There are **many factors,** such as **location, families,** or **health,** keeping people from completely perfect zero waste or vegan options. That means there has to be some **compromise** every now and then."*[147]

144 https://nutriciously.com/zero-waste-vegan-lifestyle/

145 https://nutriciously.com/zero-waste-vegan-lifestyle/

146 https://nutriciously.com/zero-waste-vegan-lifestyle/

147 https://nutriciously.com/zero-waste-vegan-lifestyle/

Families, health and certain locations may in other words create obstacles that hinder people from making completely perfect options.

*"For example, tofu and vegan meat almost always come in plastic, and I have never seen it otherwise in my local shops. I will **prioritize** vegan over zero waste every time, but others may feel differently or have other **dilemmas** they face. Either way, there will be **some items** or habits **irreconcilable** for both demands and there is **not always one right answer,** and that's okay!"[148]*

Reality

*" **The world** we live in today was not designed for **people like us,** and some won't understand why you are making things more difficult"[149].*

Indirectly, vegans are not suited to live in the world

*"There is not an achievable utopian, **nirvana** state we can realize through reducing our waste and **carbon footprint."**[150]*

Article 2 Living with Non-Vegans: A How-to Guide[151]

The article title in itself carries the message that living with non-vegans requires a how-to-guide. Further below in the article, it is explained:

"One of the hardest things about being vegan is having to live with people who aren't and who don't understand why you have decided to adopt a lifestyle free from animal products."[152]

148https://nutriciously.com/zero-waste-vegan-lifestyle/

149https://nutriciously.com/zero-waste-vegan-lifestyle/

150 https://nutriciously.com/zero-waste-vegan-lifestyle/

151 https://nutriciously.com/living-with-non-vegans/

152https://nutriciously.com/living-with-non-vegans/

Defense mechanisms/ bad habits

*"This is why so often one of **the main defense mechanisms** for non-vegans is to try and highlight a hypocrisy in your lifestyle. They'll say something like, "animals still have to die to harvest crops for plants", or "your phone was made in China by exploited workers". It's as if **they** feel that **you** are **being morally superior** by being vegan so they try and **expose you as being immoral** to justify **their own bad habits.""[153]*

There is a level of sense-making in this discourse fragment, that points to contradictory standards, regarding the legitimacy of passing moral judgements on 'others'. It is essentially argued that non-vegans have "bad habits", which in itself rwquires a judgement coming from a certain set of moral standards. This judgement is however taken-for-granted, and does not need further explanation. However, it is also implicitly argued that due to a feeling of 'moral inferiority' to vegans, non-vegans as eagerly searching for imperfections, or ways in which they can expose vegans as "immoral". The behavior of non-vegans on the other hand, is explained and described with a number of references to unconscious psychological mechanisms, an argument which is further developed in the following sentence:

*"Even though **subconsciously** most people are aware that we don't need to harm animals and most even claim they are animal lovers, these same people **have repressed this knowledge** and chosen to favor **willful ignorance** over **aligning** their actions with their **morals.""[154]*

In the discourse fragment below, another reference from psychology is brought in to describe the behavior of non-vegans:

*"By being around vegans it forces them to confront within their own mind why they pay for animals to be killed, for the environment to be destroyed and also for their own bodies to be more susceptible to the leading killers of people in the Western world. Consequently, this causes **their ego** to try and justify **why they are non-vegan** and this causes confrontations in which our friends and family will criticize,*

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153 https://nutriciously.com/living-with-non-vegans/

154https://nutriciously.com/living-with-non-vegans/

question and mock us for going vegan."[155]

Truth, Willful ignorance

*"Instead of being angry that they were **lied** to by **the animal agriculture industries** and **the government**, our parents can become angry at us for revealing **the truth** and breaking the **willful ignorance** that so many people live comfortably with".[156]*

It is argued that the knowledge conveyed by animal agriculture industries and the government cannot be trusted. Vegans, however, are holder and revilers of "the truth" which can make other authoritative figures, such as parents angry – because they would rather live comfortably in willful ignorance. There is a logic implied in this word usage which construct the vegan community as being responsible for exposing an un-pleasurable truth, which is otherwise obscured by higher institutions, in order to inform those who live in a state of pleasurable denial.

