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SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, ECONOMICS AND LAW

Green(s) is the New Black

A qualitative study of the vegan food culture among young adults in Sweden

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Abstract

We produce an amount of food that could feed the entire world, yet people are suffering from undernourishment while others from obesity. The consumption in the world today is not sustainable and the consumption of meat is the number one polluter of greenhouse gas emissions. There is a need for a change. A vegan lifestyle can be a way to accomplish this.

When researching veganism, a gap in the literature was observed concerning the practices of vegans in Sweden. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis has been to examine the research question: *How is the vegan food culture practiced among young adults in Sweden?* The practices were analyzed through the “Circuit of practice” (Magaudda, 2011), which includes the three elements: meanings, doings and objects. We customized these into the research areas of lifestyle and motives, cooking methods and food products, which constitutes “The Model of Vegan Practices” (see Figure 1). In an attempt to answer the research question, qualitative interviews were conducted concerning the personal experiences of nine vegans living in Gothenburg, Sweden.

In this explorative thesis, our findings suggest that the practices of observed vegans are quite similar to previous research concerning food practices in other diets. Nonetheless, a few findings could be argued to expand the existing knowledge of the practices within the vegan food culture. Firstly, no matter the motive of being vegan, the environment was an important aspect within their vegan lifestyle. Secondly, the use of convenience food was found to be negatively correlated with experience. Lastly, an alarming lack of awareness about the consequences of a deficiency in vital nutrients and vitamins was discovered.

This thesis attempts to bring value to producers, consumers and marketers operating within the vegan market by exploring the vegan food culture.

Keywords: vegan, vegan food culture, vegan culture, vegan cooking methods, vegan convenience food, vegan practices, sustainability, marketing

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1. Introduction

This chapter includes a background, followed by a problem discussion. Thereafter, the purpose and the research question of this thesis are formulated. Lastly, delimitations of the subject are presented.

1.1. Background

If every human in this world would attempt to live and consume like an average Swedish inhabitant, it would require 4.2 earths. Further, Sweden is among the top ten countries in the world with the largest footprint per capita (Världsnaturfonden, WWF 2017). This indicates the unsustainable consumption level in Sweden, especially considering the constantly growing population in a world with finite natural resources (United Nations Population Fund, 2017). Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon states in a press release that, “As our population grows, we must recognize that our consumption of the planet’s resources is unsustainable. We need a global transformation of attitude and practice” (United Nations, 2014).

According to The World Bank (2010), food and beverage is the most common segment of consumption worldwide, amounting to 38.6 percent. The production of food driven by consumption, and especially meat, generates substantial amounts of greenhouse gas emissions. In a report published by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (Steinfeld, Gerber, Wassenaar, Castel, Rosales, & De Haan, 2006), the livestock sector is one of the “most significant contributors to the most serious environmental problem, at every scale from local to global” (2006, p.xx). They also state that greenhouse gas emissions are negatively impacting the climate with rising sea levels and temperatures, melting icecaps and glaciers among others. The report shows that the livestock sector accounts for 18 percent of the global aggregated greenhouse gas emissions measured in CO₂ equivalent, a percentage higher than transport. The carbon dioxide equivalent measure is used to compare the various greenhouse gas emissions since all have different global warming potentials (OECD, 2013). Goodland and Anhang (2009) argues that the livestock and byproducts in this sector measures to at least 51 percent. This calculation takes into account several factors not considered by Steinfeld et al. (2006). These factors are: overlooked respiration by livestock, overlooked land use, undercounted methane, other uncounted categories and misallocated categories. No matter

which calculation is more accurate, both Steinfeld et al. (2006) and Goodland and Anhang (2009) agree that the livestock sector is the sector affecting climate change the most.

The feeding of livestock requires 50 percent of the grains in the world (Sancoucy, 1995). Further, it requires 15 000 liters of water to produce one kilo of beef, an amount that could last to more than five kilos of cereals (Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) and the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), 2004). The food produced today is enough to feed the entire global population, yet 15 percent are malnourished and undernourished at the same time as cases of obesity are increasing (SIWI -IWMI, 2004). In summary, changes in the livestock sector could therefore have a great effect on the aggregated greenhouse gas emissions as well as the ability to reallocate the resources more fairly.

In 2016, the United Nations formulated 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2017b). The aims of these SDGs are to serve as guidelines for the governments to take action and establish national frameworks in order to achieve a more sustainable future. The twelfth goal, “Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns” (United Nations, 2017a), concerns, among other aspects, the promotion of energy and resource efficiency. To achieve this, all actors in society must take responsibility for the consequences of their actions. The producers play a significant role by operating within unsustainable production processes, however, consumers are also responsible by consuming the unsustainable goods and services offered (United Nations, 2017a). There is a need to change this behavior. One solution could be to adopt a plant-based lifestyle and replace the consumption of animal-based food with vegetables, which have a lower impact on the environment (Lagerberg-Fogelberg, 2008). In addition, producers could facilitate this change by offering and producing sustainable products on the market.

In Sweden, the aggregated food consumption in the private sector accounts for over 25% of the total greenhouse gas emissions (Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, 2010). However, a recently published report illustrates a trend among Swedish citizens where two out of three choose to eat at least one meal without meat or fish during a week, and further, 22 percent claim to have reduced their total meat consumption over the past year (Keldsen & Rosenqvist, 2016). This could indicate a willingness and ability of Swedish consumers to change their behaviors.

This paper aims to explore how the vegan food culture is practiced among young adults in Sweden. To achieve this, the practices need to be thoroughly researched, as “It is through the exploration of the most trivial practices of consumption such as eating that a broader understanding of consumer culture and its mediators is made possible” (Fonseca, as cited in Cronin, McCarthy & Collins, 2014, p.3). According to Magaudda (2011), a practice involves meanings, doings and objects. Using this model, we created a new model, including the research areas of lifestyle and motives, cooking methods and lastly food products (see Figure 1). Lifestyle and motives is a part of the section called “The Vegan Culture” while cooking methods and food products constitutes the section of “Cooking”.

1.2. Problem Discussion

Exploring the thriving vegan food culture can be of great importance for producers, consumers and marketers to lower the existing barriers of following this lifestyle (Sveriges Konsumenter, 2017). For example, it could encourage companies to invest in the development of new alternatives to animal-based products, which would facilitate for consumers to transition to a vegan lifestyle. These actions could be valuable stepping-stones towards achieving the twelfth Sustainable Development Goal, concerning sustainable consumption (United Nations, 2017a). Following a vegan diet is not only beneficial for the environment, increasing the intake of fruit and vegetables have been proven to protect the body against diseases such as cancer, stroke and diabetes (Notaker, 2009).

Furthermore, there is a shortcoming in existing literature of practices within the vegan food culture. Previous research have mainly focused on the process of becoming vegan (Larsson, Rönnlund, Johansson & Dahlgren, 2003; McDonald, 2000) and the motives of a vegan lifestyle (Craig, 2009; Greenebaum, 2012; Janssen, Busch, Rödiger, & Hamm, 2016; Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard & Hogg, 2006), but only one quantitative study was found discussing the vegan food culture (Dyett, Sabaté, Haddad, Rajaram & Shavlik, 2013). Therefore, a qualitative study within this subject could obtain a deeper understanding of the consumer culture and bring new knowledge to the existing literature. Veganism has also been observed to have gained greater interest within the scientific field, which confirms the relevance of this research (Janssen et al., 2016). According to Marangon, Tempesta, Troiano and Vecchiato (2016), there is a need to investigate vegan consumers’ opinions of vegan food products, which this thesis will, among other aspects, attempt to consider.

The vegan culture is constantly growing (Keldsen & Rosenqvist, 2016). This results in a pressure on marketers and producers to capture the consumers to ensure the loyalty from a potentially strong target group in the future. The amount of vegan products available in grocery stores are increasing, and when requesting new brands, consumers are influencing the supply on the market. It is therefore vital for marketers and producers to gain understanding about the vegan culture and food consumption to be able to compete on the market.

1.3. Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore the vegan food culture. We will focus on the specific practices within this subject and, according to a theory by Magaudda (2011), practices involve meanings, doings and objects. In addition, the thesis aims to contribute to and complement the existing literature concerning veganism.

1.4. Research Questions

The question this research will attempt to answer is:

- How is the vegan food culture practiced among young adults in Sweden?

1.5. Delimitations

A decision was made to solely focus on the Swedish market. This to be able to conduct a research viable for Swedish producers, consumers and marketers, but also to facilitate the gathering of empirical data. Due to the perceived gap in literature (Marangon et al., 2016) concerning the vegan food culture, certain connections will be made between studies researching vegetarian diets or other diets when deemed possible and necessary.

Further, the empirical study will be based on interviews with vegans within the age group of 18-29. This to be able to gather answers comparable to one another, but also because it is the most common age of vegans in Sweden (Novus 2016). Lastly, in an attempt to avoid the risk of becoming too general, it was determined to exclusively focus on the aspect of food culture within the vegan culture. Consumption of other goods and services where animals might have been exploited, such as clothes and hygiene products, will therefore not be discussed to any further extent.

2. Method

This chapter presents the scientific methods and approaches used in the research, followed by a description of the collection of data, qualitative interview, interview guide, interview process, sample, and qualitative data analysis. The chapter concludes with a discussion regarding the research's delimitations, trustworthiness, and authenticity.

2.1. Qualitative Research

As this research attempts to explore the vegan food culture, a qualitative research method was chosen to be able to gather deepest possible consumer insight, which is in line with the recommendations by Bryman and Bell (2013). This method tries to closely understand and analyze words and their meaning (Bryman & Bell, 2013), which is necessary to achieve the aim of the present study. Further, Davis (2008) argues that qualitative interviews is a suitable method when exploring a culture.

According to Bryman and Bell (2013), qualitative research follows a process consisting of six steps. The first step concerns formulating general research questions, and the second step the selection of relevant objects to investigate. Gathering data is the third step, followed by interpretation and analysis of the data. The fifth step allows a specification of the research questions as well as further collection of data if necessary. In the last step, the report is shaped by the data, findings and analysis. This process was used in the present research and is discussed further in the following paragraphs.

2.2. Collection of Data

In this research, both secondary and primary data has been collected and analyzed. Secondary data was primarily gathered from scientific articles and different organizations' websites, and to supplement the secondary data, primary data was gathered from qualitative interviews.

