

**Veganism and Social Justice:
Applying a Conceptual Framework of Violence**

by

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Abstract

The system of oppression embedded in the industrial production and consumption of animal products is a social problem. The animal-industrial complex is a significant part of the food system, with numerous consequences for people—especially marginalized groups—along with animals and the environment. Knowing there is more to addressing this social problem than simply encouraging individuals to avoid the consumption of animal products, I explore vegan discourse for how it addresses and frames oppression, specific to the food system and more broadly. My overall research question asks, how do vegan discourses that address oppression frame the consequences, causes and potential cures for social injustice embedded in industrial meat production and consumption? To establish my research problem, I use conceptual frameworks of veganism, ideology, culture, discourse theory, and violence. My conceptual framework of violence becomes an analytical framework to interpret my results and answer my research questions. I discover that vegan discourse makes connections between animal oppression and different forms of human oppression, meaning that racism, ableism, sexism, and other isms are based in ideologies that justify the oppression of both humans and animals. Therefore, the oppression of animals is relevant to all social justice movements.

Keywords: cultural violence, structural violence, direct violence, oppression, veganism, discourse, social justice

To my daughter, Lark, who was born during the year I began writing my Capstone.

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Table of Contents

Tables	7
One—Introduction	8
Two—Background and Significance: Violence, Veganism, and Social Justice	11
Domain of Food Systems and Society	11
Social Problems and Social Justice in Food Systems and Society	13
Capstone Research Problem and Overall Research Question	22
Three—Methodology and Methods: Critical Inquiry and Vegan Discourse	30
Capstone Research Paradigm	30
Capstone Research Questions	32
Capstone Research Design	35
Four—Research Applications and Contribution: Vegan Discourse Addressing Oppression	43
Research Findings	43
Contribution	67
Five—Conclusion	71
References	74

Tables

Table 3.1. Analytical Criteria for Constitutive Research Questions	40
Table 4.1. Summary of Themes for CRQ 1	44
Table 4.2. Summary of Themes for CRQ 2	52
Table 4.3. Summary of Themes for CRQ 3	59

One—Introduction

Sometimes teaching people how to ask the right questions *is* part of the solution.

—Aph Ko

Eating meat is a normal part of day-to-day American life. The production of meat, dairy, and eggs is a large part of the food system, and the consumption of animal products is usually accepted in our society without questioning. However, eating meat is both an individual and social problem. It is an individual problem when it contributes to health problems, and it is also a social problem because it comes from a violent system that harms workers, animals, and the environment, which impacts us all. But this is a problem that is often out of sight, out of mind. The social problem that I address in my research is the large-scale industrial production and consumption of meat and other animal products.

The production and consumption of animal products is relevant to social justice because it is embedded in systems of oppression that affect both people and animals. Most of the meat and animal products that we can buy in grocery stores and restaurants is produced by systems of exploitation where some people benefit at the expense of many others. Your experience will be different if you are a worker at a poultry plant, if you are living near that poultry plant, if you like to eat chicken, or if you are the chicken. But one oppressive system impacts many social groups, with consequences relating to health, safety, economic well-being, and life or death. But who cares about all this?

Vegans are one small but mighty group that tries to address this problem. Veganism is a potential solution to industrial meat production and the oppression embedded in this system.

Even if you choose not to give up animal products entirely, vegans and others advocate for eating more plants and fewer animal products when possible. But veganism is much more than a diet or an individual choice. Veganism also recognizes the many social justice issues associated with eating meat, and vegan discourse articulates these connections.

An interest in the social justice aspects of veganism led me to my Capstone research problem. My research problem focused on understanding how vegan discourse addresses and frames the systems of oppression embedded in the production and consumption of animal products. Veganism is an ideology and a practice that seeks to change social relations to avoid unnecessary human-caused violence toward animals. Vegan discourse is what vegans write or speak about to conceptualizing problems, form a common understanding of issues, build on the ideas of others, and challenge commonly held views. My inquiry explored vegan discourse for how it addresses animal oppression, human oppression, and the ways that issues overlap. This research addresses systemic oppression embedded in the industrial production and consumption of animal products in the U.S. by asking how vegan discourse frames the consequences, causes and potential cures for social injustice so that this understanding can be applied to the food movement and social justice in general. The applications to social justice in general should interest anyone concerned about racism, sexism, classism, or other forms of oppression. To better understand these concepts, how they relate, and how to think about them, we need a framework.

What are conceptual frameworks, and why do they matter? Conceptual frameworks are lenses through which to view something. I relied on conceptual frameworks to explain foundational concepts and ideas, shape my research problem and research questions, and analyze my findings. Through my Capstone work, I discovered the importance of conceptual frameworks

for seeing problems clearly and for learning how issues connect to one another. Including animal oppression in frameworks of social justice is relevant to understanding and thinking about all kinds of oppression.

Chapter Two begins with defining the domain of food systems and society, social problems, and social justice. I then explain the social justice problem I am focusing on, which is the system of oppression embedded in the industrial production and consumption of animal products in the U.S. And I establish my research problem, which is how vegan discourse addresses and frames my social problem. Chapter Three begins with my research paradigm of critical inquiry, outlines my overall and constitutive research questions, and explains my research design. Chapter Four presents the findings of my research with a summary and analysis of the themes I discovered and how this research contributes to better understanding my social problem and social justice. Chapter Five concludes my Capstone, taking my approach to research and social justice and applying it to food systems and society more generally.

Two—Background and Significance: Violence, Veganism, and Social Justice

This chapter's purpose is to lay the groundwork for the Capstone research to follow. First, I define the concepts of food systems and society and identify the topic I am interested in, which is the social justice aspects of veganism. Next, I define social problems and social justice, introducing my overarching conceptual framework of violence. I explain the social problem that I am addressing through my research—the system of oppression embedded in the industrial production and consumption of animal products. Then I narrow the focus to aspects of the social problem that I am interested in learning more about. I explore how veganism addresses oppression within the categories of consequences, causes, and cures. Overall, this chapter is the logical and evidence-based foundation for building my research, establishing the social justice problem I am addressing and the aspects of the problem I will explore. I begin with an overview of social justice in food systems and society.

Domain of Food Systems and Society

My Capstone begins within the domain of food systems and society. The food system includes the production, distribution, and consumption of food. It encompasses all the seemingly separate processes and people at every level of the system, along with the connections among parts of the system and the social relationships involved (Neff and Lawrence 2014, 2). It is the relationships between individual parts that characterize a system (Neff and Lawrence 2014, 2). The many parts of the food system operate within and are influenced by the larger social and economic structures in society (Allen 2004, 102). Society is constructed of “institutions and relationships” that encapsulate individuals (Williams 1985, 206). Therefore, the food system is embedded in society, it is socially constructed, and social decisions determine how it operates. Social decisions in this system include food policy along with broader economic and social

policy that impacts people's lives at regional, national, and global levels (Allen 2004, 102). Problems found within the food system, such as exploitation and racism, are not unique to the food system—these are the same problems that exist widely in society. It is important to note the ways in which we think of society as including some lives, while excluding others (Bennett, Grossberg, and Morris 2005, 329). This means that some people are privileged, while other people—and animals—are disadvantaged in the way society is currently constructed. Raising and killing animals for human consumption is a significant part of this system, and it carries broad social implications.

Within the domain of food systems and society, a topic that I am especially interested in is the social justice aspects of veganism. Veganism at its core is about avoiding the consumption or other use of animal products to reduce the suffering of all animals (Adams [1990] 2020, 63). This implies concern for both human and non-human animals.¹ People choose veganism for personal health reasons, concerns about animal agriculture impacting the environment, and/or ethical concerns about eating animals. People also choose veganism because of the connections to broader social justice issues. I define veganism as a discourse, ideology, and practice. Veganism is often framed as an individualistic and privileged lifestyle choice, but I am most interested in looking at the ways that veganism engages with social justice issues. Thus, I am focusing not on the practice of veganism but the ideological aspects of veganism related to social justice. To begin to understand these aspects of veganism and how it applies to food systems and society, I explain what a social problem is and frame my topic as a social problem.

¹ Throughout my Capstone, I generally refer to humans as “people” and non-human animals as “animals” to keep my terms distinct and to clarify which groups I am discussing. However, some authors prefer to use language to recognize that we are all animals (i.e., human animals and non-human animals).

Social Problems and Social Justice in Food Systems and Society

Social problems are embedded in food systems and society. There are numerous social problems in both the food system and in society in general. A social problem extends beyond individual responsibility, it harms some social groups more than others, it has social causes and effects, and it can be solved by social remedies (Alessio 2011, 3). The three criteria that distinguish social problems from other types of problems are that they have social causes, social consequences, and social cures. Some problems are commonly viewed as individual problems when in fact they are social in nature. Re-framing them as social problems takes the blame away from individuals whose circumstances they cannot control and looks for social solutions. Social problems can be related to social justice.

Social justice can be understood through envisioning what a socially just food system and society might look like in response to injustices in society. A socially just society distributes wealth and power equitably and removes systemic oppression and violence, both intentional and unintentional, to create a better shared future for people, animals, and the environment. I see economic justice as foundational for social justice. My definition of social justice focuses on economic oppression because of the links to health and environmental problems. Health and environmental problems are connected to the systemic oppression of humans and animals. Oppression is power that one group holds over another that limits the ability of some social groups to participate fully in society, have their voices heard, and lead in areas that impact their lives. Young (1990, 56) writes that “oppressions are systematically reproduced in major economic, political, and cultural institutions.” This point is important for understanding how oppression is embedded in the structures of society, and social justice must address this complexity. To achieve the right conditions for a socially just society, government policies must

change to support social justice goals and practices, including economic models that prioritize people, animals, and the environment over profits. In contrast with today's unjust society, there would no longer be excess profits for corporations and wealthy individuals to donate as they choose because socially just economic systems would prevent that. Similar to the way that economic injustice causes some people to benefit at the expense of others, animals are used and killed to benefit people without regard for animals' lives.

Violence is a form of oppression that must be addressed through social justice. Different types of violence are present in food systems and society, interfering with the needs of people, animals, and environmental sustainability. While we usually think of the direct form of violence, defined by aggression and killing, violence is also embedded in the structure and culture of society (Galtung 1990, 292). Culture is reflected in the similar "values, preferences, and beliefs" that individuals share with the social groups in which they belong (Platt 2019, 92). Because individuals can be a part of many social groups, individuals within a group differ from each other; however, "dominant values or beliefs are likely to persist" (Platt 2019, 92). I see the dominant values and beliefs of American culture as violent. Observing that eating meat is a common practice in America, I would suggest that violence is embedded in the culture. Cultural violence is defined by aspects of a culture such as "religion and ideology, art and language, and empirical and formal science," which are used to justify and normalize structural and direct violence (Galtung 1990, 291). Structural violence relates to power and dominance by some groups relative to other groups that are exploited and marginalized by the dominant group (Galtung 1990, 292). Structural violence is related to economic inequality in the food system and more broadly in society. Direct violence clearly describes the raising and killing of animals for human consumption. Direct violence is an event, structural violence is a process and becomes

institutionalized, and cultural violence is a permanence and is internalized (Galtung 1990, 294). Social justice must include the opposite of violence—nonviolence or peace—as a priority to resist and to change the dominant culture. As Galtung (1990, 302) puts it, cultural peace leads to structural peace with “equitable relations among diverse partners” and direct peace replaces direct violence with acts of “cooperation, friendliness, and love.” It is not enough to define what social justice is—we also need evaluative criteria to measure progress.

To make progress toward social justice, evaluative criteria must focus on root causes rather than just the symptoms. Therefore, I focus on the distribution of power and resources that are root causes of inequality, oppression, and violence. Evaluative criteria for social justice should include improvement in measures of economic equality and nonviolence. We will know that society is making progress toward social justice when these criteria are met:

- Workers in the food system are paid enough to meet their basic needs.
- There is a smaller gap in wages between high- and low-income earners.
- Workers perform their jobs in a safe and healthy environment.
- Workers can participate in democratic decision-making at work.
- Workers own the means of production and distribute wealth equitably.
- Animals are de-commodified so that they are no longer treated as “things” that we can exploit for profit.
- Human-caused violence in all forms is eliminated.

My Capstone inquiry focuses on a social problem that relates to the key elements of my definition of social justice.

