

## *I Was a Teenage Vegan: Motivation and Maintenance of Lifestyle Movements\**

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Recent research has pointed to the rise of socially conscious consumption and of lifestyle movements or social movements that focus on changing one's everyday lifestyle choices as a form of protest. Much of this research addresses how adults maintain socially conscious consumption practices. Using interviews with youths who are vegan—strict vegetarians who exclude all animal products from their diet and lifestyle—I isolate the factors influencing recruitment into and retention of veganism as a lifestyle movement. I show that initial recruitment requires learning, reflection, and identity work, and that subsequent retention requires two factors: social support from friends and family, and cultural tools that provide the skills and motivation to maintain lifestyle activism. I also show how participation in the punk subculture further facilitated these processes. This work contributes to studies of youth subcultures and social movements by showing how the two intersect in lifestyle movement activism.

### Introduction

Growing trends in U.S. consumer culture include “going green,” “buying local,” or practicing “meatless Mondays.” Similarly, recent studies in culture and social movements focus on political or socially conscious consumption (e.g., Shah et al. 2012). Socially conscious consumption “is a way for consumers to manifest their prosocial concerns through private shopping choices” (Atkinson 2012:194). Much of this research centers on adults whose political consumption is intricately intertwined with home ownership and neighborhood or parenting networks (Bennett 2012; Lorenzen 2012). As more and more youths engage in a “search for ethical consistency,” in which their everyday actions and practices match their ideals (Quéniart 2008:220), I seek to extend this literature on political consumption to include younger people engaged in what are known as lifestyle movements, a type of social movement focusing less on traditional political mobilization and more on people's everyday lifestyle choices (Haenfler, Johnson, and Jones 2012).

We know little about how individuals initially come to participate in these lifestyle movements. Existing research describes much of what occurs once a person has joined a lifestyle movement, but they are less useful for explaining recruitment into such a movement. Further, the mechanisms for initial

recruitment and subsequent retention differ, and we need to analytically isolate those mechanisms. To understand recruitment and retention of youths into lifestyle movements, I analyze young people engaged in veganism as a lifestyle movement. Broadly defined, veganism describes living without reliance on animal products. This generally refers to eating a plant-based diet without meat, dairy products, or eggs. However, the vegans in this study were not just dietary vegans—with animal rights as their motivating ideology, they applied veganism to their entire lifestyle, also avoiding animal products and products tested on animals in their clothes, toiletries, and other household goods. About half of my participants also participated in the punk subculture, which played a specific role in their veganism.

In this article, I ask what factors contribute to youths' recruitment into lifestyle movements? What encourages retention in these movements? To answer these questions, I first outline the initial mobilization of young vegans, where I found that recruitment depended upon learning, reflection, and identity work. Identity, although, proved insufficient for the continued maintenance of a vegan lifestyle. Maintenance and retention required two factors: first, social support from friends and family, and second, cultural tools that provide the skill and motivation to remain a vegan, which were found by participating in the “virtuous circle” (Kennedy 2011) of veganism as a lifestyle movement. Throughout the analysis, I show how participation in the punk subculture further facilitated these processes of recruitment to and maintenance of veganism as a lifestyle movement. This work contributes to studies of youth subcultures and social movements by showing how the two intersect in lifestyle movement activism.

### **Lifestyle Movements and Subcultures**

Scholars typically define social movements as organized, goal-oriented, collective action (Marx and McAdam 1994). In contrast, these same scholars see lifestyles as more individual, tied to popular culture patterns of style, and generally divorced from social change (Featherstone 1987; Willis 1990). Rather than viewing movements and lifestyles as dichotomous, I follow scholars of lifestyle movements and socially conscious consumption who argue that we need to transcend the boundaries of public/private or citizen/consumer to understand how our personal lives inform our politics and vice versa (Atkinson 2012; Kennedy 2011; Lorenzen 2012; Willis and Schor 2012).

More and more people experience their “personal politics” in terms of “personal lifestyle values” (Bennett 2012:22) and no longer organize their lives around traditional group identifications, such as social class or political parties. However, even theorists of new social movements, which give more consideration to the role of culture and identity in activism, still focus their attention on organized, hierarchical movement organizations (Haenfler, Johnson, and Jones

2012). Thus to understand veganism as an identity, goal, and tactic as experienced in young vegans' everyday lives, I use Haenfler, Johnson, and Jones (2012) definition of lifestyle movements as "movements that consciously and actively promote a lifestyle, or way of life, as their primary means to foster social change" (p. 2).