Metaphor/symbolism

*"It goes against so much of what we have been taught and **waking up** to the realization that we can live an alternate way that doesn't involve slaughtering trillions of animals each year is a **huge awakening**"[157]*

The metaphor of waking up, or awakening has similarities to the discourse around becoming conscious, and it implies that a state of "sleeping" or unconsciousness has preceded the current mental capacity.

Article 3: 5 Surprising Side Effects of my Vegan Lifestyle[158]

Impact

"When a plant-based diet first piqued my interest, it was purely for aesthetics. The idea of eating more and losing weight was reason enough to overhaul my eating habits overnight. As my research into

155https://nutriciously.com/living-with-non-vegans/

156https://nutriciously.com/living-with-non-vegans/

157https://nutriciously.com/living-with-non-vegans/

158 https://nutriciously.com/5-surprising-side-effects-of-my-vegan-lifestyle/

*veganism broadened—encompassing the areas of human health, **environmental impact**, and animal welfare—eating plants became the least I could do."[159]*

*"Veganism changed everything: it provided a powerful sense of **purpose**,"[160]*

Stating facts

*"Veganism is the best lifestyle for the people, the planet, and the animals. After two years of thriving on **plants, my general health and energy levels have reached new heights." [161]**

Connection

*"I also feel **more tuned in** to people's behavior, emotions, and reactions."[162]*

Metaphors/symbolism

*"I'll happily pinch pennies so that I can afford organic produce, **cruelty-free** makeup, or a compostable toothbrush; **I vote with my dollar.**"[163]*

As seen in other instances, the act of shopping is equated with the political act of voting.

Concluding reflections

In these articles there is a tendency, to define vegans with reference to the characteristics of non-vegans, who are said to ridicule vegans, and use defense mechanisms to justify their own bad and harmful habits. They are steered by their ego, but subconsciously they know the truth. They have repressed it, however, in favor of willful ignorance.

It is assumed by vegans, that looking at the facts will persuade people/non-vegans to change their habits. Being around vegans confront non-vegan people with the reality of their actions, hence, they

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159 https://nutriciously.com/5-surprising-side-effects-of-my-vegan-lifestyle/

160 https://nutriciously.com/5-surprising-side-effects-of-my-vegan-lifestyle/

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162 https://nutriciously.com/5-surprising-side-effects-of-my-vegan-lifestyle/

163 https://nutriciously.com/5-surprising-side-effects-of-my-vegan-lifestyle/

pay for animals to be killed, for the environment to be destroyed.

According to the overall message of the article, living with non-vegans is difficult, stressful and requires a "how-to-guide", as families, friends and certain locations are obstacles for vegans. However with an armor of educated information they are prepared adequately to go into battle with Non-vegans who ask questions about their choices.

Furthermore, while the behavior, choices and attitudes of Non-vegans require references to primary psychological mechanisms, vegans are excused, because sometimes there are unavoidable emergency situations, which do happen and there is no shame in prioritizing health and peace over plastic-free or vegan.

7.Conclusion

Summing up the analytical findings in the thesis, it appears that in a number of aspects, the sustainable lifestyles under scrutiny illustrate prime examples of ways in which individuals in late modernity 'take matters into their own hands', and construct their own identities and certainties through the choices and decisions, non-decisions and compromises they make. Elaborating on some of the viewpoints presented in the theory section by Ulrich Beck, it is suggested that the circumstances of late modernity demands individuals to take their lives into their own hands, and become the managers of their own identities and biographies. To specify a few of these circumstances, Beck mentions the declining role of traditional institutions of family, the state and the government, and the lack of faith in the knowledge claims of experts and authority figures in general.