The social problem that I study in my Capstone is the system of oppression embedded in the industrial production and consumption of animal products in the United States. The animal-

industrial complex is defined by intensive animal farming practices that exploit animals and workers in a capitalist economic system (Twine 2012, 23). Going forward, I will use the term “animal-industrial complex” interchangeably with the industrial production and consumption of meat and animal products. Through commodification, animals are turned into meat—objects—so that people can eat them, and industries can profit. The animal-industrial complex includes the industries that contribute to the mass production of meat, dairy, and eggs. This includes the crops grown for animal feed,² Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs)—also known as factory farms or intensive animal agriculture, which are large-scale industrial facilities where animals are raised in a confined space—and meat processing and slaughter facilities (Potts 2017, 1). This is a relatively new problem—factory farms did not exist before the 1960s (Potts 2017, 3). Global meat production has nearly quadrupled in half a century “from 78 million tonnes in 1963 to 308 million tonnes in 2013. ... By 2050 it is estimated to reach 455 million tonnes” (Potts 2017, 3).³ The other side of the equation is the widespread consumption of animal products produced in this system. Based on data from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), it is estimated that ninety-nine percent of meat, dairy, and eggs produced and consumed in the U.S. come from factory farms (Anthis 2019). This means that nearly everyone who purchases animal products cannot avoid participating in this system.

² The use of land for grain production to feed animals for human consumption is unsustainable. Ninety percent of the oats, barley, and rye, and more than sixty percent of soybeans grown in rich countries are used for farm animal feed (Regan 1993, 115). Furthermore, nearly half the water used in the United States goes to these crops (Regan 1993, 115).

³ These numbers reflect land animals only; they do not include the commercial fishing industry’s devastating impact on marine species populations and ecosystems. According to a United Nations report, around ninety-five percent of global ocean damage is the result of trawling, a common practice of the commercial fishing industry (United Nations 2006, 11). In the next fifty years, all wild fished species are predicted to “collapse” worldwide (Taylor 2017, 180).

The industrial production and consumption of animal products is an oppressive and violent system. This social problem relates to my definition of social justice because the industrial production of animal products exploits animals and humans, there is a profit motive that results in the inequitable distribution of wealth and power, and the consumption of meat reinforces these oppressive systems. Therefore, the industrial production and consumption of animal products are incompatible with a socially just society. This fits the definition of a social problem because the animal-industrial complex has social consequences—a violent system that turns living animals into commodities (Potts 2017), relies on the dangerous and low-paying work of immigrants, refugees, and people of color (Stuesse and Dollar 2020), and the end product is food that harms the health of consumers and the environment (Hamblin 2019). It has social causes—it was created by social decisions to produce more animal products more efficiently for more profit. And therefore, it has social cures—because it was created by social decisions, society can decide differently and dismantle this exploitative and unnecessary system. I acknowledge that the animal-industrial complex is not the only part of the food system with social problems—workers in many other parts of the food system are exploited—but I am choosing to focus on one especially violent and exploitative part of the food system to better understand the many intersecting ways the system is unjust. This understanding could potentially apply to other parts of the food system and society in general. In the rest of this section, I further explain the consequences, causes, and cures of this social problem.

One of the social consequences of the industrial production and consumption of animal products is its impact on health and the environment. Americans do not eat meat in moderation. In America, meat consumption is double the global average, and the average American man eats more than his own weight in meat every year (Hamblin 2019). There is evidence that the

overconsumption of animal products and processed foods—meat, dairy, eggs, oils, sugar, and refined grains—is linked to chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes (Harper 2010, 25; Greger 2015, 5). While the risk of chronic disease impacts some individuals more than others, the societal costs of meat production and consumption affect everyone. When looking at the impacts of meat consumption, there are the health impacts to humans from the nutrients, but the environmental impacts of meat production are usually not figured in. Those factors impact health and livelihood in major ways—air and water pollution, deforestation, antibiotic resistance, soil quality and land use, and extreme weather events (Hamblin 2019). Meat production is a significant part of the food system that contributes to climate change, which can reduce crop yields, leading to food insecurity (Fresán and Sabaté 2019). Therefore, human health and planetary health are intertwined and must be looked at together for their roles in social justice. Whether or not we can definitively say that people should not eat meat does not negate the fact that the environmental impacts of our current consumption levels are already changing the environment and those impacts are damaging to our health.

The health and environmental consequences of the animal-industrial complex impact some groups of people more than others. One effect of the overconsumption of animal products is that people of color are most impacted by the polluted water and other environmental damages caused by the unsustainable production of these foods (Harper 2010, 25). This is because people with low incomes are more likely to live near factory farms and slaughter facilities (Taylor 2017, 181). Therefore, there is an uneven distribution of harms from this social problem, which can be framed as oppression and violence. Alessio (2011, 14) argues that “when those who have abundant resources use them to further deny opportunities or greater choices to those with few resources, they are participating in the oppression of others.” This describes the situation where

people in positions of power in the meat industry make choices that contribute to the oppression of disadvantaged groups. The conditions inside factory farms also have social consequences.

The social consequences of factory farming include harms to animals and both harms and benefits to people. As a part of this system, animals experience violence by factory farming practices. Animals raised on factory farms are confined in overcrowded spaces with conditions that are stressful and unsanitary, illnesses and injuries often go untreated, and they are bred for fast growth and unnatural production of meat, milk and eggs (ASPCA, n.d.). In this system, animal oppression is a requirement for industry profit, which violates my definition of social justice that calls for removing oppression and violence, intentional or not. In this case, violence toward animals is intentional and inexcusable.

The conditions on factory farms also harm workers. Workers in factory farms are exposed to hazardous air quality and antibiotic-resistant superbugs and other diseases, and they are at risk of injury from fast line speeds in slaughterhouses (ASPCA, n.d.). Immigrants, refugees, and people of color disproportionately work in the frontlines of meat production (Potts 2017, 16; Stuesse and Dollar 2020), and these groups of people face exploitation at work every day. Exploitation is a form of oppression in which the labor of a disadvantaged social group is used unfairly to benefit a privileged social group (Young 1990, 61), a concept that applies to both animals and workers in industrial meat production. Exploitation is also categorized as structural violence because of the way it is institutionalized in food systems and society. Factory farm workers often have few or no other options for employment since many are undocumented immigrants, and their labor is exploited to produce cheap meat (Adams and Messina 2018, 57). In relation to these oppressed groups, there is a privileged group—the meat industry—that benefits from the social problem.

The meat industry profits from industrial meat production and consumption. The meat industry is “a system that makes billions of dollars in profits off of animal lives” (Taylor 2017, 59). Tyson Foods, the largest poultry producer in the United States, had a net income of over \$2 billion in 2020, a four percent increase from 2019 (MarketWatch, n.d.). This is especially troubling since the meatpacking industry has been vulnerable to coronavirus outbreaks among its workers since the pandemic began in 2020. People that consume industrially produced meat are contributing to this system of oppression and violence, perhaps without knowing. Given the numerous social justice issues related to meat production and consumption—from animal oppression to human oppression to harmful health effects and destruction of the environment—why is eating meat such a common practice?

Oppression embedded in the industrial production and consumption of animal products in the U.S. is caused by cultural, political, and economic factors. In terms of violence, cultural violence explains the role of ideology in legitimizing the structural and direct violence inherent in the animal-industrial complex. I further explain culture and ideology in setting up my research problem in the next section. Direct and structural violence in this system is constructed through social decisions. One way to see the effects of these social decision is to examine how people’s diets change when they move from a different culture to the United States. Immigrants’ diets change when they move to America, and meat consumption goes up because it is subsidized and therefore cheaper to buy (Minkoff-Zern 2012, 1196). Meat may also be easier to access, as it is the default served at most restaurants or social gatherings. This suggests that in addition to cultural norms in the U.S., political and economic systems also determine the production and consumption of animal products. According to data from the Agriculture Fairness Alliance (2021), sixty percent of U.S. farm subsidies and bailouts went to livestock, dairy, and animal

feed producers in 2020. An example of how U.S. farm policy encourages livestock production over plant-based protein sources is that “for every \$1 that lentil growers received, cattle ranchers received more than \$470 in government benefits” (Agriculture Fairness Alliance 2021). It is in the interest of the food industry to produce and market unhealthy processed food and animal products that are cheap, convenient, and addictive (Harper 2010, 33). The food industry in general benefits from neoliberal policies, such as deregulation from the government, allowing harmful practices to continue in the pursuit of profits (Alkon and Guthman 2017, 2). The animal-industrial complex is part of this larger economic and political system.

The social causes of the animal-industrial complex can be viewed from a wide lens to understand root causes and implications for social justice. In a policy review about nutritional inequalities, UNICEF (1990) states that “most underlying causes are themselves the result of the unequal distribution of resources in society” (as cited in Nisbett 2019, 12). Applied to a different context, this point about unequal distribution of resources in society also helps us understand why the system of industrial meat production and consumption persists. This ties back to the importance of economic justice. It shows that the social causes of the animal-industrial complex are a part of systems that are bigger than these industries, and we must look at the bigger picture of society to fully understand them. Social justice criteria are not met in this system where wealth and power are highly concentrated, profits are prioritized over the needs of people and planet, and a person or an animal’s life chances depend on where they rank in the social hierarchy. Because there are social causes of this social problem, the cures can also be social in nature.

The system of oppression embedded in the industrial production and consumption of animal products has social cures. There are different perspectives that oppose the animal-

industrial complex, and they propose different solutions. Some advocate for smaller-scale animal farming, while not necessarily reducing meat consumption. But this does not fully address cultural, structural, or direct violence. Others advocate for cutting back on meat consumption or avoiding it altogether, which may seem individual in nature, but collectively it could be a social cure. For instance, considering that certain racial groups may face disadvantages that put them at a higher risk of health problems, addressing social and economic inequality is an important part of the solution. And this goes back to exploring veganism as more than just a diet. The way a problem is framed either limits or expands the range of possible solutions (Ko 2019, 89). With this in mind, I am most interested in exploring the ways that veganism as a discourse frames the systems of oppression that are embedded in the animal-industrial complex. In my research, I further explore social consequences, causes, and cures as articulated in vegan discourse that addresses oppression. In the next section, I articulate the aspects of the social problem that I am studying in my Capstone.

Capstone Research Problem and Overall Research Question

The aspect of the social problem of the animal-industrial complex that I want to study is my Capstone research problem. My research problem focuses on understanding how vegan discourse addresses and frames the consequences, causes of and potential cures for social injustice and what this framing can contribute to the food movement and social justice in general. Vegan discourse is what vegans write or speak about when discussing veganism—and, specific to my research problem, how they articulate the connections between veganism and broader social justice issues. I am choosing to focus on this research problem because of my interest in veganism and plant-based eating and a growing awareness of the interconnected oppressions that relate to race, class, gender, and the cultural norm of eating animals. I would like to understand

how discourses of veganism respond to this social problem and the ways that different perspectives make connections to oppression in society more broadly. This is because vegan discourse that addresses systems of oppression is relevant to social justice and social change, which is different from the way veganism is usually viewed as a lifestyle choice. Veganism is most often associated with food, diet, identity, and consumption (Ko 2019, 6). Adding to Ko's argument, I would point out that veganism comes up in conversations around meals between vegans, vegetarians, and meat eaters, but the social justice aspects of veganism may not be the focus of these conversations. Veganism and plant-based diets are not generally seen as a response to systems of oppression.

I have observed in much of the literature I read about food justice that many social justice activists do not make the connection between human and animal oppression. Ko and Ko (2017, xv) explain in their essays that the reason for this missed connection is because our frameworks for thinking about oppression do not usually consider a lens of animality, and concepts such as racism and veganism are often thought of narrowly and separately, "thanks to our one-dimensional mainstream media culture." This means that the mainstream culture, including mainstream veganism, fails to make connections between veganism and other social issues, and this limits the ways that most people think about these issues. But Ko and Ko (2017, xv) argue that all forms of oppression are intertwined. They also explain that the media represents problems and theories out of context, leading to misunderstanding, while also making it difficult to change the conversation. Similarly, Regan (1993, 103-104) points out that the ethical question of eating animals is absent from most discussions on sustainable agriculture, partly because of the silos that different disciplines work in and partly because it is an uncomfortable issue for people to broach. Considering that factory farming is a large part of the food system and is

relevant to social justice and environmental sustainability, I want to explore what others who recognize this gap are saying about it in vegan discourse. My research problem is based on concepts that provide a framework for articulating my research interests and focus.