How does one join a lifestyle movement? Lorenzen (2012) found those following a "green lifestyle" gradually made changes and could not identify a particular tipping point into their new lifestyle. However, researchers have found that when switching to a vegan lifestyle, participants experience specific "catalytic experiences" that motivate an entire lifestyle change (McDonald 2000). Social networks are especially important for recruiting into movements that require significant lifestyle changes (Snow, Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson 1980). One could imagine how becoming vegan, and learning all the new ways of cooking, eating, and making everyday purchases, not to mention the ideology behind such lifestyle changes, would be facilitated by the help of a knowledgeable friend. Maurer (2002) has shown how traditional movement organizations can provide such support, but Cherry (2006) has shown that social networks provide the cultural support to maintain a vegan lifestyle. Moreover, recruitment through social networks would seem ideal for youths, who are becoming less interested in formal politics (Gordon and Taft 2011; Hustinx et al. 2012) and who are becoming more interested in living in accordance with their ideals (Quéniart 2008). Further, Kennedy (2011) found that social networks influence consumption behaviors. What these network perspectives miss, especially in the case of lifestyle movements, is initial recruitment to the movement. Thus the first section of the analysis deals with recruitment, or how these youths first learned about veganism and decided to become vegan.

And how does one maintain participation in a lifestyle movement? Research on prosumption, which describes the shift from engaging in passive consumption to becoming active producers and consumers (Chen 2012), and "virtuous circles" (Kennedy 2011), or the effect of social networks on consumption behavior, helps to understand the retention of participants in lifestyle movements. They also help us understand the specific link between veganism and the punk subculture. As I will show in the analysis, about half of the participants in this study also self-identified as punk and participated in the punk subculture, which had a significant effect on their veganism. Researchers have shown how a DIY, or "do it yourself" approach, is important for the recruitment of young subculturalists, specifically punks (Moore and Roberts 2009). Punks distinguish between "real and fake" subcultural participation, or subcultural "production" versus mere "consumption," as a way of developing authentic subcultural identities (Lewin and Williams 2009; Williams 2006). Thus punks actively pursue "prosumption" (Chen 2012) identities within the subculture. While we

understand how this concern with authenticity, cultural production, and DIY affects subculturalists' identities, we know less about how it affects their embodied political practices. By showing how participation in the punk subculture helps to maintain a "virtuous circle" (Kennedy 2011) of veganism, and thus by merging these theories of subcultural identity and lifestyle movement participation, I will show how the DIY punk scene encourages lifestyle activism in youths, by providing ongoing support for such lifestyle changes.

### Methods

This study is based on interviews with 23 self-identified vegans in two college towns in the southeastern United States, as well as informal participation and observation in the punk and vegan subcultures in the United States and Europe. I recruited participants through a combination of convenience and snowball sampling. The participants included 10 women and 13 men. At the time of the interviews, their ages ranged from 18 to 31, with a mean and median age of 23. They had been vegan, on average, for 2.89 years at the time of the interview (median 3 years, range 6 months to 8.5 years). At the time they first became vegan, their ages ranged from 16 to 24, with a median age of 21 and a mean age of 20. Six of them became vegan, and 11 of them became vegetarian, while below the age of 18 and living with their parents. At the time of the interviews, in 2002, a little over half of the participants worked part- or full-time, and the rest were students. Eight of the participants were undergraduate students, but the sample also included three graduate students and one high school student.

To analyze the data, I employed Burawoy's (1991, 2000) extended case method as I seek to extend theories of mobilization and retention into lifestyle movements to the case of young vegans. Rather than a grounded theory approach which seeks to discover new theories through generalizations across social situations, or the interpretive case method, which views micro-interaction as expressions of macro structures, the extended case method helps examine the link between micro and macro in terms of the particular forces that shape it (Burawoy 1991). "Rather than being 'induced' from the data, discovered 'de novo' from the ground, existing theory is extended to accommodate observed lacunae or abnormalities" (Burawoy 2000:28). Thus I analyzed the culture and structure of veganism and punk as subcultures and as lifestyle movements, extending existing social movement and political consumption theories to explain individual youths' experiences, while keeping the macro-micro link between subcultures, social movements, and individual participants.

I maintain an analytic focus on vegans both in and out of the punk subculture. Analyzing both cases (punk and non-punk) allowed me to see which mechanisms worked in both groups, and maintaining the comparison between both groups allowed me to see which cultural tools from the punk subculture

particularly enhanced each mechanism. Previous work has shown how, when faced with contradictions in their practices, vegans maintain a self-identity as vegan through authenticity claims (Greenebaum 2012a). If I were to focus on only one group, I likely would have argued here that collective identity alone were sufficient for retention and maintenance of veganism as a lifestyle movement. Thus analyzing the experiences of both punk and non-punk vegans allowed me to see the similarities in mechanisms for recruitment and retention between both groups, as well as how recruitment and retention themselves differ as mechanisms.