2.2.1. Secondary Sources

Secondary sources were used to gain understanding and form an overview of the subject. To find this information, the process began by searching for articles, books, reports and relevant

websites using keywords such as vegan, vegan food culture, vegan culture, vegan practices and vegan cooking methods. The existing literature did not yield the expected degree of knowledge. The perceived gap in literature, confirmed by Marangon et al. (2016), highlighted the importance to research this subject further. This inspired the purpose of the present thesis and the research question of interest. To be able to create a theoretical framework, a decision was made to substitute the lack of existing research on vegan food culture, with other available research. This process included using more general keywords such as culture, food culture, practices, cooking methods and convenience food.

Bryman and Bell (2013) argues that it is important to be aware of four criteria when gathering data: authenticity, credibility, representativity and meaningfulness. Therefore, it was found important to be critical of the sources when gathering the secondary sources, which influenced the use of databases: Gothenburg University's search engine, Google Scholar, LIBRIS and Science Direct.

2.2.2. Primary Data

The structure of the research question and the theoretical framework deemed qualitative interviews as a suitable research method to collect primary data. The qualitative interviews were semi-structured with the use of an interview guide, which will be elaborated further in the following paragraph. The aim of gathering primary data was to be able to compare the findings with the secondary data in order to confirm or expand the existing literature. An analysis of this data could then bring answers to the research question and fulfill the purpose of the present thesis.

2.3. Qualitative Interview

According to Bryman and Bell (2013), interviews are time consuming. Despite this, it is the most appealing and commonly used method by researchers within qualitative research. This is mainly due to the flexibility it offers, but also the possibility to conduct complementing interviews with the same interview object if deemed necessary. In addition, interviewing the practitioners of the culture is an approach also mentioned by Davis (2008), which in the present study entails interviewing the individuals within the vegan culture.

2.3.1. Interview Guide

Bryman and Bell (2013) argues, in order to collect data and understand how the consumers perceive their world and life, it is important that an interview contains flexibility. Therefore, the aim of the qualitative interviews was to have a semi-structured approach, using a pre-planned interview guide (Appendix 1). The interview guide's purpose was to structure the interviews while still allowing flexibility which is in accordance with Bryman and Bell (2013). It was designed to cover relevant areas and subjects based on the purpose of the present research and the model inspired by Magaudda (2011) (see Figure 1).

The interview guide was divided into three parts. The first part focused on cooking, the second the vegan culture, and the last part concerned background information about the interviewee. A few open questions were asked in the beginning of every part, which Bryman and Bell (2013) recommend to create an environment where the interviewees could feel free to interpret and answer the questions independently. This was also deemed important because of the desire not to influence the interviewee, which could skew the data. In accordance with Bryman and Bell (2013), more specific questions were then asked to encourage the interviewees to elaborate their answers further, or to nudge the discussion in desired direction if deemed necessary. At the end of each interview it was encouraged for the respondent to add any additional comments or thoughts about the subject that could possibly bring another perspective to the research, which is in line with Patel and Davidson (2011).

2.3.2. Interview Process

To reach a wider audience than our own capacity as well as to find dedicated participants to volunteer for an interview, a digital advertisement was published in a closed vegan group on Facebook (appendix 2). The group was chosen thanks to its popularity (approximately 7,500 members) and focus on food, but also because of its focus on vegans living in Gothenburg, which facilitated the ability to perform personal interviews. Access to the group was granted thanks to previous membership by one of the authors. The advertisement further included the age of interest (18-29 years) and the main purpose of the interview. The response was overwhelming and the aim to gather ten interviewees was achieved in less than 24 hours.

To obtain the optimal environment for a qualitative interview, it was decided to book study rooms offered at the Gothenburg University's libraries. This to create a professional yet peaceful environment, but also a space where discussion is allowed without bothering the surroundings (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Respondents were contacted and updated via Facebook messenger and the time was mutually agreed upon. The location for the interview was chosen, except for three interviews where meeting in person was not possible. In these cases, it was agreed to arrange meetings over the phone.

The interviews were performed during the 19th to 22nd of April and each interview lasted in average 45 minutes. With the approval of the interviewees, the interviews were recorded on a smartphone to be certain of not missing any important information as well as being able to cite the respondents correctly (Bryman & Bell, 2013; Patel & Davidson, 2011). To reduce the possible language barriers that could occur, the interviews were conducted in Swedish instead of English. However, it was decided to write the report in English to enable an international audience. This decision was also justified by the vegan culture not only being a Swedish phenomenon but a worldwide one.

In order to capture all different elements within the process of an interview, it was decided that one should take on the role as the interviewer and one should be responsible of taking notes. This is in line with Bryman and Bell (2013) and Patel and Davidson (2011) when more than one interviewer performs the research. In addition, the person taking notes observed the intangible aspects of the interview such as the environment and subtle expressions, and assisted the interviewer if, for example, a question in the interview guide was not answered completely. According to Patel and Davidson (2011) it is important to reflect upon the interview immediately after it is conducted. Therefore, after each interview different perceptions of the interview were briefly discussed and analyzed between the interviewers.

All research is, according to Vetenskapsrådet (2002), required to follow four main obligations of ethical behavior. To satisfy these, several actions were taken during the interview process. Firstly, the interviewees were informed that their participation in the research was completely voluntary and further, that they can call off the interview at any time if desired. Secondly, the participant's consent was obtained prior to the interview and terms of the interview were mutually agreed upon. All information gathered from the interview is confidential, therefore it was decided to anonymize the respondents. Additionally, we did not find the ability to connect

the quotes to one specific respondent as relevant to satisfy the aim of the thesis. Lastly, the personal information was used solely for the aim of the research. All participant will also have the opportunity to access the final thesis.

2.3.3. Sample

Respondent	Gender	Age	Occupation	Living situation	Previous	Vegan diet
1.	Male	27	Student	Partner	Vegetarian	2 yrs.
2.	Male	29	Employed	Alone	Vegetarian	3 yrs.
3.	Female	26	Student	Partner	Vegetarian	3 yrs.
4.	Female	20	Employed	With family	Vegetarian	6 months
5.	Male	26	Employed	With friends	Vegetarian	6.5 yrs.
6.	Female	27	Student	Partner	Vegetarian	9 months
7.	Female	28	Employed	With father	Vegetarian	2.5 yrs.
8.	Female	26	Employed	Partner	Vegetarian	7 yrs.
9.	Male	31	Employed	Partner	Vegetarian	3 yrs.

Table 2: The respondents

To gather reliable and authentic responses, it was decided that the empirical data would rely on the knowledge and personal experiences of practicing, self-identified vegans. It was further decided to use a selection of comfort (Bryman & Bell, 2013), which resulted in posting a request in a vegan group on Facebook. Ten vegans got in contact and volunteered, but one announced their inability to attend during the week of the interviews. The respondents consisted of four males and five females between the ages of 20-31. The age group of interest (18-29) was specified in the post on Facebook, yet, after the last interview, it was revealed that the respondent did not fit within this range. Despite this, the interview was not excluded in the present research. This was deemed acceptable because the age of this respondent did not deviate more than the gap between the youngest respondent and remaining respondents.

Three of the respondents are students while the others are employed. Five live together with their partner who also are vegans, two live at home, one live with a couple of friends and one live alone. All respondents reported previous experience with a vegetarian diet. To be able to

find patterns based on the participants' experience of a vegan lifestyle, the authors divided the respondents into three categories. Two respondents were newly transitioned vegans (less than two years of experience), five respondents have moderate experience (two to three years of experience), and two respondents were more experienced (more than six years of experience) vegans.

As mentioned earlier (see 1.5 Delimitations), it was decided to limit the research to the Swedish market to achieve a more applicable result, as well as being able to gather respondents effectively. All vegans interviewed lives in Gothenburg, which facilitated the ability to perform personal interviews. This decision could, however, be argued to damage the applicability to the Swedish market which is the aim of the present research. But despite the sample being gathered locally in Gothenburg, it captured a wide spectrum of vegans concerning age, life situation, motives and experience of a vegan lifestyle. Thanks to this variety, we believe that the sample could represent the attitude of this spectrum of vegans in Sweden and could therefore be used in the attempt to answer our research question. However, this needs to be performed with cautiousness. The sample did, for example, not capture any vegans with extreme opinions or all different motives described in the theoretical framework. Conducting a larger study could encompass an even wider variety of vegans which would improve the applicability to a broader market.

2.4. Qualitative Data Analysis

According to Bryman and Bell (2013), grounded theory is one of the most common strategies to use when analyzing qualitative data. Grounded theory involves the development of a theory based on the gathered and systematically analyzed data. Further, the collection of data and analysis can be alternately constructed, which is an approach used in the present research.

After conducting the interviews, it was decided to go through the material several times and transcribe the most relevant parts which is in line with Bryman and Bell's (2013) recommendations. This was performed systematically by searching for themes across the different interviews, where words and phrases could be related to each other. According to Strauss and Corbin (as cited in Bryman & Bell, 2013), this approach is called "open coding", and entails a process which involves breaking down, studying, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data. Relevant quotes were extracted from the interviews and since they were

conducted in Swedish, a translation of the quotes was required. This was performed with carefulness, as words and meanings in the two languages can be interpreted differently (Bryman & Bell, 2013).

2.5. Limitations

2.5.1. Limitations of Qualitative Research

There are several limitations and restrictions to consider when conducting qualitative research. First, there is an uncertainty in the authenticity of the data considering that the results in the present study will be based on verbal responses, which in many cases can differ slightly between the actual experience or behavior, a phenomenon called the attitude-behavior gap (LaPiere, 1934).

Due to the small sample of respondents of the present study, the results cannot be interpreted as being representative for the entire vegan food culture (Bryman & Bell, 2013). The subjectivity is another restriction that needs to be bared in mind. Incorrect interpretations or misunderstandings from the interviewee could bias the result, but by conducting qualitative interviews, it allows for the respondent to ask questions if anything is unclear, which would be difficult if using a quantitative approach (Bryman & Bell 2013). The researcher could also bias the study by asking leading questions or making unsubstantiated assumptions. In an attempt to decrease this liability, the interviews were based on open questions and no interviews were conducted with friends or family of the researchers. Further, it was decided to record the interviews and use many quotes to support the empirical findings.

Critique also exists concerning a lack of transparency in how the research has been planned and conducted (Bryman & Bell, 2013). However, by constructing a detailed chapter concerning the method of the research and by describing each chapter separately, this limitation is hopefully avoided in present study.

As mentioned above, the interviews were constructed to begin with open questions, which allows the respondent to answer independently (Bryman & Bell, 2013). However, sometimes there was a need to clarify the question, which resulted in more direct questions to be asked that could have skewed the data.