Conceptual frameworks that led to my interest in and formulation of my research problem are violence, ideology, culture, discourse, and the intersection of veganism with these concepts. I previously framed the social consequences of the system of industrial meat production and consumption as oppression and violence—the harms to human health, the environment, workers, and animals—in order to better understand the social problem. Violence is also a framework that helps me formulate my research problem.

In my research problem, I explore the ways that veganism addresses systems of oppression, and I use a lens of violence for this purpose. Building on the framework of violence I introduced in defining social justice, I return to Galtung's (1990) framework in the categories of cultural violence, structural violence, and direct violence. In this framework, Galtung (1990, 292) categorizes direct and structural violence further into needs categories: survival needs, well-being needs, identity needs, and freedom needs. He suggests a fifth category of needs for ecological balance to include the environment in framing violence, arguing that humans and animals depend on the environment to meet their own needs (Galtung 1990, 292). This helps me frame my research problem and its importance because it draws attention to the many aspects of violence, and it encompasses the needs of humans, non-human animals, and the environment. I will define this framework of violence in more detail as analytical criteria for answering my research questions in the Methodology and Methods chapter. For now, cultural violence is especially relevant in framing my research problem because it includes the ideologies that justify

and normalize meat culture. The group that oppresses another group is not necessarily doing it intentionally, and this frames why I am also studying ideology, culture, and discourse.

Ideology is a key concept that explains how oppression and violence are justified in the industrial production and consumption of meat. Ideologies are “systems of belief, often tacit and taken-for-granted, which serve to legitimate unequal forms of social relations ... to the disadvantage of the poorer and less powerful” (Crossley 2004, 147). This definition explains the role of ideology in social inequality and injustice. Allen (2004, 117) explains that ideologies “form the unquestioned assumptions that organize how we think and live our lives.” Ideology shapes behavior. Dominant ideology is built into the cultural traditions, habits, and political economic systems that surround practices and discourses (Allen 2004, 118), which applies to the industrial production and consumption of meat. One example of an ideology that is relevant to my research problem is individualism and self-reliance, which is the American ideal of making it on your own (Allen 2004, 124). This ideology is related to the idea of individual choice, which is a common argument for eating meat that does not take into consideration that individual dietary choices collectively have social consequences. Another ideology that is relevant to understanding political economic structures is economic liberalism, which assumes the free market is the best or only way to organize an economy and “social goals are subordinated to profit maximization” (Allen 2004, 127). This describes the animal-industrial complex with its reliance on an economic system that requires producing more and more to keep profiting, despite the social harms. Rather than seeing this as problematic, most people accept the capitalist economic system as the way things are, limiting the range of possible solutions. Ideology frames my research problem by seeing the role of ideology in creating and reinforcing the animal-industrial complex on both the

production and consumption sides. The justification for eating meat can be further understood by examining the ideology of meat culture.

Carnism and affected ignorance explain why meat eating is a common practice. Psychologist Melanie Joy defines carnism as an “invisible belief system” or ideology that makes it seem normal and natural to eat meat (Potts 2017, 19). The ideology of carnism is a part of discourses and practices around meat eating, and it is also embedded in structures and institutions, maintaining the status quo of social relations. Because of carnism in the dominant culture, anything counter to this ideology is noticeable, such as veganism and vegetarianism (Potts 2017, 19). Affected ignorance is a related concept, defined by the way that people choose to avoid information that may implicate their participation in unethical practices (Williams 2008, 371). This allows them to remain unaware, justifying their actions based on the dominant culture. Williams (2008, 372) argues that affected ignorance explains why most people do not question the cultural norm of eating meat, and this failure to critically reflect on inhumane factory farming practices is what allows these practices, institutions, and discourses to persist. While ninety-four percent of Americans think that animals should be raised humanely, it is difficult to determine from food labels if farmers are really using higher standards of animal welfare (ASPCA, n.d.). This statistic shows that people do not have sufficient information to act on their preferences. But it also shows the contradiction between people’s attempts to do the right thing and their avoidance of reality because eating meat will always involve the violence of killing an animal unless it dies a natural death. The concepts of carnism and affected ignorance illuminate the hidden causes that influence our eating habits, demonstrating how meat eating is normalized without most people thinking about it. However, some people do think about it, including vegans.

My research problem is shaped by cultures and the ideologies that support them. I introduced culture in my explanation of social justice and the ways that culture is linked to violence. I see culture as the ensemble of ideologies, discourses, and practices that social groups have in common. Raymond Williams' (1977) concept of dominant, residual, and emergent cultures is another framework that I am using to shape my research problem. Dominant culture forms the "common sense," unquestioned assumptions about how things should be in the current social system; residual culture is no longer relevant to today's social structures but stays in the ideology that shapes current culture; emergent culture includes new ideas and practices that differ significantly from the dominant culture (Allen 2004, 80). Meat culture is a dominant culture today, considering that most people eat meat, and relatively few Americans are vegetarians or vegans. According to a 2018 Gallup poll, only five percent of Americans say they are vegetarian, and another three percent of Americans are vegan (Reinhart 2018). This connects back to carnism as a dominant ideology that serves the animal-industrial complex. Veganism can be both an alternative to the dominant culture and an ideology that challenges it directly. Because I consider veganism an emergent ideology and discourse, I want to know what we can learn from it.

To further shape my research problem, I use discourse theory and apply it to veganism. Discourse is the way language is used in a social context to frame how people discuss a topic, connecting "rules and conventions for how people speak and write to other ways they act in society" (Bergstrom and Boreus 2017, 6). This means that discourse influences what we know and who has the power to shape that knowledge. Discursive practices are the ways that language constructs knowledge and meaning in a social context (Hall 2004, 346). Discourse is important because, like ideology and culture, it frames much of what we do and do not think about, but it

usually operates outside of an awareness of its role in shaping our lives. I see ideology as a foundation for discourse, and both ideology and discourse are part of the background that makes a culture what it is. Discourse analysis can be used to learn what happens when assumptions and norms are called into question (Crossley 2004, 63). This purpose applies to my interest in discovering vegan discourses for the ways they address oppression and violence, calling out the dominant discourse, culture, and ideologies that both hide and perpetuate social injustices. This shows that discourse plays an important role in social change and leads to my overall research question.

My Capstone overall research question is the following: How do vegan discourses that address oppression frame the consequences, causes and potential cures for social injustice embedded in industrial meat production and consumption? This research addresses systemic oppression embedded in the industrial production and consumption of animal products in the U.S. by asking how vegan discourse frames the consequences, causes and potential cures for social injustice so that this understanding can be applied to the food movement and social justice in general.

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This chapter provides context for social justice in food systems and society, explains the social problem that grounds my Capstone inquiry, and introduces the Capstone research problem I am setting out to explore. My Capstone inquiry begins within the domain of food systems and society. The food system is embedded in society, and it is socially constructed. Within the domain of food systems and society, a topic that I am especially interested in is the social justice aspects of veganism, defined as a discourse, ideology and a practice that avoids the consumption or other use of animal products. Veganism is often framed as an individual lifestyle choice, but I

am most interested in looking at veganism as an approach to addressing social injustices. Social problems in the food system also exist more widely in society. A socially just society distributes wealth and power equitably and removes systemic oppression and violence, both intentional and unintentional, to create a better shared future for people, animals, and the environment. The social problem that I am addressing in my Capstone is the system of oppression embedded in the industrial production and consumption of animal products in the U.S. The aspect of the social problem I want to study in my Capstone research involves exploring the discourses of veganism that address oppression to better understand the consequences, causes of and potential cures for social injustice. Thus, my research is focused on the ideological aspects of vegan discourse. To set up my research problem, I identify and define the conceptual frameworks of violence, ideology, culture, discourse, and the intersection of these concepts with veganism. The next chapter explains the approach I take to answer my research questions.

Three—Methodology and Methods: Critical Inquiry and Vegan Discourse

The Methodology and Methods chapter is organized by sections for Capstone Research Paradigm, Capstone Research Questions, and Capstone Research Design. The chapter begins with the role of research paradigms to provide context. Then I articulate my overall research question and explain its importance and relevance for addressing my social problem and research problem. Next, I articulate my three constitutive research questions that in combination will answer my overall research question. Finally, I describe the methodology and methods for answering my research questions, including analytical criteria informed by my conceptual framework of violence. This chapter's purpose is to explain my system of inquiry, identify my research questions, and describe the process I will use to answer them. The first section in this chapter describes the role of research paradigms.

Capstone Research Paradigm

This section discusses the purpose of research and introduces my research paradigm of critical inquiry. The purpose of research is to contribute knowledge to better understand what exists or is thought to exist and to solve problems. Research involves asking the right kinds of questions that fit the problems being addressed. A research paradigm combines ontological and epistemological perspectives with decisions that prioritize what matters, forming a point of view. Ontology is about what exists, informed by experience and observation. Ontological assumptions are a foundation of research because you cannot study something you do not believe exists. Epistemology is about the creation of knowledge—how we know what we know—and it influences how we ask questions. Different research paradigms (for example, positivist, constructivist, or critical) use different approaches to research that depend on the purpose of inquiry, the nature of knowledge, values, and the role of the researcher. Some approaches claim

objectivity, but all research is subjective and biased because the researcher's point of view influences the choices they make in the research process and the questions they ask. My Capstone research is situated in critical inquiry and my positionality.

Critical inquiry is a research paradigm I use to better understand issues in the food system and how to advance social justice through social change. Critical inquiry is a way to bring attention to social problems and to see oppression in different forms—it focuses on details often missed or only briefly addressed by some researchers (Terstappen et al. 2013, 22). Critical inquiry does not only seek to understand how social conditions are constructed, but it goes further and looks at possibilities for change. And it helps to build agency in the people affected by oppression so that they can be a part of the solution (Comstock 1994, 636-638). Critical inquiry aims to better understand the conditions where social problems are constructed and the ideologies that justify and reinforce these social structures and conditions. For instance, critical inquiry can help make the invisible ideology of carnism visible and explore what can be done to change it through a lens of social justice. Critical inquiry is related to my reasons for choosing this topic and how I frame my research problem.

My ontological and epistemological orientations and positionality all influence my research. My ontological orientation as it applies to my research is that oppression, violence and carnism exist. My epistemological orientation is critical social science research because my intention is to illuminate social processes involved in the animal-industrial complex so that there can be room for greater equity in power, knowledge, and resource distribution. Positionality explains my values and motivation for choosing my topic and research problem, which I will describe in the next section. In summary, my research paradigm of critical inquiry and my positionality are what shape and inform the next section, my Capstone research questions.

Capstone Research Questions

In this section, I cover my overall and constitutive research questions, explaining the conceptual frameworks that inform how I ask my questions. My Capstone social problem is the system of oppression embedded in the industrial production and consumption of animal products in the United States. My research problem focuses on understanding how vegan discourse addresses and frames the consequences, causes of and potential cures for social injustice and what this framing can contribute to the food movement and social justice in general. This research addresses systemic oppression embedded in the industrial production and consumption of animal products in the U.S. by asking how vegan discourse frames the consequences, causes and potential cures for social injustice so that this understanding can be applied to the food movement and social justice in general. My Capstone overall research question is the following: How do vegan discourses that address oppression frame the consequences, causes and potential cures for social injustice embedded in industrial meat production and consumption? This research question addresses my social problem and research problem within my research paradigm of critical inquiry because it brings attention to forms of oppression that may be missed by other researchers and social justice activists. I mentioned this gap in the literature in my Background and Significance chapter, explaining that the connection between human and animal oppression is often absent in social justice work. I looked at vegan discourse for what it says about the systems of oppression embedded in the meat industry and what we can learn from it more broadly. My positionality shaped my interest in the social problem and research problem that I am studying.

As a vegan myself, I have observed that veganism is viewed as a privileged lifestyle choice, but that is only one way of looking at it. I want to discover what vegan discourse has to

say about the systems of oppression that are embedded in food systems and in society. I am interested in and committed to social justice, and I value reducing unnecessary harms to other people, animals, and the planet. My motivation for following a mostly vegan diet over the past decade is to do the best I can to reduce harm to others, understanding the social consequences of personal choices. However, I know that individual choices will not be enough to solve this problem. A better understanding of the consequences, causes, and possible cures of oppressive systems from the perspective of veganism, related to meat eating and more broadly, might help us construct a better society. This is what led me to research the discourses of veganism that address oppression. The next part of this section outlines my constitutive research questions and the conceptual frameworks I use to analyze my research questions.