### **Veganism and Punk**

Before delving into the analysis, I will develop heuristic definitions for both veganism and punk. According to Haenfler, Johnson, and Jones (2012) definition, veganism is a lifestyle movement. Its primary tactic is for people to consume only non-animal-based products (including food, clothing, personal goods, etc.), much of the work involves veganism becoming a central part of one's identity, and there is no official group one must join to become a vegan. While organizations such as Vegan Outreach or the Vegan Society do exist, one need not join an organization to be vegan. With lifestyle movements, it is more important to engage in everyday acts of resistance through one's lifestyle choices than to be a member of a traditional movement organization (Haenfler, Johnson, and Jones 2012). None of these vegans described engaging in lobbying or state-focused political efforts as a key component of their veganism. Rather, they registered their resistance through their everyday lifestyle, as Sam (age 31) described:

I think also your individual lifestyle is a political statement, too. You don't necessarily just have to be calling people, or rallying, or calling centers, or rallying, whatever, to be politically involved. I think that just by your making choices at the supermarket or whatever, you're effecting political change.

These vegans "aimed at changing cultural and economic practices rather than targeting the state" (Haenfler, Johnson, and Jones 2012:6). Despite this divorcing of cultural and political goals, vegans still used traditional political terms when describing their consumption practices.

All of the 23 participants self-identified as vegan, and 11 of them also self-identified as punk. There exist many subcategories of punk, such as anarcho punks, bike punks, peace punks, Riot Grrrls, crust punks, and so on. My participants came from the "political punk" or "hardcore punk" subculture, which focuses on ideology and politics. To these participants, punk described a state of mind and a willingness to change society. This was accomplished through a DIY (do it yourself) movement, characterized by independent bands,

record labels, and book presses, as well as a politically progressive way of living. While veganism played a large part in their political punk subculture, it was not necessary to be vegan to be punk. For example, David (age 23) defined punk as follows:

As I understand punk rock to mean, it means that you're going to do things your own way, on your own terms, with the goal of making things better for everybody. That's why we ride bikes, and that's why we're vegan—a lot of us. I think there's a million punk bands out there who just want to fuck shit up, or get drunk, or sing love songs...But it's not necessarily punk rock to me. To me, punk rock is a social movement. The DIY mentality is inherent in what punk rock is to me anymore...I don't feel that you have to be vegan to be punk rock, because social activism isn't strictly limited to diet...For some people, it's not worth giving up meat, but it is worth going everywhere on your bike that you humanly can. So I don't think that veganism is a necessary or inherent part of punk rock, but I do think that social awareness is, and I think that veganism is one of the easiest things to do every single day that will make this world a better place. And I think that's punk rock.

While many generative studies of punks tended to focus on style over substantive political issues (Fox 1987; Hebdige 1979), David did not describe punk rock in any way having to do with dress or style. Instead, his definition provides an example of how music and politics often go hand in hand in the punk subculture. I refer to this emic definition of political punk, exemplified by David's quote, when using the term "punk" in this paper. In what follows, I outline three specific aspects of the processes of recruitment and maintenance into veganism as a lifestyle movement, and how the punk subculture facilitated these processes.

### **Recruitment**

How does one get recruited into veganism as a lifestyle movement? Lifestyle changes require conscious deliberation and proceed very gradually (Lorenzen 2012). With lifestyle movements, mobilization is more about changing one's everyday behavior than it is about attending a protest. While people can participate in traditional social movement activism for veganism and animal rights, my participants viewed veganism as an identity shift and a private form of low-conflict action that could be spurred on by a weaker mechanism than high-risk or high-cost social movement participation. Using Ferree and Miller's (1985) conversion and McDonald's (2000) reconfiguration of Mezirow's (1991) transformation theory, I argue that a combination of learning and reflection provides the precursors to recruitment to lifestyle activism. Participants had a catalytic experience, which pushed them to learn more about veganism, then shared their learning with friends, and finally changed their identity and practices to become vegan.

McDonald (2000) outlined seven steps in a "vegan learning process." One of the key steps is simply called "learning," whereby prospective vegans

research information about animal abuse and how to live a vegan lifestyle. My participants engaged in such learning about veganism through reading literature from animal rights organizations, cookbooks, and other vegetarian resource books. Roger (age 21) said that he “got into [veganism] full force” when he purchased a book called *The Yoga Cookbook* (Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centers 1999), as a part of his practicing yoga. The book explains that with the advent of factory farming, veganism is part of a yogic lifestyle. Roger’s learning about veganism exemplified both McDonald’s (2000) catalytic experience of first learning about animal cruelty, and how such an event can spur more investigation into the issue:

Just reading about all the cruel practices that went on, like, how they sometimes de-beak chickens, they take their beaks off so they don’t peck each other, and how they’ll carry these cows in these huge trailers to the slaughterhouse, and some of them get so hot and it’s so cramped that some of them pass out, and so when they’re unloading them, if any of the cows can’t walk, they’ll just drag it and throw it in the pile of dead carcasses, and just leave it there to die. . .stuff like that. I was like, okay, I always wondered what was up with the animal industry, the meat industry, and now that I see what’s going on, I had this huge moment of clarity, like there was all this stuff going on that I needed to know about. And that was kind of a real turning point for me. Because then I really got, I became proactive. It became a really proactive search for me. That was what signified that I really need to get on the ball. Find out as much as I can and really know what’s going on. So that was kind of a moment of clarity for me.