2.5.2. Limitations of the Process

Although the decision to gather respondents by posting a request in a Facebook group was effective, this could have resulted in a few shortcomings. First, to be able to catch the reader's attention among the many other posts, it was determined vital to keep the request short and specific. This might have caused misunderstandings, which could have skewed the data collection. Further, the definition of vegans was not included in the post, which resulted in a spectrum of self-defined vegans with slightly differing views on the vegan diet and lifestyle. It was therefore important for us to include a question in the interview asking the respondent to present hers or his own experience and interpretation of the term, to make sure that the overall meaning was at least somewhat similar. We also did not put any requirements on the time of following this lifestyle, which generated vegans with varying experience and routines. This might perhaps have damaged the ability to compare the participants with each other, but it does, however, allow for a broader spectrum of vegans to be examined.

The participants were gathered from one communication channel, Facebook. This could have skewed the outcome as it required for the respondents to be somewhat active within this group to be able to see the post. However, as the empirical findings shows, the majority of the respondents did not define themselves as active participants in vegan communities and activities otherwise, but that they solely answered because of an interest in present study.

Additionally, it needs to be considered that this research was conducted in the quite large city of Gothenburg, which may differ compared to a small town regarding the ability to offer a wide assortment of vegan products. Lastly, the interviews were conducted in Swedish to not force the participant to speak in another language, causing a discomfort or a loss in expressions. However, this became a difficulty when attempting to translate certain sayings, which might have resulted in a loss of nuanced expressions.

2.6. Trustworthiness and Authenticity

In quantitative studies, validity and reliability (Bryman & Bell, 2013) are common measures to use when determining the quality of a research. However, when conducting a qualitative study, these measurements are not as easily adopted. Trustworthiness and authenticity are two alternative measurements that can be used when evaluating qualitative research, since they

allow the existence of a variety of believed truths regarding the society, compared to quantitative measurements (Guba & Lincoln, as cited in Bryman & Bell, 2013). When performing qualitative interviews the participants' views on the society are not identical, which made the use of these measurements relevant in the present research.

Both measurements contain several subcategories. Trustworthiness concerns credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Authenticity is divided into: fair, ontological, pedagogical, catalytic, and tactical authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, as cited in Bryman & Bell, 2013). Following paragraphs contains a discussion regarding some of these subcategories.

Trustworthiness is similar to the criteria of validity and reliability (Bryman & Bell, 2013). A culture can contain a wide spectrum of members and the sample size of this study could not possibly gather enough participants within each end of the spectrum while still being able to find any patterns among them. However, by attempting to provide a detailed view of the environment based on the descriptions given by the participants, it can by the reader be determined how well this information can be utilized in other situations and environments. Confirmability discusses the ability to limit subjectivity. To satisfy this criterion, aside for the actions taken to limit the risk of a biased outcome (see 2.5.1. Limitations of qualitative research), it was decided to try and gather as much knowledge as possible about a vegan diet and lifestyle prior to the interviews not to influence the data due to lack of knowledge. In addition, several quotes were used to reduce the risk of a personally biased outcome in the empirical findings. These were translated with carefulness to provide a fair representation of the outcome. By selecting certain quotes, we were aware of the process becoming unavoidably biased. However, to avoid the risk of the empirical findings becoming incomprehensible, we selected the quotes that were deemed most suitable and concise to represent the perceptions of the participants.

The subcategories within authenticity generally concerns the ability to bring new knowledge and understanding about the society and its surroundings to the participants. One question to ask is if the research has contributed with knowledge of the perceptions of other people in this environment (Bryman & Bell, 2013). By using quotes and describing every participant's situation as detailed as possible without becoming irrelevant, we hope that the other participants reading this paper could gain new knowledge regarding other views on the vegan food culture.

3. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter the theoretical framework is presented, which constitutes the foundation for the analysis of the empirical findings. First, diets and plant-based diets in general are described. Second, the definition of practice and the theory “Circuit of Practice” is presented, followed by a clarification of culture. Then, vegan food culture is presented in which identity and vegan motives are described. The last part includes a description of vegan cooking, cooking methods in general and nutrition and vitamins in a vegan diet.

3.1. Plant-based Diets

The characteristics of a plant-based diet can be interpreted and defined in various ways. There is an ongoing debate regarding the definition of plant-based diets, and Li (2011) observed a discrepancy in how people interpret plant-based diets and the official definition. Therefore, to avoid misunderstandings, the definition of a diet also needs to be clarified in this thesis.

A diet is a particular selection of food, determined by a specific reason and practiced for a longer period of time (Nationalencyklopedin, 2017b). The reasons of following a diet might be to reduce the effects of a disease or disturbed nutritional intake, or to avoid substances that may cause hypersensitive reactions (Nationalencyklopedin, 2017a; Svenska Akademiens ordlista över svenska språket, 2006). A person might also choose to follow a diet thanks to other beliefs or desires (Britannica Academic, 2017).

Beardsworth and Keil (as cited in Ruby, 2011) argues that plant-based diets can be categorized in six different types, based on the extent to which animal-based foods are avoided. The distinction between the types is summarized in table 1 below. Type I vegetarians or “flexitarians” (Livsmedelsverket, 2017), are part-time vegetarians, they have a goal to eat a more plant-based diet but still consume meat, fish and other animal-based food products such as eggs, milk and honey. Type II vegetarians avoid meat but eat fish while Type III vegetarians or “ovo-lactovegetarians” (Li, 2011) exclude both. Type IV vegetarians or “lacto-vegetarians” (Li, 2011; Livsmedelsverket, 2017) also avoid eggs and Type V vegetarians avoid specific dairy products. Type VI vegetarians, or more commonly known as vegans (Li, 2011; Livsmedelsverket, 2017; The Vegan Society, 2014), are those who exclusively eat plant-based food and avoid all consumption of animal-based food products.

Type	Meat	Fish	Egg	Dairy	Honey
Type I	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Type II	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Type III	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Type IV	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Type V	No	No	No	No	Yes
Type VI	No	No	No	No	No

Table 1: Types of plant-based diets

The Vegan Society was founded in 1944 by Donald Watson together with five others, when they recognized veganism as a new movement in the society. However, it is not a new phenomenon, it can be traced back over 2000 years (The Vegan Society, 2017). The word “vegan” comes from the contraction of the beginning and the end of the word vegetarian. Veganism differentiates from other plant-based diets, because it expands beyond the diet aspect to the lifestyle. In a report by The Vegan Society (2014), veganism is defined as:

[...] a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude—as far as is possible and practicable—all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of humans, animals and the environment. (p.6)

3.2. Practice

Since this research aims to study the practices and behaviors within the vegan food culture, it was of high importance to establish what a practice is. Reckwitz (2002) offers a definition by clarifying that:

A ‘practice’ [. . .] is a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of

mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. (p.249)

To examine and understand the vegan food culture, the practices within the culture can be analyzed in the light of the “Circuit of Practice”, a theory created by Magaudda (2011). The model tries to simplify the complexity of a practice from the practitioner's point of view by dividing it into three elements: *meanings*, *doings* and *objects*. These three elements create a practice, and in the present study, the practices within the vegan food culture. Firstly, following a vegan lifestyle can have various meanings for the individual. Depending on the motive, the meaning of one’s consumption practice may differ. Meaning is also important when discussing identity. The second element is doing, which can be related to the preparation of food objects, in other words: cooking. It could also concern grocery shopping. The objects within the vegan food culture are the products consumed. In the present study, objects include ingredients used when cooking, semi-finished food products as well as nutrition and vitamins. Depending on the meaning behind the practice, the objects are purchased or consumed, which influences the type of doing possible. On the other hand, a preplanned doing, can also influence the objects needed to achieve the desired meaning. By doing a vegan meal with vegan food objects, because of a meaning based on a motive, people are practicing the vegan culture.

3.2.1 The Model of Vegan Practices

Inspired by the model by Magaudda (2011), a new model, adapted to the purpose of the present thesis, was created. This to facilitate the exploration of the practices within the vegan food culture. The first element (meanings) concerns lifestyle and motives, but it also discusses the aspects of identity and community. The second element (doings) concerns cooking methods. The last element (objects) includes food products which involves the meal format, semi-finished foods and nutrition and vitamins.

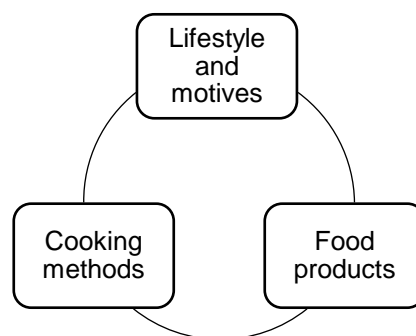


Figure 1. The Model of Vegan Practices

3.3. Culture

Culture is a widely debated subject, which has resulted in a plethora of definitions (Hofstede, 1983; Matsumoto, Kudoh & Takeuchi, 1996; Spencer-Oatey, 2008). Hofstede (1983) tried to encompass the complexity of culture by defining it as a “collective mental programming: it is that part of our conditioning that we share with other members of our nation, region, or group but not with members of other nations, regions, or groups” (p.76). The characteristics of a culture can be applied to the context of a vegan culture where the practice of not eating animal products is in somewhat contrast to other culture. Further, it is clarified that:

Characterizing a national culture does not mean that every individual within that culture is mentally programmed in the same way. The national culture found is a kind of average pattern of beliefs and values, around which individuals in the country vary. (p.78)

This interpretation allows for differences between the individuals within a group to exist, which is in line with the vegan culture as members share the common behavior of not eating animal-based food but with individual meanings. A recent definition by Spencer-Oatey (2008) offers further understanding of culture by stating, in addition to Hofstede’s (1983) description, its influence on behavior and how people interpret others’ actions. This knowledge of culture as a significant impact on people's behavior is of importance to understand the driving forces of practices within the vegan food culture.

3.4. Vegan Food Culture

Cova and Cova (2002) presents in their study the aspect of tribes as collectively created around shared consumption practices, where consumption can be considered as a moment within a practice (Warde, 2005). As veganism is mainly based on the resistance of particular types of food (The vegan Society, 2014), the shared consumption preferences would therefore, according to the theories by Cova and Cova (2002), facilitate an environment where a strong culture can thrive. Further, Mitchell and Imrie (2011) states that “The more an individual associates themselves with the tribe, the higher the tribe’s influence on their consumption will be” (p.49). This influence needs to be taken into regard when analyzing the individual’s practices within the vegan food culture as well.