My constitutive research questions collectively answer my overall research question. Constitutive Research Question 1 (CRQ 1) is the following: How do vegan discourses that address oppression frame the consequences of social injustice embedded in industrial meat production and consumption? CRQ 1 addresses my overall research question by first discovering what vegan discourse addressing oppression identifies as the consequences (harms or benefits) of the animal-industrial complex. Constitutive Research Question 2 (CRQ 2) is the following: How do vegan discourses that address oppression frame the causes of social injustice embedded in industrial meat production and consumption? CRQ 2 addresses my overall research question by examining how vegan discourse frames the causes of the consequences identified in CRQ 1. This leads to an understanding of how vegan discourse can illuminate causes of human oppression and the links to animal oppression. Constitutive Research Question 3 (CRQ 3) is the following: How do vegan discourses that address oppression frame the cures for social injustice embedded in industrial meat production and consumption? CRQ 3 addresses my overall research question

by exploring vegan discourses for how they propose solutions to the social problem of the U.S. animal-industrial complex and how that applies to society in general. I had an overarching conceptual framework that informed my constitutive research questions.

I used a conceptual framework of violence to identify and define analytical criteria to answer all three of my CRQs. My framework of violence included the categories of cultural violence, structural violence, and direct violence from Galtung (1990), introduced in the Background and Significance chapter. Cultural violence is defined by aspects of a culture such as “religion and ideology, art and language, and empirical and formal science,” which are used to justify and normalize structural and direct violence (Galtung 1990, 291). Analytical criteria for cultural violence include terms such as: culture, ideology, language, invisible, normal, natural, acceptable, value, belief, Self-Other gradient, dehumanize, justify, and legitimize. A “Self-Other gradient” or hierarchy that classifies some humans as more valuable than others—human or animal—is used to justify violence against those deemed less worthy (Galtung 1990, 302). Structural violence relates to power and dominance by some groups relative to other groups that are exploited and marginalized by the dominant group (Galtung 1990, 292). Analytical criteria for structural violence include terms such as: structure, system, institution, exploitation, marginalization, fragmentation, dominance, power, privilege, and disadvantage. Marginalization is defined by “keeping the underdogs on the outside” and fragmentation means “keeping the underdogs away from each other” (Galtung 1990, 294). Fragmentation occurs when marginalized groups are separated by their unique interests, focused on their differences rather than their similarities. Direct violence is defined by aggression and killing (Galtung 1990, 292). Analytical criteria for direct violence include terms such as: killing, aggression, misery, and cruelty. These terms may relate to one or more categories of violence: violence, oppression, and

trauma. The terms identified as analytical criteria come directly from Galtung's (1990) definitions and explanations of the three different types of violence. This approach is deductive in that it begins with pre-defined categories that I looked for, and it is also inductive because new categories may emerge from the data. This framework identified initial analytical criteria for my study of vegan discourse. I specify how I applied this framework to each of my individual CRQs in the research design section.

Capstone Research Design

This section restates my overall research question and focuses on how I will address my constitutive research questions. My Overall Research Question is: How do vegan discourses that address oppression frame the consequences, causes and potential cures for social injustice embedded in industrial meat production and consumption? In this section, I will identify my units of analysis, methodological approach, and methods. This section is organized by constitutive research questions (CRQs), and I note when an approach pertains to all three CRQs.

I begin by identifying and explaining my units of analysis. My unit of analysis for CRQ 1 was vegan perspectives on consequences of the animal-industrial complex. Unit of analysis for CRQ 2 was vegan perspectives on causes of the animal-industrial complex. Unit of analysis for CRQ 3 was vegan perspectives on cures for the animal-industrial complex. I studied vegan discourse to discover the claims or arguments made about the consequences, causes, and cures for the social problem of the animal-industrial complex. I wanted to study claims about links between human and animal oppression along with claims generally about systems of oppression as articulated in vegan discourse. This was an appropriate unit of analysis for this question because my question is about discourse, and I needed to identify vegan discourse that addresses oppression. I collected data directly from the perspective of vegans and what they say, along

with what others say about what vegans say, such as in journal articles analyzing vegan discourse. Next, I identified a methodological approach to frame and address my unit of analysis.

My methodological approach to addressing my unit of analysis for all three CRQs was thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is focused on text, defined broadly as written material or other media, similar to discourse or content analysis but less concerned with issues of power or frequency of occurrence (FSS Capstone Research Synthesis Guide 2021, 10). Themes can be taken directly from statements “that succinctly capture and summarize a major idea,” and the purpose is to analyze their meanings (Saldana 2016b, 200). Thematic analysis is relevant to my research questions because I was looking to document what vegan discourse is saying about oppression. My goal was to share my findings for illustrative and exploratory purposes, not to make definitive conclusions about all vegan discourse that addresses oppression. Therefore, thematic analysis helped me find common themes across a sample of texts, along with ideas that are different from the overall pattern. I analyzed the themes I collected from my data to interpret the meaning of them and answer my overall and constitutive research questions. I also used thematic analysis as a research method, explained later in this section. Next, I elaborate my methodological approach by defining scope, units of observation, and sources.

My scope and units of observation applied to all three of my CRQs. My scope was vegan discourse produced in the U.S. This scope was constrained based on geography and time period. Because the term “vegan” was coined in the year 1944 (Adams [1990] 2020, 63) and factory farms did not exist before the 1960s (Potts 2017, 3), I did not search for works before this time period. This scope fit the social problem I addressed, since I focused on the animal-industrial complex in the U.S. It was enough to develop my understanding of vegan discourse, while acknowledging that it would not include all possible units of observation. My units of

observation were what I observed to say something about my unit of analysis. My unit of observation for CRQ 1 was statements related to claims about consequences of the animal-industrial complex in vegan discourse. Unit of observation for CRQ 2 was statements related to claims about causes of the animal-industrial complex in vegan discourse. Unit of observation for CRQ 3 was statements related to claims about cures for the animal-industrial complex in vegan discourse. These units of observation were found in printed text or spoken words in self-identified vegan materials. The statements that I observed applied to one or more CRQs depending on whether they addressed consequences, causes, and/or cures.

My data sources are where I found the answers to my research questions. This included sources of vegan discourse that address and frame oppression. I excluded texts that discuss veganism as a lifestyle or identity without mention of oppression. I collected data from journal articles, books, and essays.⁴ I included journal articles to learn about vegan discourse from a scholarly perspective, and I found them through literature searches using Scopus. Keywords for my search included the following terms: vegan OR veganism AND oppression; vegan OR veganism AND anti-oppression; vegan OR veganism AND violence; vegan OR veganism AND culture; vegan OR veganism AND political; vegan OR veganism AND “social justice.”⁵ I found six relevant journal articles through this search that were published in the U.S.⁶ Books, including compilations of essays, have been written on my topic that look at oppression from a lens of

⁴ There are many other sources that include vegan discourse addressing oppression, such as websites, magazine articles, social media, podcasts, and documentaries, but I am limiting my search to these three types given the limited timeframe to complete my research. Because there are different ways that people seek out and share information, these other sources could be included in future research for a more comprehensive analysis of vegan discourse addressing oppression.

⁵ Vegan discourse addressing oppression is also found in texts that are not primarily about veganism, and therefore these sources may not show up in my keyword searches and are outside of my scope.

⁶ Many of the articles that I found were out of scope because they were published outside the U.S.—this could be an area for future research.

veganism. Carol Adams ([1990] 2020, 65) observed that the essay is the most common form of “protest literature” that challenges the dominant culture of meat eating. Therefore, books and essays were sources where the information I was seeking was likely to be found, and I expected to learn about a diversity of perspectives from them. I found a Goodreads (2017) list titled “Social Justice Vegan Books,” with fifty-three books described as: “Books about veganism, activism, and non-human animal rights that include a feminist, social justice, and/or pro-intersectional perspective.” Based on the data available after conducting these searches, I then determined a reasonable sample to analyze.

I justified my sample based on my research questions and the methodology that I used. Because my research questions were about better understanding consequences, causes, and cures, and because I used thematic analysis as a methodology, selecting a sample from a variety of sources allowed me to find multiple perspectives in recent vegan discourse. A way to limit sample size is to take a random sample, which can be useful when it is not necessary to see changes over time (Abbott and McKinney 2013, 319). Since it was not feasible to include all materials available on my topic, and because time was not a variable in my research questions—I was not looking to document changes over time—I took a sample of materials that discuss veganism and oppression to limit my scope. Rather than strictly a random sampling approach, I chose my sample based on relevance of sources. I determined relevance of sources by the title and book summary or journal abstract. Within books, I chose the most relevant chapters or sections to analyze, based on reviewing the table of contents and skimming chapters. My sample was also based on choosing sources from a variety of perspectives—anti-racist, feminist, disability rights activist, and sources that addressed multiple forms of oppression along with veganism. I began with a larger set of relevant sources that met my criteria and stopped when I

collected enough data to analyze. A sample of five books, four essays, and four journal articles was sufficient for answering my CRQs because I was able to identify common themes across these sources. Due to time limitations, and because I did not attempt to collect a comprehensive set of data, I did not include additional sources. Now I further describe my methods, including my data collection, organization, and analysis process.

I used thematic analysis as a method to define, collect, and analyze data. This method was appropriate for combining a wide variety of ideas into themes so that the data could be used to answer my research questions. A theme provides unified meaning to variations and patterns in the data so that the larger perspective on an issue can be understood (Saldana 2016b, 199). Thematic analysis helped me identify the commonly discussed issues in vegan discourse, what is less common, and perhaps where there is a growing awareness of issues. I needed a way to categorize the data that I gathered. This leads to my data collection strategy where I used coding to classify texts according to criteria established deductively along with information that emerged from the data inductively. This strategy fit my purpose because “[c]oding materials helps classify them into larger conceptual frameworks” (Abbott and McKinney 2013, 319) so that I could understand vegan discourse as a response to my social problem and in relation to a broader social context. My approach to coding involved interpreting the data to identify the range of ideas or themes present in a text. In qualitative research, a code is a “word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing ... attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana 2016a, 4). Codes are assigned to data to explain their meaning for the purpose of data analysis (Saldana 2016a, 4). Open coding involves describing patterns by “labeling the phenomena, discovering categories, and naming categories” (Abbott and McKinney 2013, 320). Saldana (2016a, 14) explains a similar method where data is

coded, then categorized, progressing toward themes/concepts. This happens inductively, going from the particular to the general. Coding is an iterative process that is refined throughout the analysis as data is reviewed multiple times. The basis of the codes I tracked were my analytical criteria.

Analytical criteria were the central part of my strategy for data organization and analysis. I defined my analytical criteria both deductively and inductively. I anticipated that analytical criteria defined inductively would be a good approach for my questions so that I could discover what is out there and not limit what I am looking for to categories I had pre-defined. The deductive analytical criteria for each CRQ were described in the Capstone Research Questions section, and I present a summary here. Table 3.1 lists my analytical criteria organized by categories of Galtung's (1990) violence framework.

Table 3.1. Analytical Criteria for Constitutive Research Questions

Cultural Violence	Structural Violence	Direct Violence	Multiple Categories
Culture	Structure	Killing	Violence
Ideology	System	Aggression	Oppression
Language	Institution	Misery	Trauma
Invisible	Exploitation	Cruelty	
Normal	Marginalization		
Natural	Fragmentation		
Acceptable	Dominance		
Value	Power		
Belief	Privilege		
Self-Other gradient	Disadvantage		
Dehumanize			
Justify			
Legitimize			

These analytical criteria were applied to my units of observation so that I could identify applicable data in my sources to answer my research questions. In other words, I looked for these terms in the data so that I would “know it when I see it.” For CRQ 1, I looked for statements that included these terms in the context of consequences. For CRQ 2, I looked for statements that included these terms in the context of causes. For CRQ 3, I looked for statements that included these terms in the context of cures. I also looked for references to the opposite of violence—nonviolence or peace—in vegan discourse addressing potential cures. The statements may have explicitly used the terms consequences, causes, or cures, or they may have been implied. I collected data in an Excel spreadsheet in separate columns for source (author/date), raw data (unit of observation/statement), applicable CRQ(s), code(s), category (direct violence, structural violence, cultural violence), and theme. I collected statements that contain the terms listed in Table 3.1 or related terms, assigning a “code.” For example, a statement that contained the term “dominance” or a related concept was assigned the code “dominance” and was categorized as structural violence. In the case where a statement included general terms such as “oppression” or “violence,” I determined where the statement fit in the categories of violence based on the context. Some statements applied to more than one CRQ. Statements that I analyzed addressed consequences, causes, and/or cures, and this method of organizing my data helped me keep track of data answering one or more questions.