Roger’s initial catalytic experience jumpstarted his learning more about animal rights and veganism, and encouraged him to become “proactive” about it. Once participants learned about animal cruelty and how to live a vegan lifestyle, they changed their entire worldview and experienced the world as a vegan (McDonald 2000). While Hirschler (2011) did not find that becoming vegan resulted in any change of identity for his participants, I found that my participants would reconstruct their identity around moral and ethical issues. Meredith (age 25), described a lecture she attended the night she decided to become vegan:

We went and saw this Tibetan monk who spoke at the university, and just by understanding his example of how to be peaceful, and how he achieved peace after enduring terrible cruelty for decades, I don’t know, I just came home that night after hearing him speak and just decided that that would be my role in terms of being a peaceful person. So after that, I just never ate any animal products again.

Through an Eastern religious philosophy, Meredith found a community of morality upon which she based her new identity and practices, her worldview. Meredith’s catalytic experience (McDonald 2000) encouraged her to rethink her identity as a moral person. She said her veganism changed how she viewed herself, even from when she was vegetarian: “I had been vegetarian in high school, but I think I was just doing it cause it was novel or something. Like I didn’t have

the same moral basis for being vegetarian.” Once she became vegan, however, she viewed herself differently: “To me, it’s just about living in a moral sense. It’s my version of spirituality and religion. (. . .) It just helps me, I think, to be a better person, and to just be more compassionate in the way that I do things.” Ferree and Miller (1985) argue that such conversion events can promote enhanced commitment to one’s cause: “The positive feelings produced by conversion can initiate a process of extensive commitment as new members seek to validate their new self-image” (p. 51). In the case of vegans, they validated their new self-image through changing their entire lifestyle accordingly.

The punks involved in this study experienced further methods of recruitment only available within the punk subculture. Following Futrell, Simi, and Gottschalk (2006) revision of Bennett and Peterson’s (2004) definition of music scenes, I view the punk subculture as encompassing three interconnected elements: local, transnational, and virtual. On the local and transnational scales, at DIY political punk shows in Europe and in the United States, it is a common occurrence to see a table filled with literature on veganism and animal rights next to the table where the band sold their records and t-shirts. The virtual element of the punk scene links to the local scene, in that many of these punks said they had never heard of veganism until they started listening to punk music, and through participation in the subculture, they met vegans who taught them about the vegan lifestyle. These punks first learned about veganism through listening to records, learning about bands, and participating in the subculture:

The biggest one, the one that had the most impact was the band Crass. They were one of the first punk bands ever, and a lot of their stuff is about vegetarianism. (. . .) They were one of the first bands that we got into, and we started realizing the more records we bought, it was a big thing that the punk movement was a largely vegetarian movement, at the very least. We actually had no idea. The love of the music and the sound of the music came first, but just being conscious people and reading the lyrics, we were just like, “Wow.” (Jason, age 24)

Other ways in which punks learned about veganism were by reading the liner notes of punk records, contacting animal rights groups that were mentioned by punk bands, or reading articles about veganism in zines (DIY magazines). The impact of these “virtual” elements (Bennett and Peterson 2004) reinforces Wood’s (1999) assertion that much of subcultural political learning comes from reading song lyrics and album liner notes. Jason, and many of the other punk vegans, discussed specific bands, songs, and lyrics that awakened their consciousness to veganism and animal rights. To be clear, in my participants’ experiences, it was not only information from the music in terms of lyrics and liner notes, but participation in the subculture itself, that provided the impetus to become vegan. Further, none of my participants reported experiencing any pressure from their vegan friends in the subculture to become vegan.

Their process resembled the other participants' experiences of learning and reflection, with the difference being they learned about veganism specifically through punk.