3.4.1. Identity

According to Warde (1997), people are no longer divided in classes or subgroups based on their background. Instead, individuals actively shape and display their own identities, which can be communicated through consumption. This is also confirmed by Arnould and Thompson's (2005) study of consumer consumption. They argue that the role of consumption is an important factor in the construction of consumers' individual identities. The motive behind consuming specific products and services could be a behavior to signal a desired identity (Warde, 1997), made possible through the unique sign value of a product, expressing certain meanings and values (Warde, 2005). Making the decision not to consume animal-based food might therefore derive the same effect.

Products and services might be bought because of their sign value, but they can also be bought to show resistance against the sign value of other products. The hipster community portrays an identity by showing resistance towards mainstream consumerism, where one of the alternative ways to show this is by practicing a vegetarian and/or vegan diet (Cronin et al., 2014). The vegan food culture also expresses resistance, but in this case the focus is towards animal-based products and not necessarily mainstream products, even if these in many cases can be the same.

Focusing on the aspect of food consumption, it is highlighted that what we purchase and consume transmits signals about our identities and values (Martin, as cited in Cronin et al., 2014). A study by Jabs, Sobal and Devine (2000) confirms this by presenting vegetarians' expression of their diet as being or becoming a part of their way of identifying themselves, which therefore also could be of interest to analyze when researching the vegan food culture. Food is also argued as the one primary consumer item to influence our lives and signal our deeply rooted "socialised rules and ritualised behaviours" (Bourdieu & Lupton, as cited in Cronin et al., 2014, p.3).

3.4.2. Motives

Decisions are based on motives, which are reflected in the behavior and the action to reach a desired goal (Janssen et al., 2016; Solomon et al., 2006). The motive is dependent on specific wants and needs created by the consumer (Solomon et al., 2006), which can vary extensively and be more or less impulsive. Within the vegan culture there are a few subcultures with

differing motives and beliefs, which can influence food consumption preferences (Greenebaum, 2012; Janssen et al., 2016; Larsson et al., 2003). The motives of a subculture can also be interpreted in various ways, which previous research have illuminated (Greenebaum, 2012; Janssen et al., 2016; Larsson et al., 2003). In addition, Beardsworth and Keil (as cited in Ruby, 2011) argues that the motivation of a diet can change and additional motives can be of interest with time.

3.4.2.1. Ethical Motive

The ethical motive is one of the most common motives, promoting animal rights and animal well-being (Greenebaum, 2012; Janssen et al., 2016). These consumers have chosen to live a life without animal-based products, mainly because of their concern about the poor treatment and exploitation of animals. This was the case in a study by Larsson et al. (2003), where the majority of the vegans chose to follow a vegan diet because of personal beliefs regarding animal rights. Ethical veganism is not only a diet, it is a lifestyle, since it stretches beyond the food consumption (Greenebaum, 2012; The Vegan Society, 2014).

3.4.2.2. Health Motive

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is another prominent characteristic of a vegan diet that consumers are attracted to. The health motive can be based on a desire to lose weight as well as to improve one's physical condition. This motive does not necessarily entail a vegan lifestyle, since the primary motive is health and not animal rights (Greenebaum, 2012). Increasing the intake of fruit and vegetables can reduce the risk of many diseases such as cardiovascular disease, stomach cancer, prostate cancer and obesity (Craig, 2009). Dyett et al. (2013) has also observed a protective effect in plant-based food against diseases, while meat was observed to have the opposite effect.

3.4.2.3. Environmental Motive

Plant-based diets are more sustainable and environmentally friendly compared to meat-based diets, regarding greenhouse gas emissions. Previous research shows that this motive is not as dominating as the ethical and health motives (Greenebaum, 2012; Janssen et al., 2016). Greenebaum (2012) defines an environmental vegan as one who is concerned about the meat industry's impact on the environment. The study also shows that environmental vegans may

even purchase leather products instead of polyvinyl chloride (PVC), because PVC products impacts the environment more than leather products and therefore prefer leather products.

3.4.2.4. Other Motives

Consumers might also choose to follow a plant-based diet due to religious or cultural beliefs (Dyett et al., 2013). Self-related motives, such as a dislike of taste, aesthetics or consistency of meat, might also motivate a plant-based diet (Janssen et al., 2016; Larsson et al., 2003; Waldmann, Koschizke, Leitzmann & Hahn, 2003). As mentioned in the introduction, the resource distribution in the world is unfairly skewed. Being vegan could therefore also be motivated by solidarity to other humans (Pettersson, 2004), enabling a redistribution of the food and water surplus to people in need.

3.5. Cooking

3.5.1. Vegan Cooking

According to a recent study by Dyett et al. (2013), focusing on self-reported vegans' lifestyle behaviors in the United States, vegans would presumably consume home-cooked meals rather than other meal types. Further, 99% of the respondents reported to never consume fast-food meals. The different cooking methods are divided in three categories based on the most used methods. On first place, is the combination of moist cooking methods, consisting of boiling and steaming. Dry cooking is the second most used method, which concerns baking, grilling and microwaving. The least used cooking method is stir-frying. It was also found that a typical practice when cooking is the use of non-fat and low/reduced-fat products.

3.5.2. Cooking in Sweden

Due to a lack of literature about vegan cooking methods and routines, it was decided to complement the literature with studies regarding cooking in general, no matter the dietary preferences. Kjærnes (2001) and Notaker (2009) studied the Nordic and Scandinavian countries, which improves their applicability to present research.

In Kjærnes's (2001) research, respondents from the Nordic countries were asked about their eating habits during the previous day, and the majority said to have had 3-5 meals. In Sweden,

two of these meals are in most cases hot meals (Kjærnes, 2001; Notaker, 2009). This would require a certain level of cooking, or at least the consumption of a prepared meal.

A proper meal is, according to the respondents in the studies by Kjærnes (2001) and Notaker (2009), a meal prepared from scratch with raw and fresh ingredients. Further, the meal consists of a primary ingredient of either meat, fish or vegetables accompanied with a staple including pasta, rice, pulses or potatoes. The most popular staple in Sweden is potatoes (Kjærnes, 2001). Additional components could include vegetables, sauces, condiments and/or a slice of bread. Tomatoes, lettuce, cucumbers and carrots are favored among Swedish consumers (Kjærnes, 2001). Both studies (Kjærnes, 2001; Notaker 2009) noticed that the format of the meal and method depends on the work situation and lifestyle. For example, Notaker (2009) recognized that activities of shopping and preparing meals with many ingredients from scratch is time consuming, which could result in the use of convenience food, semi-finished products, if time was scarce. Notaker (2009) also noticed that eating at restaurants is becoming more popular as well as spending money on cafés.

The planning prior to the shopping occasion is described as an extensive process in Notaker's (2009) study. First, there is a need to search through the current supply of products at home. Then, the consumer plans the meals for the upcoming days, this to determine the required ingredients and components to be bought. Shopping mostly takes place at supermarkets since they dominate the retail market of food. The size of the store enables a wider range of food products, but these supermarkets are often placed outside the center of the city that makes the consumers dependent on transportation by car. This encourages consumers to make fewer but more extensive shopping trips. If the consumer has a partner, it is common for the couple to shop together when doing more extensive shopping. Lastly, price influences the consumer when choosing between certain products (Notaker, 2009).

There is a plethora of ways to prepare a hot meal. Notaker (2009) mentions boiling, frying, roasting, baking, grilling and steaming as a few examples. Further, he noticed a decrease of boiling and an increase of frying and roasting. According to Kjærnes (2001), the most common cooking methods in Sweden are pan-frying, baking and boiling. Notaker (2009) claims that Scandinavian cooking incorporates all mentioned methods, varying during the week. Time, occasion and preferences could also influence the method. Kjærnes (2001) states that Swedish

cooking is the most diverse and complex among the Nordic countries researched, both regarding use of ingredients as well as methods of preparing meals.

Much of the preparation of food has today moved to the food manufacturing industry (Notaker, 2009), and in recent years an increase in demand for these products has been observed (Brunner, Van Der Horst & Siegrist, 2010). Notaker (2009) presents a range of semi-finished products that requires different levels of cooking skills, such as frying, boiling or baking. In the end of the spectrum where barely any cooking skills is required, are pre-produced meals, these products only need to be reheated in the oven or microwave.

According to Brunner et al. (2010), convenience food can be defined as food products helping consumers to minimize time and reduce physical and mental effort required in the food preparation, consumption and cleanup. In their study, convenience food products are divided into four groups ranging from highly processed food to cut and washed salads.

Notaker (2009) observed a difficulty among the respondents to distinguish homemade food from convenience food. Kjærnes (2001) recognized semi-finished products such as meatballs and sausages to be a considerable part of the respondents' diets. For most respondents, spaghetti with ground meat and tomato sauce is perceived as a homemade meal, even if neither of the components are made from scratch (Notaker, 2009). Carrigan, Szmigin and Leek (2006) noticed this difficulty as well, and states that a proper, homemade meal has today evolved into include convenience food, even when not experiencing time pressure.

3.5.3. Nutrition and Vitamins in a Vegan Diet

Notaker (2009) observed a difference in what people believe is healthy food and what nutritionists recommend. The term healthy is by some people associated with organic food, non-fat food or home cooked meals. A general assumption is that eating more vegetables and less meat is beneficial for the health, yet this is rarely implemented.

A vegan diet is, from a nutritional and vitamin point of view, associated with many health benefits. According to Craig (2009) and Notaker (2009), following a vegan diet can reduce the risk of cancer, heart disease, diabetes and stroke. Craig (2009) states that a plant-based diet is

“usually higher in dietary fiber, magnesium, folic acid, vitamins C and E, iron, and phytochemicals, and they tend to be lower in calories, saturated fat and cholesterol, long-chain n-3 (omega-3) fatty acids, vitamin D, calcium, zinc, and vitamin B-12” (p.1627S).

A vegan diet is distinguished from other plant-based diets by containing even “less saturated fat and cholesterol and more dietary fiber” (p.1627S). However, when following a diet that eliminates all animal-based products there is an increased risk for deficiency of “vitamins B-12 and D, calcium, and long-chain n-3 (omega-3) fatty acids” (Craig, 2009, p.1627S). Li (2011) confirms this by stating that vitamin B-12 cannot be found in plant foods. Consequences of having a deficiency of vitamin B-12 “can produce abnormal neurologic and psychiatric symptoms that include ataxia, psychoses, paresthesia, disorientation, dementia, mood and motor disturbances, and difficulty with concentration” (Craig, 2009, p. 1630S). Therefore, it is of high importance to be aware of how to maintain a nutritious diet. If the required daily intake of nutrients and vitamins is not achieved, it is recommended to consume appropriate supplements or foods that are fortified with the desired nutrients and vitamins. Common fortified food products are soy and rice beverages or cereals (Craig, 2009).