The analysis demonstrates how social attitudes towards contemporary risks, such as climate change, and environmental disasters have changed. This is evident in the sense that it has become naturalized and taken for granted that the responsibility to act is placed on people and individuals, rather than governments, scientists or other professionals. The lacking faith in these figures is visible in the analysis, where the agricultural industry is often pointed out as the main sinner, and it is argued that the government and industries lie to people, hold back the truth and cannot be trusted. In other words it is up to individuals to learn about ingredients, manufacturing methods and the ability of their purchases to decompose sustainably after they have been used. Truth and authenticity under these circumstances is found through a return to nature, connection with animals and purchasing a 'cruelty-free', recyclable toothbrush to weigh up the plastic-wrapped tofu, bought in a desperate situation.

The discursive construction of reality and the world in the vegan blogosphere, is incapsulated clearly in a statement made by a vegan blogger: "The world we live in today was not designed for people like us." On a general note, the reality as discursively formed in the vegan blogs, is characterized by division. Vegans and non-vegans live their lives in two separate realities, which are not easily unified. Vegans who are characterized as connected to the Earth, animals and nature live in a bubble of compassion. They shop locally at farmers markets, buy their clothes at second-hand stores, unless they find themselves in desperate situations, where compromises must be made. These compromises may imply getting out of their bubble and into the 'unfortunate reality'. However, visiting the non-vegan reality and facing the cruelty can help them re-connect to the reasons why they chose an alternative

lifestyle. Living with people who are not vegan is depicted as one of the hardest things about being vegan. Thus essentially the two 'worlds' are incompatible.

As was described in the theory, there is a concern that 'lifestyle' and commodification gain new meanings for modern identity construction and that consumption choices have replaced the genuine development of the self. Developing further on these arguments, the analysis of the discursive construction of the vegan/minimalist identity and community demonstrate that a significant amount of the discourse fragments revolve around the theme of making the 'right' choices. When shopping and purchasing food or products it is encouraged to appropriate all choices and decisions to a specific moral standard dictated in the community. The social categorizations which actors in the vegan blogosphere construct, are largely described through binary words which simplifies the 'truth'. It can thus be clearly deducted from the discourses that there are 'right' choices, and 'poor' choices, and little room for grey areas, compromises or negotiations.

Analyzing the discursive construction of the vegan/minimalist community reveals that it represents more than merely a 'lifestyle', it constitutes an entire ideology, where consumption and purchasing of everyday items is granted equal importance as the act of voting.

Vegans are defined by their profound connection to truth, nature, animals and the planet. They have a heightened awareness about the impact of their choices and actions and they are deeply reflected beings with high moral standards and in many instances they are indirectly constructed as morally superior to non-vegans. This is evident in the position they take as messengers of 'truth', and the legitimacy they claim directly or indirectly, to pass moral judgements about the behavior and choices of non-vegans. Furthermore this is emphasized in the way that vegans state facts and make truth claims about what serves the greater good of humanity. The background knowledge, empirical evidence and facts which they memorize during 'cruelty-free' shopping is however largely derived from the same documentaries, and taken in as 'truth' and knowledge, without much critical reflection or questioning of possible bias. It is taken for granted that people in general live in a state of excess, and that the process of minimalizing will be therapeutic and cleansing. While these assumptions may be true for people who are financially well off and employed, it most probably will not result in therapeutic experiences for those living in poverty or for the homeless.

It was suggested in the theoretical framework, that 'out-groups' are often more easily and reductively characterized than in-groups, which implies that in-group identification often leads to stronger stereotyping and prejudice towards 'out-groups'.

The analysis supports this suggestion, as well as the hypothesis that non-members are often attributed categories and labels indirectly, symbolically and through meaning associations. Hence according to the findings in the analysis, actors in the vegan community construct Non-vegans by indirectly labeling them as willfully ignorant, out of touch with their senses, lazy and in search for the most convenient, pleasurable options. The non-members are hence discursively defined by their more or less deliberate choice to be disconnect from the truth of their actions. They make poor choices, have bad habits, and use harmful products, and even though there is an abundance of information and knowledge everywhere they choose convenience and pleasure over truth, scientific facts, and well-established evidence. Their humanity is not immediately apparent, however, their actions and excuses can be explained through the reference to psychological mechanisms, and their ego.

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