Once learning this new information about veganism, many of these punk vegans had a specific "catalytic experience" (McDonald 2000). Each of these moments centered on animal rights—realizing the meat they were eating came from an animal, learning what goes into a hamburger, or learning how animals die from being used by the meat and dairy industry. For most of these punks, they experienced a transformation of consciousness in which they understood the concept of animal rights for the first time. Josh (age 22) describes the moment he understood animal rights, which occurred after listening to a punk album:

I listened to one band called Shelter and they were all Hare Krishna devotees, and at the end of their CDs they would have their spiritual masters giving speeches on subjects related to Krishna consciousness, and on one of their CDs they were talking about the reasons why they were vegetarian. Even though I don't have any religious beliefs, just the interconnectedness of equating animal life with human life, the basic value of life really clicked.

Many of these punks described their moment of enlightenment by telling a story, as Josh did above—the story of the moment they understood animal rights, the story of the last time they ate meat, the story of how they became vegan. This activity of storytelling is important to veganism, as a way in which people access emotional resources to mobilize collective action (Ganz 2001; Polletta 2006; Powell 2011). By sharing these stories with others in conversations at shows, and by repeating these stories to themselves, these punks internalized the vegan message. Through these processes of having a catalytic experience, learning about veganism and animal rights, and sharing stories about these issues and moments, these youths transformed their identities and behaviors to become new participants in veganism as a lifestyle movement.

These processes of recruitment into lifestyle activism are further clarified by contrasting them with other theories of recruitment. The methods activists use to recruit new members into traditional social movements typically involve some attempt to change their recruits' belief system. Whether it be through extended conversations and the push/pull methods of social networks (McAdam 1986), by the careful alignment of activists' and targets' belief systems through framing (Snow et al. 1986), or through the quick punch to the gut of moral shocks (Jasper and Poulsen 1995), all these techniques persuade targets to change their ways, to mobilize for this new movement.

Such methods work well to encourage new recruits to participate in protests, campaigns, sign petitions, and other actions, but they seem less effective for lifestyle movements, which favor individual, private action, cultural targets,

and ongoing participation (Haenfler, Johnson, and Jones 2012). Further, researchers indicate that young people are more interested in prefigurative politics than they are in participating in formal political organizations (Gordon and Taft 2011; Hustinx et al. 2012; Quéniart 2008). The iterative process depicted here, of consuming new information and reflecting upon it, to then go about changing one's identity and everyday living habits, is more telling of how people—especially young people—come to change their entire lifestyles.

### **Social Support and Retention**

Initial recruitment to veganism as a lifestyle movement happened through catalytic experiences, learning, and a shift in identity and practices. However, these processes are insufficient for maintaining a vegan lifestyle. Participants in lifestyle activism need social support for retention. This is especially important for veganism, which affects many areas of one's life, including practical aspects like grocery shopping and social situations like eating with friends. All of my participants found it easy to maintain their veganism by shopping for their own food and by cooking their own meals. They found the more difficult situations to be eating with friends and family who were not vegetarian or vegan.

In my interviews, I asked participants to respond to a series of hypothetical situations regarding holiday meals and meals with friends, and all of them responded with real-life examples of such situations. Further, all of them responded with practical solutions to these difficult situations that allowed them to maintain both their veganism and their friendships. For example, Ralph described his friend's birthday party at a steakhouse: "One of my friends had a birthday a while back, and she wanted to go to Longhorn Steakhouse. And I knew there was nothing I could eat there, except maybe a baked potato or salad. So I ate before, and when I was there, I just drank a lot of beer." Nearly every respondent spoke of eating before an event, bringing food to an event, or planning ahead with the host to make sure they had food to eat. My participants easily resolved these situations through planning and discussion. Similar to Greenebaum's (2012b) study of vegans engaging in impression management to save face in difficult situations, these cultural tools seemed relatively easy for my participants to develop on their own through time, experience, and practice.

The more difficult issues for these vegans concerned their everyday relationships with their non-vegan friends and family. All of my participants reported being teased or questioned by family and friends, to varying extents. Some engaged in light-hearted joking, as Charles said his meat-eating friends "joke with me, like 'You're going to get vitamin D for death.' Then they start joking like, 'Yeah, we're going to eat a big old steak,' stuff like that. But it's

joking. We go back and forth.” Others reported their friends and family simply did not understand veganism, as in Meredith’s case: “A lot of people that I knew before I was vegan, after I became vegan were like, ‘What is that? Some kind of weird phase.’ Or ‘Are you on a diet?’” Conversely, others said their non-vegan friends became very invested in the purity of their veganism, such as Bronwyn’s friends: “They say ‘Hey, how do you know what’s in that bread?’ It’s like they’re being the vegan police and they aren’t even vegan!” And almost all of them reported that their family members worried about the healthfulness of their vegan diet, which I describe in more detail below. Despite these jokes, questions, and concerns, all of the participants in this study ultimately found the social support they needed from family, friends, and the punk subculture.