My data organization strategy involved further categorizing and grouping themes from the data collected. I aggregated codes and categories to identify themes. A theme is a sentence or extended phrase that explains the researcher’s interpretation of the data (Saldana 2016b, 199 and 204). Themes can be found in repeating ideas or issues, common terms, similarities or

differences in expression, and also from what is missing from the data (Saldana 2016b, 203).

This process guided my analysis of the data to find patterns and trends. I used tables to organize and present data to illustrate patterns, analyze, and interpret the data to answer my research questions. This section described the research design process I followed to answer my research questions.

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The Methodology and Methods chapter explained my system of inquiry, identified my research questions, and described the process through which I will answer them. I am using a research paradigm of critical inquiry to better understand social problems in the food system and how to advance social justice through social change. I explained how my ontological and epistemological orientations and positionality all influence my research and lead me to ask my research questions. My overall research question is: How do vegan discourses that address oppression frame the consequences, causes and potential cures for social injustice embedded in industrial meat production and consumption? My constitutive research questions ask about how vegan discourses that address oppression articulate the consequences, causes, and potential cures of the social problem of the animal-industrial complex, using a conceptual framework of violence. Finally, I described my capstone research design process, elaborating on my methodological approach and methods, so that I could make sense of the data I collected and answer my research questions. This leads to my research findings and contribution, presented in the next chapter.

Four—Research Applications and Contribution: Vegan Discourse Addressing Oppression

The purpose of the Research Applications and Contribution chapter is to present and analyze my findings and explain my contribution to social justice in food systems and society. I begin with restating my overall research question (ORQ) and how each constitutive research question (CRQ) helps to answer my ORQ. Then I present the application of my analytical framework of violence to my CRQs and analyze the themes I found. This chapter concludes with the Contribution section, which explains how my findings for each CRQ collectively address my ORQ, research problem, and social problem, and how this research increases our understanding of social justice in food systems and society.

Research Findings

My overall research question is: How do vegan discourses that address oppression frame the consequences, causes and potential cures for social injustice embedded in industrial meat production and consumption? My overall research question addresses my social problem and research problem by exploring the consequences, causes and cures for the systems of oppression embedded in the animal-industrial complex in the U.S. I am interested in learning how vegan discourse frames this social problem because of its relevance to social justice and social change, as opposed to the way veganism is often seen as an individualistic and privileged lifestyle choice. To better understand all aspects of the social problem, I am asking about consequences, causes and cures. CRQ 1 addresses my ORQ by exploring consequences. CRQ 2 addresses my ORQ by exploring causes. And CRQ 3 addresses my ORQ by exploring potential cures.

In this section, I present my data and analysis for each CRQ. First, I restate each CRQ. Then I present the results of my research organized by analytical criteria using tables to describe and summarize themes. Next, I provide an analysis that interprets my results to address my

research questions using my conceptual framework of violence. Finally, I conclude my analysis for each question with a summary that shows how my findings for each CRQ help address my ORQ. I begin with CRQ 1.

CRQ 1: Consequences of Industrial Meat Production and Consumption

How do vegan discourses that address oppression frame the consequences for social injustice embedded in industrial meat production and consumption? Here I will present my research applications for CRQ 1. I used Galtung's (1990) framework of violence to categorize the terms (codes) I found in the vegan discourse I collected about consequences. Applying my analytical criteria, I found groups of terms that related to direct violence (such as killing and misery), structural violence (such as exploitation, marginalization, and fragmentation), and cultural violence (such as cultural norms, language, and the Self-Other gradient). I also found additional concepts that emerged from the data (such as disability). I then assigned themes based on patterns I observed in my data, summarized in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. Summary of Themes for CRQ 1

Direct Violence Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humans and animals are forced to live in fear, in horrible conditions (Polish 2016; Taylor 2017). • Industry practices lead to disability and illness among animals and humans (Taylor 2017; Adams and Messina 2018). • Billions of animals are killed every year by humans for humans (Hamilton 2016; Dickstein et al. 2020; Taylor 2017).
Structural Violence Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The animal-industrial complex is a system of oppression that exploits many so that some can profit (Roeder 2021, 299; Taylor 2017, 59 & 168; Harper 2010, 33). • Humans and animals experience oppression differently, but they are oppressed by the same systems (Roeder 2021; Taylor 2017; Dickstein et al. 2020, Hamilton 2016; Ko and Ko 2017).

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- Fragmentation keeps oppressed social groups siloed (Roeder 2021; Adams and Messina 2018; Ko and Ko 2017).

Cultural Violence Themes

- Cultural norms that originate from systems of oppression usually go unquestioned (Ko and Ko 2017; Adams [1990] 2020; Ko 2019; Loyd-Paige 2010).
 - Othering applies to both humans and animals (Roeder 2021; Taylor 2017; Bruek 2017; Adams & Messina 2018; Hamilton 2016; Roba 2021).
-

The answer to CRQ 1 is that vegan discourse frames the consequences of social injustice as the direct violence of raising and killing billions of animals every year, the structural violence of humans profiting from institutionalized oppression, and the cultural violence of othering. This answer is based on the results of my data collection and the main themes I found, as summarized in Table 4.1. Vegan discourse discusses consequences of oppression in different ways. My conceptual framework of violence reveals that consequences of systems of oppression are much more than the direct violence we usually think about—vegan discourse that I analyzed refers to structural violence more than anything else. Which consequences to prioritize in the discourse is an overall theme I found—a focus on direct violence, while important, does not necessarily recognize the structural or cultural violence in systems of oppression (Taylor 2017, 147). However, direct violence is a significant consequence of systems of oppression, and I found direct violence themes in my analysis.

Direct violence themes emphasize the conditions that harm the lives of animals and humans in the animal-industrial complex. A common theme in the data I analyzed was that humans and animals are forced to live in fear, in horrible conditions (Polish 2016; Taylor 2017).

Marginalized groups experience oppression based on their status as not fully human:

Both those considered nonhuman animals and those racialized as less-than-human by dominant US society are fundamentally placed at risk and are often forced to live lives in cages, in horrific conditions, in immediate, real terror (Polish 2016, 388).

Polish (2016) is referring to the incarceration of Black people in the U.S., observing parallels between systems of oppression that we usually think about as separate problems. This example fits the criteria for direct violence in terms of misery (“forced to live lives in cages, in horrific conditions”) and cruelty (“in immediate, real terror”). There is also an element of cultural violence in the racist ideology that justifies direct violence in this system. The cruelty in the animal-industrial complex harms everyone:

Countless investigative reports and studies have exposed just how cruel, toxic, and terrible these industries are, not just for animals, but for the environment, workers, and human health overall (Taylor 2017, 38).

The terms “cruel, toxic, and terrible” can all be categorized under direct violence. This disregard for life can cause disabilities. Industry practices lead to disability: “Industrially farmed animals live in such cramped, filthy, and unnatural conditions that disabilities become common, even inevitable” (Taylor 2017, 31). Adams and Messina (2018, 100) agree: “Animal agriculture actively disables animals.” Factory farm workers and people living in the surrounding area, mainly low-income populations, are also likely to become ill, injured or disabled as a consequence of the animal-industrial complex (Taylor 2017, 185). Damage to health is a form of direct violence. These points show that the direct violence in this system leads to disabilities. The consequence of disability is a finding that emerged from the data. Vegan discourse also refers to the billions of animals killed every year by humans for humans (Hamilton 2016; Dickstein et al. 2020; Taylor 2017). The harms of this system begin with the mass killing of animals and end with many downstream effects:

Our current food system is not only brutalizing billions of animals and contributing to the destruction of the planet, it is also harming people's health and contributing to mass starvation (consider the fact that 50 percent of the grain we grow worldwide is fed to the animals we eat) (Taylor 2017, 181).

This speaks to oppression on a massive scale, mapping on to direct violence with the analytical criteria of aggression (“brutalizing”) and misery (“starvation”). These direct violence consequences are institutionalized through structural violence.

Structural violence themes relate to the consequences of institutionalized oppression. Vegan discourse discusses the ways this system exploits many so that some can profit (Roeder 2021, 299; Taylor 2017, 59 & 168; Harper 2010, 33). This shows that there are some groups of people who benefit financially from the animal-industrial complex. This also points to humans as the cause of this violence, which I will explore further in CRQ 2. Structural violence is embedded in society:

... we in the West constitute a society based on violence, oppression, misery, and domination that has led to an ongoing societal trauma from the microscale to the macroscale for all of us—whether we are the oppressors, the oppressed, or both. I see this clearly in how we collectively consume and how we rationalize why it is okay if our products come from a place of suffering, violence, and inequality (Harper 2010, 34).

This example includes analytical criteria of direct violence (misery, suffering), structural violence (domination, inequality), and cultural violence (“how we rationalize”), and multiple categories (violence, oppression, and trauma). These consequences impact everyone, and it speaks to the fact that we can be both an oppressor and oppressed at the same time. This is an important point, since meat consumption is such a widespread practice, many of us participate in this system of oppression while also experiencing some of its violent consequences.

Structural violence is a consequence for humans and animals. Humans and animals experience oppression differently, but they are oppressed by the same systems (Roeder 2021; Taylor 2017; Dickstein et al. 2020, Hamilton 2016; Ko and Ko 2017). The same structures have consequences for both humans and animals:

The animal agriculture industry, which routinely enmeshes non-human animals in oppressive structures alongside marginalized human beings ... is an illustrative example of how the liberation of non-human animals is connected to the liberation of the humans oppressed by the same system (Roeder 2021, 295).

My analytical criteria of oppressive, structures, marginalization, and system all appear in this quotation, pointing to structural violence. Humans and animals do not experience the exact same oppression, but they are "oppressed by similar forces" (Taylor 2017, 155). Taylor is responding to comparisons between oppressed groups that can spark defensive reactions among those who feel that their oppression is not related to animals. Taylor argues that comparing humans to animals is not the point, but instead it is necessary to confront the common source of oppression. In other words, the consequences may look different for humans and animals, but they both experience structural violence. In response to veganism portrayed as a privileged lifestyle for white people, there are those who draw our attention to the extent of exploitation in this system:

But there is an irony in considering veganism as a 'white thing,' given, as we have argued, the whiteness of the universalizing, imperial drive behind the 'meatification' of food systems all over the world. Moreover, the ongoing exploitation of animals is fundamentally bound up with that of exploited humans all over the world, whether via overfishing, the consumption of endangered species, the exploitation of laborers in factory farms increasingly situated in the Global South, and so on (Dickstein et al. 2020, 9).

The majority of those who are exploited in these systems are non-white. The consequences of these systems should matter to anyone who is concerned about inequality. Multiple social groups are oppressed and issues are intertwined, and yet different groups of people and related issues are often separated.

Related to the theme that humans and animals are oppressed by the same systems, another structural violence theme in vegan discourse is the concept of fragmentation.

Fragmentation keeps oppressed social groups separated into silos (Roeder 2021; Adams and Messina 2018; Ko and Ko 2017). Fragmentation prevents separate groups from connecting:

Supremicist hierarchies and late-stage capitalism benefit by fragmenting both oppression and activism. When we resist systems in which some lives are valued more than others and look at veganism as part of the struggle against the commodification of the planet and the beings who inhabit it, however, we can see a larger picture: one in which the fight for liberation from the structures that exploit the most vulnerable among us connects, rather than divides, humans and the non-human animals with whom we share our world (Roeder 2021, 312-313).

This example includes multiple forms of structural violence that fit my analytical criteria: systems, fragmentation, exploitation, and structures. It illustrates how oppressive structures maintain their power by keeping oppressed groups apart. Fragmentation serves as a distraction from addressing the root causes of a problem: "At times, the pitting of the disenfranchised against each other causes us to fail to confront the common problem—the roots of democracy based on exclusion and its limited notion of a citizen" (Adams and Messina 2018, 98).