4. Empirical Findings

In this chapter, empirical findings from the qualitative interviews are presented. The chapter is structured with the same design used in the theoretical framework, but categorized by themes that were found during the interviews.

4.1. The Vegan Culture

Although this section does not specifically concern food culture, the culture in general can influence the consumption behavior (Mitchell & Imrie, 2011), which in turn is relevant when attempting to understand the food culture.

4.1.1. The Life of a Vegan

Defining a vegan lifestyle or how to be vegan was very difficult for the respondents, especially due to the wide spectrum of individual interpretations and frameworks that one can follow. Despite this, a unanimous definition was “a person who, as far as possible, tries not to harm animals”, which further entails “You are vegan when you do not consume animal-based products”. Moreover, the difference between vegetarianism and veganism was discussed and the distinction found was that “Being a vegetarian means following a diet, but being a vegan means following a lifestyle”.

When discussing the various frameworks of being vegan, they somewhat differed. Aside from not eating meat and dairy, there is a range of products that might not be as obvious for every vegan to exclude. The most common products where the mindset seemed to differ was especially concerning honey, but wool, beeswax and carmine were also discussed. The influence of the decision to either consume or resist these products was based on the perceived knowledge about the industry behind the production. For example, a few respondents believed that the bees were treated well during the process, which justified their consumption. While others talked about the cruelty of the industry as the reason of their resistance.

Buying cruelty-free products, which are products that have not been animal tested (Leaping Bunny Program, 2017; Peta, 2017), were perceived collectively important among all respondents, in comparison to the disagreement in previous paragraph. It was further

acknowledged that, if necessary, animal tested medicine was an exception. There was also a mutual acceptance towards using animal-based products, such as leather boots or wool jackets, that had been purchased prior the transition to veganism. The otherwise unnecessary waste justified this behavior. Buying clothes in second-hand stores and minimizing consumption were other practices among the participants.

Several participants stated to own cats, which therefore opened up for a debate whether or not it was deemed acceptable for vegans to own pets. Among this group, no participant expressed any negative attitude concerning the subject. Those who owned cats perceived it acceptable to feed them with animal-based cat food due to the cat's need for specific adapted food (SFS 1988:534). However, it was also discussed that other vegans might consider it hypocritical to be vegan and at the same time own a pet.

An overall message the participants wanted to pass forward was that no matter where one decides to draw the line of veganism, the most important thing is that one acts in a way that feels right for oneself, "as long as you do your best and have both your own body's and the animals' best in mind". Especially if considering, as one respondent explains, that

"Not everyone has the ability to become vegan. Partly because of economical reasons, but also because of health or mental reasons if one has eating disorders or such. I think it is important as a vegan to remember not to judge others too harsh just because they cannot do the same thing as yourself. [...] It does not necessarily have to be more expensive to become a vegan, but it takes more time than to just buy some meatballs to fry for dinner if you are a stressed mom with toddlers"

4.1.2. Ethical, Health and Environmental Motives

Most respondents stated that the ethical aspect of animal welfare was the number one motive behind their choice to follow a vegan lifestyle. The respondents with this motive also enhanced that they value animals' health and wellbeing equally to their own: "I think that animals have a value for themselves". In addition, they were more focused on the resistance of consuming animal-based products than the aspect of healthy eating.

The second most frequently mentioned motive was the health motive. The respondents with this motive expressed that eating healthy dominated the resistance of eating meat. Two respondents explained that they have adopted a vegan lifestyle mainly because of the health benefits of the diet. For example, stomachache and skin problems were claimed to have reduced or vanished completely.

During one participant's childhood, a vegetarian diet was the only solution since "it felt strange to eat someone else". Later, the decision to become vegan was easy when the state of the environment and the overconsumption in the world became evident.

It was observed that the extent to which a participant related to a motive varied. Some identified themselves fully with a motive, while others expressed a devotion to several motives, even if one was more dominating. Motives were also discovered to have grown stronger or added along with increased knowledge and experience. The environmental aspect was not expressed as the primary motive by the majority, however, all expressed it as being an important part of their vegan lifestyle.

All participants had in common the experience of following a vegetarian diet before they decided to follow a vegan lifestyle. Several participants explained that the environmental motive dominated the transition to a vegetarian diet. Further, by not making the transition from meat-based diet to a vegan diet, it was collectively believed that the step from a vegetarian diet to a vegan diet enabled an easier transition. This thanks to the few products that would need to be eliminated from the current diet: "I felt that 'I still contribute to that industry by buying milk and eggs, I should probably become vegan instead'"

Another respondent declared that the transition to a vegan lifestyle became obvious one day when preparing lunch, consisting of sushi: "when I was going to add the fish, I felt that: 'I have tofu, avocado, rice, seaweed, sesame seeds, I had everything I really wanted, why should I add a lot of fish on top of it?'". The respondent felt satisfied after the meal, which made a vegan diet to feel achievable. Lactose intolerance was also a factor that made the decision easier: "I am lactose intolerant, I do not drink ordinary milk [...] I never eat eggs and gelatin is just disgusting. So why not just become vegan if I do not want to eat fish anyway". Lactose intolerance was frequently mentioned as an allergy that several participants suffered from, but this problem was solved when transitioning to a vegan diet, thanks to the lack of dairy products

Another debate that generated different opinions was if it was perceived acceptable or not to eat eggs from a hen, bred and taken care of by oneself. Not eating the eggs was perceived to be a wasteful behavior according to some, who therefore could consider eating the eggs. A number of participants could, however, not consider eating the eggs, even if the hens were to live under perfect conditions. This signals a strong point of view regarding eating animal-based products, which goes beyond the welfare of the animals.

4.1.3. Engaging in Social Media and Social Activities

The vegan community includes a variety of vegans. The participants in the present study all engaged at least a moderate level of devotion to social media and other social activities. This by being passively active in various vegan Facebook groups, sometimes posting or commenting on content, but mostly getting inspiration from the many recipes. Being a member in Djurens rätt (Djurens rätt, 2017) was another activity mentioned, as well as administering an Instagram account exclusively dedicated to vegan food. The most active respondent expressed an engagement in arranging vegan festivals and similar activities to encourage a vegan lifestyle:

[We] arrange gigs and festivals where everything is vegan. We explain why it is vegan and that we try to do it as environmentally friendly as possible and not to damage the environment, animals or humans. [We] try to enable plant-based food for more people.

Being active in different communities could be a way to connect with new people with similar interests. It was also mentioned that new friendships have been established thanks to the vegan community. Another topic the respondents reflected on was the influence and inspiration their lifestyle has brought on to others in their proximity. It was not uncommon for the respondents to admit having influenced a number of friends and family to try a vegetarian diet or vegan lifestyle.

4.1.4. Identifying with Veganism

About half of the respondents explained, that following a vegan lifestyle might be a part of their way of identifying themselves. However, they clarified that it is only one part, in some cases a very small part, of their whole identity, which was justified by not wanting to be confused with

someone else, “I do not always call myself vegan since it has connotations to militant vegans who hates everyone who is not”.

The remaining group of respondents considered veganism playing a large role in who they are, and being vegan signals characteristics they want to communicate to other people:

I think it says something about you as a person, that you care about other things than yourself. The environment, resource allocation, water, the animals, not just yourself. Even if those who eat animals do not realize it, it [eating meat] is very selfish. I think it [being vegan] is a characteristic.

4.1.5. Positive and Negative Aspects of being Vegan

All participants agreed that the most positive aspect of being vegan was to have a clear conscience:

I believe that every human somewhere feels that they want to do some kind of positive act and this could range from big to small things. But I think that as a vegan, you feel like you do not contribute to unnecessary suffering

Several participants expressed an improved physical health after making the transition as well as feeling more energized but also healthier skin and hair. “You can see that there is a difference, I cannot put my finger on it, but I can tell that something is different when I look at myself in the mirror, and I like the difference”. Other physical problems, such as stomachache, was also eased. According to a number of participants, the lifestyle contributed to an increased feeling of empathy for others as well as a more positive outlook on life. Further, it encouraged exploring new activities to improve the wellbeing, such as yoga.

A few negative aspects and difficulties with being vegan were also specified. One was constantly being questioned about the lifestyle and the obligation of having to justify the decision. Travelling was frequently mentioned as difficult, partly because of the language barrier but also because a perceived lack of knowledge at the location of visit about the distinction between a vegan diet and other vegetarian diets. Another difficulty was prominent

when visiting smaller cities, where vegan products and alternatives could be harder to find in stores and in restaurants.

In many cases, it was experienced that the producers do not specifically state if one product is vegan or not, unless it is a substitute for an animal-based product. This forces vegans to constantly read the label of content on products, which could be a time-consuming process. Another struggle discussed was to learn the various names on ingredients that are animal-based since a lot of them are “hidden” in complicated names or E-numbers. In addition, the symbols for vegan and vegetarian products are very similar which might cause unfortunate mistakes:

There is a V [symbol] that stands for vegan [products] but there is also a V for vegetarian. [...] The V that is light green and looks like a leaf is vegan but some companies use a similar [symbol] to show that it is vegetarian. This creates confusion.

Another difficulty mentioned concerned the ethical perspective, where one respondent reflected on the importance to be aware of all involved actors in the production process, not only the animals. If a person is vegan because of ethical motives, it should encompass everything. For example, how the workers are treated in the process. However, it was also mentioned that it is easy to become too focused on one perspective. “You might forget the ethical perspective around the people when you are so focused on what is vegan”.

4.2. Cooking

4.2.1. Grocery Shopping

A trend observed, was that the participants try to go grocery shopping once a week, and preferably in supermarkets. One of the participants purchases all groceries in bulk once a month in connection to the monthly wage. The majority of the respondents living with their partner argued that in order to make the grocery shopping more effective, they try to go grocery shopping together. Several participants live far from supermarkets, such as ICA Maxi and COOP, however, they value these supermarkets’ wide range of fruit, vegetables and vegan food products higher than the required travel time. They also experienced that the stores are, in general, very positive and open for suggestions if they do not sell a specific vegan product or

brand: “I submitted a request for more vegan food. Then someone from the store contacted me”. Other factors that might have an impact on the grocery shopping behavior can according to the respondents be price, quality, and especially if the stores offer organic and locally produced products.

Minor purchases were made in smaller stores, located closer to their home, work or university. However, the products offered are more expensive and the range of products is not as wide as in the supermarkets. Several respondents have also experienced that the smaller stores always seem to run out of the few vegan food products that they offer.