Researchers have shown that family members typically present problems to youths who decide to become vegan or vegetarian (Greenebaum 2012b; Hirschler 2011; McDonald 2000). However, most of my participants experienced only initial skepticism and their families eventually supported their veganism in one way or another. Most of my respondents became vegan (or vegetarian before vegan), while below the age of 18 and living at home with their families. Just as young environmentalists experienced some backlash from their families who eventually supported their activism (King 1995), these vegans more often found acceptance from their parents, whether immediate or gradual.

My female participants generally reported finding eventual support from their families, with a few experiencing sustained negative reactions from their families. Most of the positive familial support came to male participants in my research, echoing Merriman’s (2010) findings that families often act neutrally or favorably to men’s vegetarianism, but hostilely to women’s vegetarianism. Similar to other research on family reactions to veganism (Hirschler 2011), all of my participants’ parents most often worried about the healthfulness of a vegan diet. After extended discussions, most of their parents eventually accepted that veganism could be a healthy diet. Amanda (age 20) said her mother bought a carton of soy milk, and then called Amanda to say, “You’re right! It does have the same nutrients as milk!” Other participants said their parents were simply happy to see them eating vegetables as opposed to the junk food teenagers often eat.

While these participants experienced uncharacteristically supportive reactions from their families when they initially became vegetarian and vegan, at the time of this study, most of the participants lived on their own. Many participants who had become vegetarian while living at home did not become vegan until they lived away from their families. This pattern resembles religious conversions in several ways. Living away from their family meant they were now “autonomous and self-sufficient” (Smilde 2005: 779), which allowed them to

change their lifestyle. As sociologists of religion explain conversion through “pull” factors rather than “push” factors, we see that these vegans were not “pushed” into veganism by their personal problems, but were rather “pulled” by their social contacts. Finally, conversion to veganism, like conversion to evangelical Christianity, “added value” (Smilde 2005: 769) to these new social ties. They now had one more thing in common with their new friends: veganism.

Several respondents sought out a supportive community through people they met in yoga classes or at a local natural foods cooperative. Even if their friends were not vegan, they were supportive of veganism:

There’s always a little ceremony, like “Okay, everyone gather around. Who brought what and is it vegan?” You know, so everyone knows what’s vegan and what’s not vegan. That’s been one of the best things. Having these potlucks with these people, and it’s like, okay, everyone cooked this vegan food, and it’s always tasty, but that’s never really the focus of the attention. (Roger, age 21)

Very few participated in organized animal rights groups, as Bronwyn did: “I didn’t really have that many animal rights activist friends. I had very few friends like that. I was the anomaly in my circle of family and friends (. . .) So I could go to these animal rights and vegetarian groups, and I would participate sometimes in protests or potlucks.”

Outside of these organizations, the vegans affiliated with the punk subculture primarily found support from the subculture itself. Seymour (age 20) said he listened to bands specifically because they supported animal rights, and he wrote to them about their beliefs: “Dropdead, they’re big on animal rights, Dystopia, big on animal rights, and they have the same philosophy that I do. (. . .) I wrote that band Dystopia and asked them if they were vegetarian or vegan, and they said yes.” They also found other vegan friends within the punk scene: “Almost all my friends are at least vegetarian, and a big number are vegans. (. . .) It’s just punk rock and veganism and vegetarianism go hand in hand” (Katie, age 19). For the most part, these vegans eventually found support from their families. But once they moved out of their parents’ houses, they created new social networks and needed to find new sources of support for their veganism. Thus social support, from friends, family, and the punk subculture, provided some of the necessary tools to maintain veganism. In the following section, I will show how the informal structure of veganism as a lifestyle movement also provided this support and assisted in the maintenance of their veganism.

### **The “Virtuous Circle” of Veganism**

Besides social support, how else do lifestyle movement participants maintain their activism? Lifestyle movements embody more diffuse structures than do traditional, bureaucratic social movement organizations. The dense but infor-

mal networks in lifestyle movements (Bennett 2012; Haenfler, Johnson, and Jones 2012) provide cultural resources such as environmental themes (Lorenzen 2012), and even self-actualization (Atkinson 2012). That is, vegan social networks provide participants with cultural tools that inform their vegan practices and shape their vegan identities. For all of the vegans in this study, these cultural tools included things like learning and sharing cooking skills. The vegans in the punk subculture also engaged in prosumption, or the active production and informed consumption of vegan subcultural items and practices (Chen 2012). This included listening to music, reading liner notes, playing in punk vegan bands, writing vegan zines, and participating in Food Not Bombs. These social networks and shared cultural tools provided a “virtuous circle” (Kennedy 2011) that further helped retention in veganism as lifestyle activism.