Fragmentation benefits the dominant group because it maintains group separation so that groups do not form coalitions and gain power. Issues are most often addressed separately—animal rights in one silo, anti-racism in another—but multiple issues can and should be addressed at the same time (Ko 2019). This can be seen in the way that veganism is “single-issue” when activists claim that veganism should only be about animals—vegan discourse addressing oppression opposes this view, instead arguing that veganism should be against all forms of oppression (Polish 2016; Roeder 2021; Bruek 2017). Vegan discourse addressing oppression also sees consequences in the category of cultural violence.

Cultural violence themes in vegan discourse articulate consequences of cultural norms, language, and othering. Cultural norms that originate from systems of oppression usually go unquestioned (Ko and Ko 2017; Adams [1990] 2020; Ko 2019; Loyd-Paige 2010). Cultural

norms relate to consumption practices and attitudes toward animals and humans: "We have to question all 'norms' produced out of the system we're trying to bring down, such as consuming animal flesh or possessing negative attitudes toward certain marginalized groups" (Ko and Ko 2017, 128). This example fits the analytical criteria of cultural violence (referring to norms and attitudes), and it highlights the way that cultural violence justifies structural violence (referring to system and marginalization). A consequence of cultural violence is that norms are largely unquestioned by most people in a society, relating back to the concept of affected ignorance explained in chapter two—we do not ask questions about things we would rather not know. Cultural violence makes other forms of violence acceptable: "Treating them so callously is symptomatic of a general disregard for anything our culture defines as inferior and expendable" (Loyd-Paige 2010, 4). Direct and structural violence are not even recognized as violence: "When humans exploit, commodify, and harm animals, it is portrayed not as political, not as exploitation, but just as 'the way things are'" (Taylor 2017, 161). Through language such as "the way things are," cultural violence makes structural violence both invisible and acceptable. Ko and Ko (2017, 19) sum it up this way: "Conceptual violence creates the conditions for physical violence." This shows that different forms of violence are not separate problems with separate consequences—they are composed of each other.

One way to see how different forms of violence are composed of each other is in the theme of othering. I found instances of vegan discourse discussing othering as a consequence of the animal-industrial complex (Roeder 2021; Taylor 2017; Bruek 2017; Adams & Messina 2018; Hamilton 2016; Roba 2021). One of my analytical criteria is the Self-Other gradient, which relies on dehumanizing, a form of cultural violence that takes human status away from the Other, which has the effect of turning someone (person or animal) into something—an object for

exploitation and/or consumption (Galtung 1990, 298). This means that othering is based on perceptions of status between people and relative to animals, which is a problem for those groups of people that rank lower in status—and for the animals that are ranked the lowest. To treat animals as the “Other” is an act of cultural violence:

They reminded me that we are all animals, and they demonstrated that the animal-industrial complex is responsible for multiple ills that have at their root the essential separation of one group of beings into undesirable, exploitable, and killable -- by another group of beings that manufactures reasons to consider them disposable, 'Other,' and unworthy of life (Roba 2021, 79).

This example brings together multiple forms of violence and their consequences—the cultural violence of labeling animals “undesirable”, “disposable”, and “Other,” the structural violence of exploitation, and the direct violence of killing. Cultural violence justifies direct and structural violence toward both people and animals—those who are not considered fully human. Othering is called out as a form of animal oppression and human oppression:

Otherization is not only a barrier that we must break down on behalf of nonhumans; it is also a commonly practiced form of human oppression that the vegan movement must openly reject (Bruek 2017, 14).

Bruek is saying that some in the vegan movement think singularly about animals in their activism, but they should also consider humans and the ways that different groups of people are othered. The opposite is also true, that those in social justice activism focused on human oppression may not consider animals when they think of othering. The point is that no matter your area of focus, there needs to be a recognition that both animals and humans are othered by the same systems and that othering is based on a status hierarchy that places animals at the bottom. This recognition addresses cultural violence and structural violence together. In the next section examining causes, I will look more deeply at the ways vegan discourse articulates how violence is justified in systems of oppression. The answer to CRQ 1 contributes to answering my

ORQ by exploring ways that vegan discourse articulates consequences of systems of oppression in terms of direct, structural, and cultural violence. The next section presents my results and analysis for CRQ 2.

CRQ 2: Causes of Industrial Meat Production and Consumption

How do vegan discourses that address oppression frame the causes for social injustice embedded in industrial meat production and consumption? Here I will present my research applications for CRQ 2. I used Galtung's (1990) framework of violence to categorize the terms (codes) I found in the vegan discourse I collected about causes. Applying my analytical criteria, I found groups of terms that related to structural violence (such as systems and domination) and cultural violence (such as invisibility, justification, and ideology). I also found additional concepts that emerged from the data (such as the ideology of the human-animal divide). I did not find causes in terms of direct violence since this category relates more to consequences. I assigned themes based on patterns I observed in my data, summarized in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2. Summary of Themes for CRQ 2

Structural Violence Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Root causes include human domination, white supremacy, and capitalism (Roeder 2021; Taylor 2017; Ko and Ko 2017; Dickstein et al. 2020; Hamilton 2016, Adams [1990] 2020).
Cultural Violence Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The justification for eating animals and oppressing certain groups of people are socially constructed, relating to the ideology of the human-animal divide (Polish 2016; Taylor 2017; Roeder 2021; Adams [1990] 2020; Ko and Ko 2017; Ko 2019). • Social inequities are linked by the same ideologies (Lloyd-Paige 2010; Ko and Ko 2017; Adams and Messina 2018; Taylor 2017, Ko 2019).

The answer to CRQ 2 is that vegan discourse frames the causes of social injustice as the structural violence of human domination, white supremacy, and capitalism, and the cultural

violence of ideologies, such as the human-animal divide, that justify direct and structural violence toward humans and animals. This answer is based on the results of my data collection and the themes I found, as summarized in Table 4.2. My analytical framework of violence reveals that causes of systems of oppression can be seen as structural and cultural violence. Causes in vegan discourse that I analyzed mainly point to cultural violence for its role in justifying structural and direct violence, along with elements of structural violence that are considered root causes of oppression. For example, of the thirteen sources I read, at least eight sources argued that racist ideology (cultural violence) and/or structural racism (structural violence) are causes of the animal-industrial complex and social injustice more broadly. This means that structural violence and cultural violence work together to create and reinforce systems of oppression.

Themes in the structural violence category point to root causes of systems of oppression. A recurring theme in vegan discourse addressing oppression is that root causes are human domination, white supremacy, and capitalism (Roeder 2021; Taylor 2017; Ko and Ko 2017; Dickstein et al. 2020; Hamilton 2016, Adams [1990] 2020). White supremacist capitalism is identified as a root cause of systems of oppression: “We believe that veganism plays a fundamental role in total liberation because the meat-centric diet and food infrastructure ... fundamentally intertwines with white supremacist capitalism and its intersecting systems of oppression” (Dickstein et al. 2020, 7-8). Analytical criteria applied to this statement are infrastructure, white supremacist (relates to domination), and systems—all of these fit the category of structural violence. In this view, white supremacy and capitalism are considered causes of the rise in industrial meat production and consumption. Therefore, questioning how much meat we produce and eat in the U.S. is an essential part of changing these larger systems of

oppression. In other words, we cannot confront white supremacy and capitalism without changing the scale at which we produce and consume meat and animal products. Vegan discourse explains how capitalism establishes the conditions for violence in the animal-industrial complex.

Capitalism is a cause of specific consequences of the animal-industrial complex. One of the consequences of the animal-industrial complex explained previously in the analysis for CRQ 1 is disability, and capitalism creates the conditions that cause some disabilities. According to Taylor (2017, 181), it is the "systemic violence of capitalism that leads to disability." Taylor (2017, 181) is referring to disabilities caused directly by the animal-industrial complex and disabilities caused by capitalism more broadly, such as poverty and lack of access to healthcare. This fits my analytical criteria for structural violence (systemic), explaining a cause of disability. According to Hamilton (2016, 125), "... capitalism creates the conditions for the invisibility of many forms of labour across species." Capitalism fits my criteria for structural violence because it is a system of oppression that depends on exploitation and domination. This example points to labor and class oppression, relating to economic injustice. It also meets the criteria for cultural violence (invisibility). This is a problem "across species," aligning with an overall theme from my research findings that the same systems are exploiting animals and humans—also explained as a consequence for CRQ 1. These examples show how structural and cultural violence are intertwined—processes of capitalism fit the criteria for structural violence, while cultural violence is internalized, and made invisible, in this system.

Cultural violence themes explain that causes are about the ideologies that justify eating animals and oppressing marginalized groups of people. The justification for eating animals and oppressing certain groups of people are socially constructed, relating to the ideology of the

human-animal divide (Polish 2016; Taylor 2017; Roeder 2021; Adams [1990] 2020; Ko and Ko 2017; Ko 2019). Systems of oppression are caused in part by ideologies that privileges some humans relative to other humans and animals:

The human-animal divide is the ideological bedrock underlying the framework of white supremacy. The negative notion of 'the animal' is the anchor of this system (Ko and Ko 2017, 45).

Analytical criteria include ideology (cultural violence) and system (structural violence). Ko and Ko (2017, 45) explain the human-animal divide as a socially constructed racial hierarchy with white humans designated as the superior race and species, and the opposite of human and whiteness is the idea of “the animal.” Non-white people have a status somewhere in between, and their oppression is justified given their proximity to animals in social standing. The othering of animals has historically enabled the privileged group to legitimize violence against animals, but to also consider people of color as not fully human. Furthermore, claiming that people of color should not be treated like animals—asserting their humanity—reinforces the negative status of the animal, which means we are accepting the racial hierarchy and white supremacy (Ko and Ko 2017, 45). This demonstrates how an ideology—the human-animal divide—justifies a system of oppression—white supremacy. It means that a cause of the animal-industrial complex is also a cause of the larger system of oppression that is white supremacy. And thus, confronting white supremacy requires seeing how the human-animal divide works to justify that system. The human-animal divide goes along with language that compares some humans to animals:

Embedded in the phrase 'treated like an animal' is the knowledge that not only does the human state perpetrate acts of violence on the bodies of non-human animals on a regular basis, but also that many of these acts of violence are sanctioned as acceptable because of the hierarchy inherent in the 'human/animal' binary discussed before (Roeder 2021, 301).

Analytical criteria for cultural violence includes language (“treated like an animal”), acceptable, hierarchy, and “human/animal binary,” which is another way of saying “human-animal divide.”

Language such as “treated like an animal” relies on an ideology that positions humans and animals along a hierarchy. Positioning someone as human or animal relates to the social categories of race, sex, and class:

The humanized human in Western culture has often been white male, the one who had the right to vote and own property. Casting individuals as animalized humans is usually influenced by race, sex, and class. Animalizing discourse is a powerful tool in oppression (Adams [1990] 2020, 203).

This example includes the analytical criteria of humanized and animalized (related to dehumanized), culture, and oppression, and these criteria fit within cultural violence. Adams ([1990] 2020, 203) argues that animalizing discourse depends not only on species and race, but also gender and class. It is white men that rank above women, regardless of race. For example, women are denied the same rights and opportunities as men and are often treated as property. Understanding common causes of oppression shifts the focus away from the differences between experiences of oppression:

When we think about our oppressions with respect to their cause—the propping up of “the human” (the long project of Western colonialism and domination)—then the fine-grained differences between them start to matter less (Ko and Ko 2017, 73).

Analytical criteria here apply to cultural violence (“the propping up of ‘the human’,” which relates to justification and dehumanizing) and structural violence (domination). Colonialism is an emergent category that speaks to a cause with historical roots from which we still see consequences. This example relates back to the consequence of fragmentation—a structural violence theme identified for CRQ 1—and it demonstrates how an understanding of shared causes can serve as a connection point between multiple oppressed groups.

Ideologies that maintain different forms of human oppression are related to animal oppression. Social inequities are linked by the same ideologies (Loyd-Paige 2010; Ko and Ko 2017; Adams and Messina 2018; Taylor 2017, Ko 2019). Vegan discourse makes connections between animal oppression and other types of oppression. Specifically, the vegan discourse I analyzed discussed racist, ableist, and sexist ideologies and how they are not only related to animal oppression, but how they all rely on the ideology of the human-animal divide. Animality is a social construct that contributes to the oppression of animals and marginalized groups of people:

A lot of us aren't just talking about animal oppression, but animality, which is a Eurocentric construct that has contribute to the oppression of any group that deviates from ideal white homo sapiens (Ko and Ko 2017, 91).