Two of the respondents primarily buy all their groceries in stores, only selling fruit and vegetables, for example farmers’ markets. They registered that these stores are much cheaper than other grocery stores:

We shop at the farmers’ market because price is important, it's 30 to 50% cheaper [...] we would not afford avocado if we had not purchased everything in the farmers’ market, there it is 3 [avocados] for 15 [Swedish kroners] not 2 for 30.

Online shopping was another alternative way of grocery shopping. Once a week groceries were ordered online to last the following week. The assortment in the online store was perceived as limited, yet it was convinced to be the most time and energy saving process.

A list was the most common method of organizing the grocery shopping, which was created in advance. This to avoid unnecessary purchases and to make the time in the grocery store more effective. Two respondents do not use a list and base their shopping on the supply in the store. The one common denominator between all the respondents was that they always have basic products at home, such as potatoes, rice and beans, this because these typically create the base when cooking.

4.2.2. Cooking Methods

When being asked about the continuity of cooking, the majority of participants stated their cooking as taking place at least six days in a regular week. In a few cases, it was said that their

cooking occurred more than once a day. The least amount of times someone stated to cook during a week was three.

The different methods used when cooking did not reveal any specific patterns. Nearly all participants preferred preparing warm food, only one expressed a preference of the opposite. The stove was used frequently and activities such as frying, boiling and making stews were common methods for preparing the food. The microwave was a method only mentioned once and in this case it involved the preparation of lunch.

The most common method was to prepare enough food to last for lunch the following day. One respondent explained preparing many lunch boxes as the main goal of the cooking: “I am someone who only makes big stews, so that I get many lunch boxes”. The remaining interviewees, who did not have this habit, either cooked their lunch during the same day or bought lunch at a restaurant.

Asian or traditional Swedish dishes were mentioned as favored food inspirations when cooking and, as presented earlier, different kinds of stews frequently appeared on the dinner table. A mutual feeling of curiosity was also expressed among the participants, considering the desire to try new food:

When I became a vegan, I realized I liked a lot of things that I never knew I liked before [...] then I began to think about how many more golden grains that are out there that I have not tested. So I spent a year testing everything that's in season.

One respondent found a passion of trying new recipes and have ongoing food projects in the kitchen, which did not exist before the decision to become vegan, “We are making vegan blue cheese with cashew nuts as a base. [...] we've never done this before”.

4.2.3. The Meal Format

No respondent reported to consume a fully pre-produced meal. However, six respondents admitted to be using semi-finished vegan products in their regular cooking routine. The terms semi-finished and convenience food will therefore be used synonymously henceforth. The most frequently mentioned products were meat substitutes based on fungus culture (Quorn, 2017) or

soy protein (Oumph!, 2017; Anamma, 2017) in the format of nuggets, schnitzels and patties. Quorn, Anamma and Oumph! were the most common brands specified to offer these products.

Semi-finished vegan food generally received a positive response. It was perceived as a simple and timesaving alternative to meat. One respondent explained that “some days you do not have the energy and then I will buy semi-finished products and other days I cook for one and a half hour; it varies a lot”. Using meat substitutes enables the ability to prepare well-known classics: “It is pretty fun to prepare a childhood favorite, like sausage stroganoff, and just change the ingredients. Then it [vegan cooking] will never be so difficult”. Further, semi-finished food was also described as an excellent item to bring when going away and when not knowing if there are any vegan alternatives available. An example described, if eating dinner with your friends or family. The meat substitutes were also perceived as “a good gateway for many [potential vegans]”. One respondent explained that substitutes could facilitate the step of becoming vegan by saying that:

You have a habit of what you are used to eat and if you need to change that completely it will be much harder to take that step [of becoming vegan] [...] I believe it could be of help to find alternatives, if you see: ‘that is a dish I am used to be eating, then I can try if it exists as a vegan alternative’. For example, vegan pizzas, it is such a simple thing because everyone knows what a pizza is and what to expect. I think that if you do not know what to expect, it will be a bit more difficult to try out.

However, the meat substitutes were found tiresome by a couple of respondents which additionally was one of the reasons behind the decision to replace these products, “In the beginning I was very interested in buying convenience food, semi-finished food and such, but my partner got tired of it so now we are using a lot of greens [...] more beans and such instead”. Another disadvantage was the price, which was a unanimous perception. But despite this, it was by most respondents worth it:

Some things are more expensive, but I think that it is okay because the product is still good and I like it. [...] I would never consider going back to regular meat-meatballs [...] as long as you plan with the increased price, it will be fine in the end, then you can exclude something else instead.

Another respondent agrees with this and adds that:

It [the price] affects me as a consumer in the end but I can at the same time understand it since the norm in society is to eat meat. If you think about the cheapest meat products that exist, like Danish bacon, those animals are treated the worst but the people who eat meat do not think about this. They probably look at the price and buy the products that are the cheapest instead. It comes with an ethical price that it is so cheap.

Those who did not use semi-finished goods typically prepared their meals from scratch. “I'm not a fan of vegan products [semi-finished food products], I like vegetables more and products which has not been processed”. It was also observed that these respondents preferred to purchase seasonally based groceries. This was motivated by the desire to reduce the footprint on the environment, but also to get inspiration to cook meals based on what is offered in the grocery store. The respondents using certain semi-finished products were also observed to complement the meal with components made from scratch. Among all participants, a common foundation of groceries when cooking were root vegetables, especially carrots, cabbage, potatoes and beetroots. In addition, rice, pasta, beans, lentils and chickpeas were other produce specified to be used in their cooking:

The standard [meal] is a stew of lentils, this is made regularly because it is simple and you can add anything and it is great for making lunch boxes. I am trying to vary a bit by having meat substitutes because it is fun, because there are so many alternatives, but also just using clean, simple beans, lentils and a lot of delicious vegetables and such, it usually turns out pretty good.

Preparing food from scratch could also be preferred from a price perspective, since “If you make everything from scratch it is much cheaper to be a vegan, but if you buy a lot of semi-finished food it will be more expensive”.

Other food habits included going out to eat or ordering takeout from restaurants and fast food restaurants: “At least once a week. I like trying out new restaurants and taste their vegan food if it is good or not”. One perception about going out to eat was that many restaurants do not

write which courses are available for vegans. Therefore, “I have learned not to judge the restaurants by the menu”, because if one were to ask for or request a vegan alternative, the general experience was that many chefs are willing to improvise and create a vegan meal. In some cases, a discount was received since the restaurant could not guarantee the quality of the food. “I think it almost pays off to be a vegan when going out to eat because you get served something more exciting and it is a little bit cheaper”.

4.2.4. Supplements

It soon became evident that nutrition and vitamins is a topic most vegans have been confronted with earlier. A few reacted by complaining about the constant discussion about vegans’ nutrition and vitamin intake, and the lack of this debate when considering a meat-based diet “It is the first question you receive [as a vegan] ‘do you really get everything [nutrition and vitamins] you need?’, which one would never ask otherwise”.

Most of the participants do not eat any additional supplements of B-12 or other vitamins, which was motivated by the belief that their diet contributes with enough nutrition on its own. Two of respondents previously ate supplements, but have now stopped taking them and two considered to begin, due to the feeling of having a lack in nutrition intake. The remaining individuals stated a regular intake of B-12 supplements and the majority of these mentioned additional vitamin D intake as well. One of the more experienced vegans highlighted the importance to take supplements to ensure a nutritious diet in the beginning of the vegan diet. However, the respondent does not currently eat supplements, because he feels confident that his diet cover all needs. “I think it is good to do it in the beginning, but I have been vegan for six and a half years now, so it [eating a nutritious] comes naturally”.

When discussing fortified products with vitamins the answers were quite homogenous. No respondent expressed an active habit of searching for and consuming fortified products. Still, it was perceived “comforting to know that you at least get a bit [of everything you need]” if purchasing these products.

5. Analysis and Discussion

In this chapter, the theoretical framework is reviewed in relation to the empirical findings. To achieve a chronological disposition that is easy to follow, this chapter keeps the similar structure as previous chapters. The analysis contains one part where the relevant categories are analyzed separately. The concluding part contains an analysis across the various categories. This part also facilitates a discussion of the empirical findings that are not represented in the theoretical framework.

5.1 Practices

Practices involve meanings, doings and objects according to Magaudda (2011). Through this research process, these three elements have been interpreted into the research areas of lifestyle and motives, cooking methods, and lastly, food products (see Figure 1). The interpretations established a model that has been used throughout the thesis to explore the vegan food culture. More specifically, the research areas of lifestyle and motives are included in the section “The Vegan Culture”, together with the subsections of vegan communities and identity. The section “Cooking” consist of cooking methods and meal format, as well as nutrition and vitamins.

5.2. The Vegan Culture

5.2.1. Vegan Lifestyle

The definition of a vegan lifestyle stated by The Vegan Society (2014), seems to be agreed upon among all respondents. The theory and the empirical findings also agree about veganism being a lifestyle and not only a diet (Greenebaum, 2012; The Vegan Society, 2014). The definition by The Vegan Society (2014) does however lack explicit distinctions, which could be one of the explanations to the broad spectrum of interpretations among the vegans studied. Further, The Vegan Society (2014) use the words “as far as possible” in their definition. This vagueness could force the individuals to draw their own line of what is acceptable to consume and not which further facilitates a spectrum to emerge. This was observed among the respondents; some eat honey since they do not consider bees being exploited or harmed in the production process, while others expressed the opposite. However, when discussing the different exceptions among the respondents, it was common to end an answer with admitting that others might not consider

them as true vegans. This could indicate a general awareness of the most common framework of a vegan lifestyle, even if they do not always follow it. Despite these differences among vegans in the present study, they could be recognized as a culture when analyzing the definition by Hofstede (1983). Further, the empirical findings are consistent with Spencer-Oatey's (2008) definition arguing that culture influence how people interpret others' actions. In this case, the vegans were aware of how other vegans could perceive their actions.

5.2.2. Motives

Previous research (Greenebaum, 2012; Janssen et al., 2016; Larsson et al., 2003; Pettersson, 2004; Waldmann et al., 2003) has observed that there are several motives in the transitions to a vegan lifestyle, which was confirmed by the empirical findings. It was also mutually agreed that these motives could be categorized as different subcultures. However, not all of the motives mentioned in the theoretical framework could be found among the participants. This outcome is believed to have been caused due to a small sample size. Previous research recognized the ethical motive, focusing on animal welfare and rights, as being the dominating one, another discovery supported by the empirical findings. Two respondents in the present research argued health benefits as the primary motive and only one respondent claimed to have the environmental motive. This distribution follows the structure mentioned in the literature, however, due to the sample size, this trend cannot be deemed reliable.