Whereas some researchers have found collective identity to be a primary factor in participation in certain lifestyle movements, such as straight edge (Haenfler 2004), I found that self-identifying as vegan was not enough to sustain vegan practices. Several participants had weak vegan networks and described numerous instances in which they purchased or consumed non-vegan products, all while self-identifying as vegan:

I would consider myself vegan, but I would still eat honey, and occasionally, maybe very occasionally, have something that has some dairy product in it or something like that. So in terms of level, of being strictly vegan, I mean, I guess by the strict vegan definition I wouldn't be, but I still consider myself vegan. (Sam, 31)

Like Sam, many other participants described times they did not ask whether something was vegan, or they knowingly consumed non-vegan products, as Para (age 25) said: “I would break my vegetarianism often for these hot wings. And there was no rhyme or reason to it; it was just to maximize my enjoyment in life.” The key difference between my participants who did or did not regularly sustain vegan practices lies in their social networks. Those who maintained stricter vegan practices also participated in the punk subculture, which acted as a “virtuous circle” (Kennedy 2011) and helped them to maintain their lifestyle activism. In her writing on the virtuous circle with regards to ecological citizenship, Kennedy (2011) describes it as a close-knit social network that shares knowledge and resources on how to live sustainably. She found that having ecologically oriented social networks enhanced participants’ environmental practices, whereas an absence of such networks harmed their practices. In this section, I analyze the punk subculture as a virtuous circle, demonstrating the social networks and cultural resources the punk subculture provided to vegans to help them maintain veganism as a form of lifestyle activism.

The punk subculture provided punks with information on veganism, and possibly the impetus to become vegan, as described above. The connection to

the punk subculture was also with the more abstract ideals the subculture promotes:

I was listening to some of those bands before I was vegetarian, like Youth of Today. But when I got more into the music scene, it became easier to become vegetarian. It was almost like you felt obligated to do it. But I think the music came first, but then [being vegetarian] definitely fed the music thing, like I'd read about some vegan band in a zine or something. So I'd read about bands like that and I'd definitely get into them because I felt like, I definitely felt like it helped that I had something in common with those bands. (Lucian, age 19)

Lucian described specifically listening to bands because they were vegan, because he felt a connection to them. But Lucian and the other punks in this study were not just passive consumers. Just as zine-making allowed Riot Grrrls to become active cultural producers instead of passive consumers (Schilt 2003), so too these punks became prosumers (Chen 2012) in the punk subculture in ways that promoted veganism. Josh (age 22), Jason (age 24), David (age 23), and Andrea (age 18) played in political/vegan punk bands, David and Jason organized house shows and vegan potlucks, Ralph (age 24), Andrea, and Mary (age 18) worked with Food Not Bombs, Andrea had a distro (a DIY mail-order catalog) and a zine, and Seymour also wrote a zine. Just as Willis and Schor (2012) found that political consumption increased other forms of political activism, Katie (age 19) described the subculture as encouraging these forms of political participation: "Punk rock ethics isn't just not supporting it, but you find some other way to go about it, rather than to just leave it and just ignore it. A lot of times people have protests or write zines about what is wrong." Below I outline the specific ways in which the punk subculture provided a "virtuous circle" (Kennedy 2011) that encouraged a sustained commitment to veganism.

At a DIY punk show, the evening often begins with a vegan potluck, after which the bands play, and then they sell merchandise and distribute vegan and animal rights literature. David (age 23) described his experiences with punk shows and promoting veganism:

With a lot of the punk rock shows, we do a vegan potluck, that's always great for the touring band to get a free vegan meal. And it helps to show people that you can have a great time and eat well eating vegan, people that are just coming to the show and are not necessarily into the vegan aspect.

David described how punk shows act as a virtuous circle by sharing skills and resources. Moreover, by participating in the act of cooking and eating together, "their (typically) private actions become visible to others" (Kennedy 2011:853). People attending the show for the music will come away with information about animal rights, veganism, and the knowledge of how to cook a vegan meal. A similar sharing of skills and resources occurs with Food Not

Bombs, a widespread affinity group that distributes vegan food to the homeless and needy. Several of the punk participants worked with this group, wherein they gathered discarded food from grocery stores, cooked it, and distributed it every week in the same public location. While not specifically a punk organization, many participants are punk and on a benefit album for Food Not Bombs, all of the bands were punk.

These participants' work with Food Not Bombs is perhaps the closest any of them came to working with a movement organization of any sort, which further sets them apart from traditional social movement activists. In her study of the vegetarian movement, Maurer (2002) contends that local and national vegetarian organizations provide the necessary social support for vegans, who lead a deviant dietary lifestyle: "Vegetarian organizations, despite their lack of public visibility, are the backbone of the vegetarian way of life" (p. 2). My vegan participants did not exemplify this: only one had ever attended a national conference, only two were members of a national organization, and at the time of our interviews, none of the respondents were members of a local vegetarian group.