There has always been a human/animal binary aspect to racism, misogynistic, and ableistic logic. In the political sphere, animality functions as a tool for democratic exclusion. Oppression elevates some humans as deserving equal protection and equal participation as citizens and lowers others, by making them 'other' and suggesting they are more like animals" (Adams and Messina 2018, 97).

Animality relates to ideology and language, analytical criteria for cultural violence. It is a cause of othering, a consequence of systems of oppression articulated in vegan discourse. As a disability rights and animal rights activist, Taylor (2017, 57) sees the need to understand the underlying systems and ideologies that cause both forms of oppression: "It is essential that we examine the shared systems and ideologies that oppress both disabled humans and nonhuman animals, because ableism perpetuates animal oppression." Furthermore,

... oppressions are not mutually exclusive: they are entangled and interlocking, as is so clear when we look at slaughterhouses themselves, where, as we have seen, animal and environmental destruction are wrought on the backs of largely low-income people, who are funneled into such undesirable jobs due to class, disability, and immigration status (Taylor 2017, 201).

In this way, structural violence (systems) and cultural violence (ideologies) are causes of multiple forms of oppression. Taylor (2017, 5) defines ableism as “prejudice against disabled people that can lead to countless forms of discrimination ... but it also informs how we define which embodiments are normal, which are valuable, and which are ‘inherently negative’.”

Ableism differs from speciesism because it creates a narrative that justifies the oppression of certain humans and certain animals, based on their lack of perceived value or burden on society.

Ableism is found in the marginalization of people with disabilities, and it is found in the legitimized violence against farmed animals, many of them disabled by industry practices. This is not to say that that all people and animals should be valued in the same exact way, but that differences in ability and dependency should not be a justification for their exploitation. Disabled groups—human or animal—should live free from exploitation and oppression. Ableism is one ideology that contributes to the oppression of humans and animals. Racism is another:

What animals are experiencing should matter to our anti-racist movements if we understand that 'animal' as a social construct was designed to prop up the ruling class and the 'human.' Although pre-colonial cultures all over the world consumed animal flesh, colonization added a racial connotation to 'animal' and used this as a justification to brutalize different beings globally (Ko 2019, 37).

This example includes cultural violence (justification), direct violence (brutalize, which relates to my criteria of aggression), and multiple categories (colonization is both an event—direct violence—and a process—structural violence). The concept of race is based on this socially constructed human-animal divide. The answer to CRQ 2 contributes to answering my ORQ by exploring causes in terms of the cultural violence that justifies structural and direct violence, as articulated in vegan discourse. My findings show that root causes of the animal-industrial complex are found in larger systems of oppression and the ideologies that support them. The next section presents my results and analysis for CRQ 3.

CRQ 3: Cures for Industrial Meat Production and Consumption

How do vegan discourses that address oppression frame the cures for social injustice embedded in industrial meat production and consumption? Here I will present my research applications for CRQ 3. I used Galtung's (1990) framework of violence to categorize the terms (codes) I found in the vegan discourse I collected about potential cures. To categorize and analyze cures, I altered my framework to think of the opposite of violence, what Galtung (1990, 302) describes as cultural peace, structural peace, and direct peace. Applying my analytical criteria, I found groups of terms that related to direct peace (such as boycotts), structural peace (such as coalitions between fragmented groups), and cultural peace (such as solidarity). I also found additional concepts that emerged from the data (such as other conceptual frameworks). Sources I analyzed discussed non-violence generally as a cure for all systems of oppression (Hamilton 2016; Polish 2016). This points to the importance of recognizing systems of oppression as violent in many ways because the idea of non-violence may be otherwise overlooked as a solution. Specific ideas for cures mapped onto my framework of direct, structural, and cultural peace. I assigned themes based on patterns I observed in my data, summarized in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3. Summary of Themes for CRQ 3

Direct Peace Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Veganism as an act of resistance/boycott/tactic for social justice movements (Adams and Messina 2018; Dickstein et al. 2020).
Structural Peace Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dismantling systems of oppression and dismantling capitalism (Dickstein et al. 2020; Roeder 2021; Hamilton 2016). • Coalitions link social justice issues to increase effectiveness of social movements (Roeder 2021; Loyd-Paige 2010).

Cultural Peace Themes

- Solidarity (Hamilton 2016; Ko and Ko 2017; Dickstein et al. 2020; Roeder 2021; Taylor 2017)
 - Imagination: new ideologies, new conceptual frameworks (Adams [1990] 2020; Ko and Ko 2017; Ko 2019; Roeder 2021; Hamilton 2016).
-

The answer to CRQ 3 is that vegan discourse frames the cures of social injustice as the direct peace of boycotts to avoid participating in oppressive systems, structural peace of dismantling oppressive systems over time, and cultural peace of acting in solidarity with oppressed groups and imagining new ideologies and conceptual frameworks for the future. This answer is based on the results of my data collection and the themes I found, as summarized in Table 4.3. My conceptual framework of violence reveals that cures for systems of oppression can be seen as direct, structural, and cultural peace. In the same way that cultural violence justifies direct and structural violence, cultural peace is foundational for creating an environment in which direct and structural peace are the norm. Responding to direct violence through direct peace is one part of the cure.

In vegan discourse addressing oppression, direct peace involves acts of resistance to violence. Veganism is seen as an act of resistance and a tactic for social justice movements (Adams and Messina 2018; Dickstein et al. 2020). Adams and Messina (2018, 4) claim that “veganism is in part a sophisticated boycott using economic consequences to bring about change.” I categorize a boycott as a tactic of direct peace because of Galtung’s (1990, 294) description of direct violence as an event—the opposite, direct peace, would also be an event but with different goals. A boycott is an action taken in opposition to the violent consequences of the animal-industrial complex. A boycott can be taken by individuals, and the ultimate goal is for collective action to create enough pressure for systemic change. A boycott is something anyone can do right now. But frankly, “the solution is to shut down these concentrated animal

operations" (Taylor 2017, 38). This means that direct peace (through something like a boycott) is one immediate step toward a cure, but ultimately, the overarching cure requires structural peace (through the dismantling of the animal-industrial complex). Those arguing for boycotts recognize this dynamic, but they see boycotts as a crucial component of social change:

Put simply, if other people are not going vegan or engaging in a boycott, you are less likely to do so. And the more people go vegan, the more likely it is that others will see veganism as normal and desirable. If no one goes vegan, the odds of structural change to meat production and all its associated forms of exploitation are slim; if everyone were to go vegan, these forms of exploitation would disappear (Dickstein et al. 2020, 14-15).

Veganism as a boycott is a way to change attitudes and norms ("normal and desirable" relate to cultural peace) that will lead to systemic change (addressing exploitation for structural peace).

This means that individual choices are not insignificant, and the impulse to dismiss individual change as not enough fails to recognize the role of individual and collective actions as a catalyst for changing social norms. Besides, the choice to follow a vegan diet does not preclude individuals from participating in other forms of political engagement (Dickstein et al. 2020, 13-14). In other words, you can be vegan and work toward changing the system at the same time.

Direct peace is a necessary component of the cure because the actions of some begets the actions of others, leading to larger cultural and structural change.

Structural peace themes in vegan discourse relate to dismantling capitalism and linking social justice issues to strengthen social movements. Vegan discourse addressing oppression sees capitalism as a cause, and therefore identifies dismantling capitalism as a cure (Dickstein et al. 2020; Roeder 2021; Hamilton 2016). Veganism is a part of broader anti-capitalist politics:

Going vegan will not overturn this system, but it does respond to two realities: first, capitalism will not be 'dismantled' without some alterations to markets and consumption patterns; second, while broader anti-capitalist projects are underway, ongoing mass-scale

violence and suffering urgently require immediate mitigation (Dickstein et al. 2020, 8-9).

This example links direct violence (suffering) to structural violence (markets and consumption patterns). While a long-term and broad solution is necessary to confront capitalism, the role that veganism can play as a part of this larger solution should not be dismissed. Resisting capitalism benefits humans and animals:

I argue that when we conceptualize and practice veganism as an act of resistance in the face of the dominant and ecologically destructive ideologies espoused within capitalist, white supremacist heteropatriarchy, we disrupt the rhetorical and institutional norms that oppress many humans alongside the non-human animals... (Roeder 2021, 293).

Veganism is a cure in response to structural violence (dominant, capitalist, white supremacist, heteropatriarchy, institutional) and cultural violence (ideologies, rhetorical, norms). A related theme of structural peace in vegan discourse is that coalitions between groups are part of the cure, and we must see the links between social justice issues to increase effectiveness of social movements (Roeder 2021; Loyd-Paige 2010). Loyd-Paige (2010, 2) puts it this way: "All social inequities are linked. Comprehensive systemic change will happen only if we are aware of these connections and work to bring an end to all inequalities." This responds to the structural violence of fragmentation, a consequence of systems of oppression framed in vegan discourse. There is an opportunity for cures to encompass humans and animals:

Because the plight of non-human animals in our food industries is intrinsically connected with that of human beings and the environments in which we live, approaches that link food justice and human and environmental health and safety alongside the health and safety of non-human animals may be especially effective in promoting wide-scale veganism (Roeder 2020, 299).

This example implies structural peace through the linking of multiple issues that have been separated (or fragmented) by structural violence. Vegan discourse addressing oppression

recognizes the connections between forms of injustice and addresses multiple issues together. Recognizing that multiple forms of social injustice are linked means that the paths to liberation are also linked. Focusing too much on structural violence—changing the systems of economic inequality and exploitation—may make the problem seem too big to change. Or it could reflect the hegemony of capitalist ideology, meaning that proposed solutions often work within a capitalist economic system but do not challenge it directly. Either way, much of the vegan discourse that I analyzed is less about structural change and more about changing attitudes, norms and behaviors related to cultural violence—or its opposite, cultural peace.

The concept of solidarity was a theme I frequently found in vegan discourse addressing oppression. Solidarity is framed as a recognition that exploited groups—animal or human—share a common oppressor (Ko and Ko 2017, 75). It is also an act of resistance to the institutionalized devaluing of lives (Roeder 2021, 312; Dickstein et al. 2020, 5; Taylor 2017, 174). Solidarity is an antidote to othering: “This vulnerability between species creates powerful opportunities for solidarity between workers, animals, environmentalists, and all of us who want to challenge the meat industry's disregard for life” (Taylor 2017, 188). Therefore, solidarity fits within the category of cultural peace—it is a viewpoint that legitimizes peace rather than violence. Solidarity does not make the mistake of conflating all types of oppression as the same, but rather it embraces similarity and difference. This involves the “valuing of otherness” (Taylor 2017, 60), as opposed to using the cultural violence of the Self-Other gradient to justify violence toward those labeled “Other” (Galtung 1990, 302). Solidarity is taken in opposition to the systems that harm animals, people, and the environment, recognizing our interdependence (Taylor 2017, 145). Personal commitment to veganism is a way to act in solidarity with oppressed groups:

By framing our role as that of co-conspirators with the non-human animals who every day rebel against their own oppression, we

resist speciesism and re-enforce a commitment to veganism as an act of resistance, rather than a prescriptive diet (Roeder 2021, 312).

For the billions of animals killed every year, the ecosystems destroyed to make room for farms and feed crops, and the people displaced or made to labor in the animal-industrial complex, this active political refusal is the least we can do to show our solidarity (Dickstein et al. 2020, 15).

These examples illustrate how an understanding of the ways animals, people, and the environment are all harmed in the animal-industrial complex leads to political engagement taken in solidarity to resist the systems that harm them. This ties back to the direct peace theme of a boycott, which is a specific political action framed in vegan discourse. Applying analytical criteria of “invisibility” (cultural violence), resisting oppressive systems through solidarity is a way to make the extent of the harms (and who is harmed) visible. Veganism is a logical step forward when these connections are made visible. Vegan discourse addressing oppression contributes to cultural peace by making the social problem of the animal-industrial complex visible and unacceptable.