A tendency observed was that vegans with health motives focused their diet on plants and vegetables instead of the resistance of animal-based products. This observation can be related to the argument by Greenebaum (2012) where the primary focus is on health and not on animal rights. The theory is also verified by the empirical findings of ethical vegans where their focus is primarily on the resistance of animal-based products.

5.2.3. Vegan Communities

Shared consumption practices are argued to be the core within a culture (Cova & Cova, 2002; Warde, 2005). It is further stated that various tribes and communities can be shaped around these shared consumption practices. This behavior was observed in the respondents' membership in different vegan Facebook groups. They enjoyed taking part in what was written and discussed, but they considered themselves as passively active in these forums. Only two of the respondents claimed to be more active in other vegan communities. Mitchell and Imrie

(2011), argued that a high degree of participation in the community correlates with the community's influence on the consumption of the individual. Even though only two participants initially could confirm this theory, all participants stated to have become inspired by the recipes in the Facebook groups, which could be argued to agree with the theory. Another consumption behavior adopted thanks to the vegan culture was yoga. These two practices could be perceived to value similar characteristics such as compassion and empathy for other beings which might facilitate a positive correlation.

A demand for new vegan food products could be observed in the empirical findings, especially for new semi-finished food products. This might be a sign of growth of the vegan community in Sweden, which also was observed by Keldsen and Rosenqvist (2016). Therefore, it could be an invaluable resource for the future growth of the company if marketers could establish a good relationship with the vegan community. One possible action to achieve this could be to sponsor festivals and events with vegan products to spread awareness about the products and establish a positive image. As several respondents reported to have influenced family and friends to eat more vegan products, being able to offer appealing products and having a good reputation among these influencers should be a priority for all companies within the vegan market.

5.2.4. Identity

Jabs et al. (2000) argued that a vegetarian diet could become a part of how the vegetarians identify themselves. The empirical findings of vegans both contrasted and confirmed this theory. A few respondents did not agree to the vegan lifestyle being a part of their identity. However, it was recognized that their surroundings might think otherwise, which could confirm that their consumption behavior communicates a value that could be interpreted by others as vegan values which confirms the theory presented by Warde (2005). According to Warde (1997), individuals actively shape their identities through consumption, which is also clarified by Arnould and Thompson (2005). However, the present study indicates a tendency that the identity of the respondents is involuntarily shaped by others. Further, as also described by the respondents, their consumption could create a false perception that they do not identify with. This is in line with Martin's (as cited in Cronin et al., 2014) argument that what we purchase and consume transmits signals about our identities and values. The remaining respondents felt more positive about the vegan lifestyle being a part of their identity by highlighting all the

positive characteristics their consumption signals to others, and therefore they saw no disadvantage of identifying themselves as vegans.

5.3. Cooking

The empirical findings concerning the vegans' grocery shopping behavior agree with the behavior observed in the study by Notaker (2009). Further, the entire planning and shopping process of vegans did not differ significantly from the theory. However, some of the vegans purchased the main part of their groceries in farmers' markets, instead of supermarkets. Both in the literature and the present study it was observed that people living with their partner went grocery shopping together and purchased groceries for a longer period. The empirical findings and the previous research also mutually agree that price was one of the most important aspects when shopping for groceries. In addition, a tendency could be observed among the vegans to prefer organic and locally produced groceries, which was not explored in Notaker's study (2009).

5.3.1. Cooking Methods and Meal Format

The cooking methods used among the respondents, did only partially correspond with the study by Dyett et al. (2013). Boiling was used most frequently, which agrees with Dyett's et al. study (2013). However, frying was in the present research mentioned to be used to the same extent as boiling, which contradicts the observation by Dyett et al. (2013). It was expressed in the study that microwaving was the second most used method and that vegans preferred using non-fat or low/reduced-fat products when cooking, but these behaviors were only mentioned once in the present study. However, the study was based on American citizens, which might be a contributing factor for these dissimilarities. This because of the cultural differences between Sweden and America, which could influence the consumption practices.

If the empirical findings are compared to the research on Nordic and Scandinavian cooking (Kjærnes, 2001; Notaker 2009), more similarities in the cooking method can be found. Firstly, a majority expressed the habit of consuming two hot meals a day. Secondly, the use of semi-finished food depended on time scarcity and other factors affecting the ability to cook from scratch. Lastly, using the car was expressed to enable a more extensive shopping trip, which was mentioned by Notaker (2009).

The definition of convenience food offered by Brunner et al. (2010) was confirmed by the respondents, being perceived as both energy and timesaving. When using these semi-finished food items, there seemed to be a tendency of preparing the typical proper meal, mentioned by both Kjærnes (2001) and Notaker (2009), containing a center, a staple and additional components including a sauce and some vegetables. Additionally, potatoes were mentioned as the most common staple. As can be observed, the above-mentioned behaviors show a tendency of the vegan cooking practices discussed among the respondents to not be very different from other cooking practices, especially if preparing meals with semi-finished food.

One perception that was observed to contradict, however, was the perception of a homemade, proper meal. If a respondent, in the present research, used semi-finished foods in their cooking, these meals were not claimed to be made from scratch or homemade meals in contrast to what Notaker (2009) and Carrigan et al., (2006) discovered. This could be analyzed as vegans having a different view on convenience food compared to others. The contrast presented could be due to a few reasons. Convenience food products might still be a new phenomenon that has not been completely incorporated with the vegan values. Therefore, more experienced vegans could have already established a comfortable lifestyle based on the products available at the time of their transition and do not feel a need to ease this practice with convenience food products. In addition, the empirical findings showed a tendency among all the respondents to perceive locally grown produce and cooking from scratch as being a part of a healthy diet which supports Notaker's study (2009). This could cause a negative attitude towards the use of convenience food products, and thus, it might be excluded from the perception of a homemade, proper meal.

The literature by Notaker (2009) briefly mentions that eating at restaurants is becoming increasingly popular. The present study cannot support this finding since it did not ask about their potentially increase in restaurant visits. What could be observed, however, was that several respondents expressed an enjoyment for going out to eat and trying out the assortment of vegan food. A difficulty that requires attention concerning restaurant visits was the lack of information on the menus concerning vegan alternatives. This problem occurred even if the restaurant had the abilities to offer this. Therefore, to attract potential customers in the future, the restaurants need to improve their marketing and signage if vegan options are available.

5.3.2. Nutrition and Vitamins

When following a vegan diet, nutritionists highlights the importance to be aware of the intake of vitamins B-12 and D, calcium and omega-3, and recommends consumption of supplements if the required quotas are not achieved (Craig, 2009; Notaker, 2009). This because various deficiencies could emerge, with serious consequences as mentioned by Craig (2009). It was observed that all the respondents had a general awareness of required nutrients and vitamins. They also expressed a positive attitude towards fortified convenience food to help consume the required nutrients and vitamins. A few respondents claimed to consume the recommended supplements, and a tendency could be observed that those who consume one type of supplement were more likely to consume other supplements as well, for example B-12 and D vitamins. However, very few expressed awareness of the serious consequences that could occur in case of deficiency, which is a subject of concern. This lack of awareness might be due to the perception among the respondents of a vegan diet as being healthy if it is made from scratch, as in the study by Notaker (2009) and therefore, they might believe that this is enough. Literature may argue that a vegan diet has many health benefits (Craig, 2009; Notaker, 2009), but it does not necessarily ensure a sufficiently nutritious diet.

5.4. Other Observations

5.4.1. Semi-finished Food

A tendency could be observed that vegans less experience (less than two years) consumed were more likely to consume semi-finished products compared to the other vegans. Vegans with moderate experience (two to three years) claimed to be attempting to reduce their consumption of semi-finished products and eat more greens instead, and to cook more from scratch. More experienced vegans stated an active decision to not consume convenience foods and therefore prepared everything from scratch.

This trend could be result of several reasons. Firstly, knowledge acquired with time could facilitate the desire to prepare meals from scratch. As one respondent explained “You have a habit of what you are used to eat and if you need to change that completely it will be much harder to take that step [of becoming vegan]”. Therefore, during the transition, convenience food can ease the need to create a whole new selection of meals. After a few years, the

individual might have enough knowledge to compose own dishes. Secondly, the range of convenience food might not have been as extensive or accessible at the time of the transition for the most experienced vegans, which might have forced them to cook from scratch. Thirdly, it was observed among the vegans claiming to reduce their consumption of semi-finished food that one of the reasons behind this was due to the products and the consumption of these products were tiresome.

In order for companies to keep the loyalty of vegans who are becoming more experienced and routinized in the vegan food culture, it is important to offer healthy and a more extensive variety of products. This issue is constantly improving, but more can still be done. The vegan food market is today saturated with products based on fungus culture (Quorn, 2017) or soy protein (Anamma, 2017; Oumph!, 2017). A new product based on a new ingredient could therefore widen the assortment and bring new excitement to the consumers. As mentioned earlier, several respondents believed that convenience foods could facilitate the transition to a vegan lifestyle and the desire to try new vegan foods. It is therefore important to keep a high quality of these products to encourage a pro-environmental behavior and to decrease the footprint of humans.

5.4.2. Lunch Boxes

A common feature among the respondents' cooking methods, which was not found in previous research, is the routine of preparing lunch boxes. Several respondents expressed a preference towards cooking frequently and therefore only prepared a lunch box for the following day. This was by some motivated by a preference of cooking frequently and by others of the dislike to eat the same meal for a longer period of time. This illustrates a possible pattern within the vegan food culture that vegans mostly enjoy the cooking process and to not eat the same type of meal several days in a row. Producers should therefore expand their variety of vegan food products in order to adapt to the observed behavior.

5.4.3. Enthusiasm

When searching for vegans to participate in the research, the response was, as mentioned earlier, overwhelming. This might be an indication of the willingness by vegans to help and spread knowledge about the vegan culture, or that the advertisement met the right target group at the right time of the day.

The first cause could be proved as more probable thanks to the Facebook group mentioned by the respondents where recipes are shared to inspire each other. If this is correct, the willingness and openness should be considered and utilized by the companies when developing new products for the market. This because it could bring value and new insights as well as improve the image of the company.

5.4.4. The Environment

Only one respondent expressed the environment to be the primary motive of becoming vegan, however, during the interviews, the environment was an aspect all respondents recognized as important in their consumption behavior. This demonstrates a tendency to gradually value other motives, which is in line with the theory by Beardsworth and Keil (as cited in Ruby, 2011). By purchasing locally produced, organic, seasonally based produce, shopping at second hand stores and aiming to reduce their overall consumption, it became evident that not only the animal's or the self's well-being was important, but also the world's.