Andrea (age 18) ran a distro, through which she bought and sold music, t-shirts, buttons, patches, fliers, and books about punk rock and veganism. She also wrote her own zine, which she described as "completely political and about animal rights and there's always something about veganism in every single issue." Especially before the advent of the Internet, zines played a key role in disseminating information throughout the punk subculture (Duncombe 1997; Schilt 2003). Even after the proliferation of Internet resources, many punks still make and distribute zines as part of their underground, DIY activities. One of the first "cookzines," or DIY cookbooks, came about in the early 1990s when the editors of *Hippycore*, a punk zine, created the cookzine *Soy Not Oi*. In the introduction and throughout the cookzine, many of the contributors included essays on why they were vegan or believed in animal rights: "Our message is simple: GO VEGAN! It's not a unique message: anyone faintly in touch with punk rock or animal rights has certainly heard it before" (*Soy Not Oi* p.2). Further contributing to the link between punk and veganism, each recipe is accompanied by a suggested punk album to listen to while cooking the vegan dish.

These shared resources and cultural tools, specifically created to disseminate information about politics and veganism within the punk subculture, furthered the virtuous circle beyond face-to-face interactions. Punk meant more than just providing music, but also producing information on animal rights and veganism. The outward focus of these informal, cultural activities exemplified these vegans' intent to use their personal lifestyle choices as a means for broader social change. These aspects of punk provided a supportive environment for many punks to become and stay vegan.

## Conclusions

To understand recruitment and retention into lifestyle movement, we need to analytically separate those mechanisms. Here, I have shown how factors influencing initial recruitment and subsequent maintenance of veganism as a lifestyle movement differed. Youths experienced initial recruitment through a catalytic experience, which prompted more learning and reflection, which in turn motivated a shift in identity and practices. However, having a vegan identity proved insufficient for maintaining vegan practices. Retention in veganism as a lifestyle movement required two elements: social support from friends and family as well as the cultural tools to provide skills and reinforce motivations to remain a vegan. Prosumption in the punk subculture especially facilitated these processes, as participants reinforced their vegan practices by playing in bands, writing zines, going to potlucks at shows, or working with Food Not Bombs.

Previous scholars have characterized subcultures as resistant but only inherently political, claiming that participants did not understand the extent of their political nature (Hebdige 1979). In contrast to these depictions of seemingly disaffected and style-obsessed youths, these youths engaged in a form of activism—lifestyle activism—through their participation in veganism or also in punk. Some academics take the other side of the argument and claim that subcultures are not so oppositional, and that their so-called resistance is really just everyday, apolitical consumption (Marchart 2003; Weinzierl and Muggleton 2003). In doing so, they effectively de-politicize subcultures. Thus, here, we can see how political subcultures, such as punk, encourage recruitment to and maintenance of veganism as a form of lifestyle activism.

Given the overall positive support for their veganism from friends and family, these youths also provide a counterpoint to many academic studies of youth subcultures, particularly theorists who posit youth subcultures as inherently opposed to “parent culture” (Clarke et al. 1976) and their entire parental age cohort (DeMartini 1992). These processes can equally apply to creating cohesion in autonomous, decentralized movement groups, such as the global justice movement (Fominaya 2010).

Many social movements were founded on consumer activism (Cohen 2003). In contrast to previous research that separates and contrasts citizens and consumers, or public and private actions, recent studies have merged the two and have further shown that boycotting or buycotting leads to higher levels of activism and a wider variety of activism (Willis and Schor 2012). In the case of these vegans, they boycotted animal products and corporations such as McDonald’s, they buycotted vegan companies such as Dr. Bronner’s, and they also participated in direct action for animal rights and veganism, such as Food

Not Bombs. Marchart (2003) argues that until subcultures move from the micro-politics of sartorial resistance into the macro-politics of universal antagonism, they will never effect large-scale changes. However, these vegans and these punks would likely fulfill his criteria for working toward macro-level changes.

To be certain, political consumption includes more than simply boycotting or buycotting (Atkinson 2012). One of the main foci of lifestyle movements is to transform participants' identities so they individually feel connected to the broader collective identity of the movement (Haenfler, Johnson, and Jones 2012). All of these participants cultivated a vegan identity, which was reinforced by the punk subculture. Thus by developing an authentic subcultural identity through cultural production rather than mere consumption (Lewin and Williams 2009; Williams 2006), we can see how subcultural presumption (Chen 2012) in veganism and in punk affected participants' embodied political practices. Future research should further consider the relationship between subcultures and lifestyle movements, and it should also seek to further examine the differing mechanisms of recruitment and retention in lifestyle movements.

#### ENDNOTE

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