Many of the cures proposed in vegan discourse are in response to dominant ideologies and offer new ways of thinking about problems and their solutions. These perspectives offer (or imagine) new ideologies and new conceptual frameworks for a different vision of the future. I found the word “imagination” used across multiple sources to describe new ways of thinking and doing (Adams [1990] 2020; Ko and Ko 2017; Ko 2019; Roeder 2021; Hamilton 2016). The point is that thinking in the same ways, locked into the same usual frameworks, is unhelpful—we must think in new ways to create transformative social change. This theme relates to cultural violence with analytical criteria of ideology, but I also classify conceptual frameworks as an emergent category from my data. In my research, I came across vegan discourse that use some of the same frameworks (such as intersectionality) that are used by many in social justice activism, but Ko

and Ko (2017) are unique in their critique of intersectionality. They argue that it is not useful to simply make various oppressions intersect with each other because thinking in terms of socially constructed categories of oppression (such as human/animal, race, or gender) does not challenge the basis of those categories. Instead, they believe that we need new frameworks for envisioning the future. One of the frameworks they propose is Afrofuturism. Ko and Ko (2017, 135) explain that "Afrofuturism is about reimagining our citizenship as well as the citizenship of others, without being held captive by the thoughts of the dominant class." This means that marginalized groups did not create the conditions that label them inferior in society; they know what it is like to be dehumanized, and from this experience they are able to construct new ways of thinking and being in the world (Ko and Ko 2017, 135). This perspective recognizes that ending animal oppression cannot be overlooked for its broader implications: "Moreover, as long as animals are oppressed, as long as 'animal' means something degrading, we will never be set free" (Ko and Ko 2017, 135). Afrofuturism envisions a future where ideas of dominance and inferiority no longer serve a purpose. Likewise, Hamilton (2016) responds to Carol Adams' well-known feminist vegetarian theory by offering a different perspective, while also feminist:

It is this commitment to non-violence as the basis for an ethics of eating—and of living—and not an ill-conceived comparison between violence against women and violence against animals, that makes veganism a feminist issue (Hamilton 2016, 126).

In this view, uncritical comparisons between women and animals can be thought of as cultural violence. Hamilton (2016, 115) argues that Adams' framework is "stuck in a binary model of gender" and does not reflect the "groundbreaking contribution of feminist theory to understandings of gender and sexuality and their intersections with race, class and other categories." Hamilton believes that Adams' argument may have the unintended effect of dissuading some feminists from including animals in their purview. Hamilton points to Adams'

anti-prostitution and anti-pornography positions, demonstrating how sex workers are marginalized in Adams' arguments. Hamilton argues that bringing sex worker agency to the story provides a different framework for understanding how labor is exploited, human or animal. This framework differs from Adams' comparison of different forms of violence, focusing instead on questions of work and worker agency. Although this does not seem to challenge the basis of Adams' argument that gender violence and animal violence are interdependent and both need to stop, it does suggest that frameworks can influence the agenda of social movements. Hamilton's framework may lead to more inclusion and participation in the movement by broadening the conversation, making the issue of animal exploitation relevant to anyone who cares about issues of labor exploitation in general.

We can learn from well-established theories, build on the parts that hold up over time, and discard the rest. This speaks to the importance of revising and imagining new conceptual frameworks and not simply thinking about problems in the same ways—including those that seem social justice-oriented. The answer to CRQ 3 contributes to answering my ORQ by exploring how vegan discourse addressing oppression frames cures. The violence embedded in the animal-industrial complex and in systems of oppression more broadly—whether we are talking about direct, structural, or cultural violence—must be recognized as violent so that non-violent solutions may be considered.

In summary, the findings for each of my CRQs contribute to answering my ORQ. Applying my analytical framework of violence, I found consequences, causes, and cures discussed in vegan discourse related to the categories of direct, structural, and cultural violence. I also found an emergent category discussed in vegan discourse, which is conceptual frameworks themselves. The next section explains the contribution of my Capstone research.

Contribution

The purpose of this section is to answer why my Capstone work matters. It is a summary of why I chose my Capstone research and what I have learned. First, I review how my Capstone research responds to the social problem of the animal-industrial complex. Then I review my research's contribution to social justice in food systems and society. I start by explaining how I have addressed my overall research question, research problem, and social problem.

My overall research question is: How do vegan discourses that address oppression frame the consequences, causes and potential cures for social injustice embedded in industrial meat production and consumption? My research problem focuses on understanding how vegan discourse addresses and frames the consequences, causes of and potential cures for social injustice and what this framing can contribute to the food movement and social justice in general. My social problem is the system of oppression embedded in the industrial production and consumption of animal products in the United States. My CRQs collectively address my overall research question and research problem by finding instances of vegan discourse addressing oppression to learn how consequence, causes, and cures are framed. Applying Galtung's (1990) framework of violence allowed me to see the consequence, causes, and cures of social injustice as forms of violence, even when the term "violence" is not found in vegan discourse addressing oppression. There are many more forms of violence than one might initially assume. Moreover, different forms of violence are composed of each other—one form leads to and reinforces another, such as conceptual and physical violence (Ko and Ko 2017, 19). My CRQs collectively address my social problem by exploring various perspectives to see how they frame oppression and violence in the animal-industrial complex and in society broadly. I have found that there are

many different perspectives advocating for veganism as a practice and an ideology for social change.

As a result of my Capstone research, we are better able to understand how conceptual frameworks can be applied to the animal-industrial complex and to systems of oppression broadly. The vegan discourse I analyzed argues that veganism addresses the social problem of the animal-industrial complex—but it goes beyond the straightforward connection between production and consumption of animal products to addressing multiple forms of oppression embedded in this system. The sources that I read argue that veganism is not the only thing necessary to correct social injustices, but it is an essential part of social justice (Dickstein et al. 2020; Taylor 2017; Adams and Messina 2018). The concepts of animality and the human-animal divide are relevant for all social justice movements (Ko 2019; Roeder 2021; Taylor 2017; Ko and Ko 2017; Adams and Messina 2018; Hamilton 2016). Furthermore, Ko and Ko (2017) do not argue that everyone should join the animal rights movement, but that all other social justice movements should incorporate animal justice. This is not just for the animals, but it is because the same systems and ideologies that oppress animals also oppress humans and damage the environment (Roeder 2021; Taylor 2017; Dickstein et al. 2020, Hamilton 2016; Ko and Ko 2017). Some argue that we should not simply avoid animal oppression because people are harmed in the process—we should recognize the value and agency of animals themselves (Taylor 2017; Hamilton 2016). Through my Capstone, it should be clear that animal oppression and the ideologies that normalize it matter for all of us—human or animal—and it depends on your conceptual framework whether you see oppression and liberation as multidimensional as they truly are. If we are not including animals in our frameworks that inform social justice work, then we are not getting to the root causes of the oppression we are trying to solve (Ko and Ko

2017, 92). This speaks to the importance of conceptual frameworks for thinking about problems and solutions. This is a finding from my research that does not fit within my violence framework, nor should it, since the point is that there are many different frameworks you could use to examine social problems.

The framework of cultural, structural, and direct violence is one way to better understand consequences, causes and cures of social injustice as articulated in vegan discourse addressing oppression. But I could have used many other frameworks—some existing frameworks and perhaps some framework not yet conceptualized by anyone. Beyond my research topic, there are aspects of veganism that I did not address, that is the practice of veganism and plant-based diets and how they do or do not relate to veganism as an ideology.

A question that remains is about the contradictions of promoting veganism through the inherently violent system of capitalism. Vegan discourse is suggesting important ideas, such as conceptual frameworks and solidarity, but the political-economic systemic changes that would be required to put these cures into practice is undertheorized. Because my research shows that capitalism is a root cause of the systems of oppression embedded in the animal-industrial complex, what is the role of vegan businesses that exist or even thrive in a capitalist economic system? This has implications for market-based solutions, such as products labelled “vegan” but not necessarily from social-justice oriented businesses, even if they claim to be locally-owned, organic, and so on. Local or family-owned and organic businesses do not necessarily prioritize worker health and safety or pay their employees a fair wage. Understanding how the ideology of veganism extends to the practice of veganism, and exploring examples of consistency or contradictions in approaches, is a potential area for further research.

The RAC chapter presented the research applications and contribution of my Capstone research. I explained how my CRQs answered my ORQ, in line with my analytical criteria and conceptual framework of violence, and how this addressed my research problem and social problem. I found instances of vegan discourse addressing oppression and applied my conceptual framework to explain consequences and causes of the animal-industrial complex in terms of cultural, structural, and direct violence. The cures for systems of oppression can be seen as cultural, structural, and direct peace. My conceptual framework of violence points to the importance of recognizing systems of oppression as violent because the idea of non-violence may be otherwise overlooked as a solution. I then explained the contribution of my research to social justice in food systems and society. Vegan discourse recognizes the connections between multiple forms of oppression, and therefore it is a relevant practice and ideology for addressing social injustice broadly. An area for further research is to better understand the practice of veganism and whether or not vegan capitalism is compatible with social justice. I conclude my CRS in the next chapter, applying what I have learned to social justice and social change in general.

Five—Conclusion

The conclusion to my Capstone Research Synthesis reviews my contribution to social justice in food systems and society overall. I reflect on what I have learned from my specific inquiry and how to apply it to social justice problems in food systems and society in general.

Through my Capstone, I learned about the role of research in addressing social justice. I learned that addressing social problems using critical inquiry can lead to unexpected and exciting findings. I began my research with an interest in veganism and a basic understanding of how it relates to social justice, but I did not know the extent of the connections I would uncover. This applies to any research topic—you never know what you will find. I found that vegan discourse brings up familiar concepts, such as othering and solidarity, but with a wider lens for understanding who is harmed, who benefits, and how systems and individuals can change for the better. Without doing this research, I would not have discovered such compelling arguments and new conceptual frameworks. Nor would I have really understood why conceptual frameworks matter.

The importance of conceptual frameworks was underscored through every step of the process of writing my Capstone. I learned that conceptual frameworks are used for many different purposes. I used many conceptual frameworks throughout my CRS and an overarching conceptual framework of violence—I used them to define food systems and society, to define social justice and social problems, in setting up my social problem and research problem, and finally as analytical criteria for making sense of the data I collected to answer my research questions. Having an overarching conceptual framework gave my Capstone a thread to follow from start to finish.

Not only were conceptual frameworks the building blocks of my CRS, but the vegan discourse I analyzed in my research brought up conceptual frameworks too. Thus, conceptual frameworks were not only something I used to structure my approach to inquiry, but they were also a finding of my research. This finding makes me wonder what other conceptual frameworks I might discover by researching other social justice problems.

Conceptual frameworks should be central to social-justice-focused social change efforts. That is, research and activism should be grounded in frameworks and theories. There will be different roles—some people will use existing frameworks and apply them to different problems, some will build on old frameworks, others will conceptualize new frameworks, and some will take those frameworks and put them into practice. Without conceptual frameworks, we will not know how to effectively think about the problems we are trying to solve. Rather than jumping to solutions, conceptual frameworks help us see old problems in new ways and expand the range of possible solutions. This is much needed in a world with many urgent problems to solve and yet many barriers to solving them.

One of those barriers is fragmentation. Through my conceptual framework of violence, I was able to recognize patterns and themes in vegan discourse addressing oppression. Fragmentation was one of the analytical criteria for structural violence, and it means that the oppressor wants to keep issues and social movements separated so that we cannot join together and make progress on the many things we share in common. I learned that the idea of the oppressor is complex, that it is embedded in systems, and yet because these systems are created by social decisions, social decisions can change them. Vegan discourse addressing oppression brings up the concept of fragmentation with the intent to break down barriers between different forms of activism. This is an understanding that can certainly be applied to social justice and

social change in general. Bringing the concept of animality—the idea of dehumanizing and its roots in the human-animal divide—to other social justice movements will only strengthen those movements. In other words, bringing up animal oppression does not distract from other issues, but it is an essential part of changing oppressive systems. We cannot look at animal rights alone or worker rights alone or any number of related issues alone because the system exploits them all. We need a broader framework.

I learned through my Capstone how social justice problems are interconnected. I learned that not only do they share connections that can be seen at the surface, but they also share root causes. Because various forms of oppression are justified by the same ideologies, it does not make sense to think of issues and the social movements that address them one by one. The right conceptual frameworks are needed to see the connections between seemingly separate issues.

Perhaps we can eventually solve long-standing social problems such as the animal-industrial complex if we can learn how to think about and talk about social problems and not fear them. The trick is to ask the hard questions and imagine new conceptual frameworks that will allow us to see what we could not see before.

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