6. Conclusion

This conclusion attempts to bring answers to the research question. It contains implications for theory, which consists of the most relevant findings from the analysis, followed by implications for marketers and regulators. Lastly, recommendations for future research are provided.

6.1. Implications for Theory

The purpose of this study has been to explore the vegan food culture, by attempting to seek answers to the research question: *How is the vegan food culture practiced among young adults in Sweden?*. This has been performed by examining the practices within the vegan food culture. To facilitate this, the theory “Circuit of Practice” by Magaudda (2011) was used as inspiration to create a similar model suited for the aim of exploring the vegan food culture (see Figure 1). Our model, “The Model of Vegan Practices”, could be of interest to use in future research, studying practices within a desired culture.

Most of the previous literature in the theoretical framework was confirmed by the empirical findings in the present research. This could entail that the practices within the vegan food culture do not differ immensely from practices in other food cultures mentioned in the literature. However, new findings as well as a few contradictions were discovered within all three elements, which could contribute to a deeper understanding of the practices within the vegan food culture. This knowledge could hopefully bring value by expanding the existing literature.

A spectrum of interpretations of what is acceptable and not to consume was discovered in the empirical findings. This could have been caused due to vagueness in the definition of veganism by The Vegan Society (2014). However, there seemed to exist a general perception of the vegan framework, despite the partly vague clarification. The different motives of a vegan lifestyle among the respondents confirmed previous research (Greenebaum, 2012; Janssen et al., 2016; Larsson et al., 2003). Even if the environmental motive was the least common motive in the empirical findings, it was observed to influence the consumption behavior of all participants. This could entail that even if a pro-environmental behavior is not mentioned in the definition of veganism, it is a part of the vegan lifestyle.

The empirical findings in the present research showed several similarities to the studies by Kjærnes (2001) and Notaker (2009). This could indicate that the vegan cooking methods correlate with the general cooking methods of the Swedish population, especially when cooking with semi-finished food. The most common methods in the present research were preparing hot meals by frying or boiling, which agreed with Kjærnes (2001) and Notaker (2009). The method of frying did however contrast the literature by Dyett et al (2013). This difference might have been caused by national cultural differences.

Semi-finished food was consumed by participants within previous and present research and the definition provided by Brunner et al. (2010) was confirmed by the empirical findings. However, what could be observed in the present research was that vegans viewed the consumption of semi-finished food differently to the conclusions by Carrigan et al., (2006) and Notaker (2009). The perception of a proper meal agreed with the original definition by Carrigan et al. (2006) and not the evolved version which allows the use of semi-finished food products to be included in the concept of a proper meal. Another finding which could contribute to the literature, was the negative correlation between the use of semi-finished food and experience. For example, more experienced vegans tended to use less semi-finished food products. The respondents also preferred to prepare food frequently and enjoyed to alter the meals to the same extent.

The empirical findings of the vegans' grocery shopping behavior did not vary substantially from the studies by Notaker (2009). However, grocery shopping in farmer's markets was a behavior observed in the empirical findings, not mentioned in the literature. Moreover, the vegans in the present research tended to prefer organic and locally produced groceries. Both of these behaviors could be motivated by the observed desire among the vegans to decrease their impact on the environment.

According to several studies (Craig, 2009; Dyett et al., 2013; Li, 2011; Notaker, 2009) a vegan lifestyle induce many health benefits, but the studies also highlight the importance to ensure a sufficient intake of nutrients and vitamins due to the otherwise risk of deficiency. All respondents expressed awareness concerning this information, but a lack of knowledge was observed when discussing the consequences of deficiency. This is an alarming observation that needs to be highlighted and explored further.

As described in the introduction, the consumption in Sweden is unsustainably high (Världsnaturfonden, WWF 2017), which generates substantial amounts of greenhouse gas emissions (The World Bank, 2010). This progress needs to change to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2017b). As mentioned earlier (see 1. Introduction), a vegan lifestyle could be an alternative towards a more sustainable future. As the present research shows, this is not only due to a decrease in meat consumption. The respondents in present study were observed to have a sustainable mindset concerning other aspects as well, such as buying locally produced products, shopping at second hand stores and decreasing the overall level of consumption. Following a vegan lifestyle also seemed to encourage activities focusing on well-being among the respondents. If this is a practice that could be related to the vegan lifestyle in general, following a vegan lifestyle would not only decrease the meat consumption and the greenhouse gas emissions caused by the livestock industry, but also the unsustainable consumption overall. A vegan lifestyle could therefore be one of the gateways to a more sustainable, healthy and happier lifestyle.

6.2. Implications for Marketers and Regulators

Establishing a good relationship with the vegan communities could be of great value for all actors within the society: regulators, companies, producers, and marketers. For example, accessing insight of the barriers within the vegan community could benefit the regulators ability to facilitate the ability to obtain a sustainable society in the future. This by lowering the barriers by providing information about the vegan culture and its benefits to the society. Regulators could also act by implementing recommendations for companies, producers and marketers. Producers and marketers could benefit by adopting the received insight in the development, production and marketing process of new desirable products. At the same time, the consumers within the vegan community could benefit from these relationships through improved regulations, signage and a wider range of vegan products. These improvements could ease the practices within the vegan culture, both for current and potential practitioners in the future.

To facilitate future growth of the vegan lifestyle, it is important to consider the many difficulties and barriers mentioned in the present research. Producers, restaurants and marketers need to improve the packaging and/or symbols illustrating vegan-friendly options to ease the process for vegans to consume these products. In this case, regulators could demand companies to formulate labels of content easy to interpret, or to place the vegan-friendly symbol on the

packaging. The symbol also needs to be clearly distinguished from the vegetarian symbol, to avoid misunderstandings. As described earlier, many companies offer vegan products without advertising this, which is a shame since they could lose potential consumers.

In contrast to Kjærnes's (2001) and Notaker's (2009) studies, the perception of a proper meal among the vegans does not include any use of semi-finished food. Further, preparing food from scratch, using locally produced and organic ingredients was perceived as healthy, also agreeing with Notaker (2009). This perception could, however, become a barrier towards the consumption of semi-finished products, being perceived as a lazy and unhealthy alternative. To overcome this, producers and marketers need to consider these aspects when developing new products for the vegan food market. For example, producers should consider the use of locally produced and healthier ingredients and marketers should market this on the packaging in order to attract this type of consumer.

The gap of knowledge concerning the consequences of a deficiency in nutrition and vitamins needs to be acknowledged as a serious issue. Regulators, influencers and nutritionists should be obligated to inform the society more clearly about the importance to be aware of the recommended intake of nutrition and vitamins as well as the dangers of deficiencies that could occur when following a vegan lifestyle. This issue could also be prevented if the producers developed a wider assortment of fortified vegan food products.

6.3. Future Research

Although this thesis has generated several interesting conclusions that could bring value to producers, consumers and marketers, the limited sample size requires further research on a more extensive scale to be able to support these findings.

First, one perspective interesting to research further, could be how vegans with an ethical motive reflect on the production industry overall. If the exploitation of humans in the production process is considered as an issue as well, or if the focus is to prioritize animals' well-being. It could also be of interest to explore how this potential distinction is justified.

Second, the lack of awareness of the consequences of nutrition and vitamin deficiency is an issue that needs to be researched further in order to find if this gap of knowledge is a common phenomenon among vegan practitioners.

Lastly, it could be valuable to study potential differences between the theoretical definition of a plant-based diet compared to the practitioners' view but also to the general perception among the rest of the society. The present study has verified a few differences in interpretation which indicates the plethora of existing interpretations. The main purpose of this future research could be to establish an overview of where the differences could cause unfortunate misunderstandings and how to prevent these.

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Appendix 1

Interview Guide

The interview is divided into three areas, involving cooking, veganism and general questions

Cooking

1. Would you like to tell us about your cooking?
2. How do you cook food?
3. Can you tell us how a typical cooking week looks like?

Follow-up questions

4. How often do you cook in a week?
 - a. Cooking in bulk or daily cooking
 - b. Lunch boxes at work / school?
 - i. Why?
5. What type of food do you cook?
 - a. When you cook, do you cook from scratch or use semi-finished products?
 - i. Why?
 - b. How would you define semi-finished food?
 - i. What's the difference between semi-finished products and complete ready-made products?
6. In your household, who is responsible of grocery shopping?
7. Where do you buy vegan food?
8. What is important to you when grocery shopping?
 - a. Time
 - b. Money
 - c. Allergies
 - d. Supply
 - e. Preferences
 - f. Nutrition
9. Do you think the food chains (Willys, Ica, Hemköp, etc.) provide a satisfactory vegan variety?
 - a. How?
 - b. Why?
10. Do you think about nutrition and vitamins?
 - a. Is it hard?
 - b. For example...
 - i. B12
 - ii. Protein
 - iii. Vitamin D
 - iv. Omega3
 - v. Calcium

The Vegan Culture

11. How would you describe your vegan lifestyle?
12. Why did you transition to a vegan lifestyle?
13. Can you tell us about your transition to a vegan lifestyle?
14. What is the hardest and the best parts of a vegan diet?

Follow-up questions

15. Definition of vegan?
16. Spectrum of veganism?
17. For how long have you defined yourself as vegan?
18. Was this a gradual / immediate transition?
19. Vegans in the social circle?
 - a. Has this affected you?
20. Are you active in vegan communities? (Facebook, communities, associations, social contexts, courses and the like?)
 - a. Has this affected you?
21. Motive?
 - a. Has this changed over time? How?
22. Identity?

Background

23. Age?
24. Number of members in the household?
25. Occupation?
26. Living situation?
27. Previous diets?

Last question

28. Do you have anything that you would like to add to this interview?

Appendix 2

Facebook Advertisement



Olivia Sørensen Öhlén ▶ **Vegan Göteborg - Produkttips, vegoträffar etc**
6 April · 

Hej!
Är du en person mellan 18-29 år som identifierar dig som vegan? Och som tycker om att hjälpa andra? Då ska du titta hit!

Vi är två studenter vid Handelshögskolan i Göteborg som skriver vår kandidatuppsats med fokus på den veganska matkulturen och vi behöver DIN hjälp! Vi är nämligen väldigt nyfikna över att få veta dina synpunkter och erfarenheter inom denna kultur.

Intervjun beräknas ta ca 30-45 min och det kan ske både öga-mot-öga eller över skype.

Va en go' vegan och hör av dig till oss!

Hjärtliga hälsningar, Isabell och [Olivia](#)

 Robin H Olsson, Isabell Mellin and 4 others 9 Comments

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