



How men are expanding the circle of compassion: what vegan men can show us about care

KEYNOTE

The 5th International Conference on Men and Equal Opportunities: Men who care

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Forthcoming book chapter

- ▶ Aavik, K. (2020). “Vegan Men: Towards Greater Care for (Non)human Others, Earth and Self.” In: *Men, Masculinities, and Earth: Contending with the (m)Anthropocene*. Edited by M. Hultman and P. Pulé. Palgrave Macmillan, xx-xx.

Background

- ▶ Postdoctoral research in the project “Climate Sustainability in the Kitchen: Everyday Food Cultures in Transition“ (2018-2021), University of Helsinki
- ▶ Funding: Kone Foundation
- ▶ Foci of the project:
 - research: cultural change towards more sustainable ways of living and eating, veganism
 - practical intervention: developing low CO² vegan recipes for large kitchens in Finland





+ RESEPTIT

AJANKOHTAISTA

+ TIETOA

+ KAMPANJA

YHTEISTYÖ

YHTEYSTIEDOT



Ilmastokestävä kasvisruoka -kampanja tarjoaa ruokapalveluille, joukkoruokailun asiakkaille ja päättäjille käytännön työkaluja, joilla ilmastokestävien kasvisruokien saatavuuden edistäminen helpottuu. Nettisivuilla on 30 ilmastokestävää ja vegaanista pääruokareseptiä. Ruokapalveluille suunnatut reseptit ovat ravitsemuksellisesti täysipainoisia ja niistä on laskettu annoskohtainen hiilijalanjälki. Reseptipankin, kampanjointimateriaalien, tapahtumien, esityksien ja koulutuksien avulla kampanja tukee ilmastokestävien kasvisruokien tarjoamista ruokapalveluissa. Kampanjan tavoitteena on madaltaa ruokapalveluiden kynnystä tarjota päivittäin ilmastokestävää kasvisruokaa asiakkailleen vapaasti valittavana vaihtoehtona.

HUOM! Reseptisivuilla ei ole vielä tulostuspainiketta. Jos tarvitset reseptistä tulosteen muulla kuin 20 annoksen määrällä, niin otathan yhteyttä osoitteeseen climatekitchen@helsinki.fi

Ilmastokestävä kasvisruoka -kampanja toteutetaan Helsingin yliopiston tutkimushankkeessa **“Ilmastokestävyys keittiössä – ruokakulttuurin murroksen arkiset mahdollisuudet”**. Humanistisessa tiedekunnassa vuosina 2018–2021 toteutettavaa hanketta rahoittaa **Koneen Säätiö**.



Seitanmureke ja metsäsienikastike



Ranskalainen linssekeitto ja aioli



Papu-maapähkinäpata

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Human-animal relations, social and environmental justice in the Anthropocene

- ▶ Damage to ecosystems, rising inequalities
- ▶ Ethical crisis in human-animal relations
 - ▶ 60% of all mammals on Earth are farmed animals (Bar-On, Phillips & Milo, 2018)
 - ▶ Over 70 billion land animals killed for food every year (Faunalytics, 2018)
- ▶ Consumption of other animals as key driver of climate change
 - ▶ Animal agriculture: 18% (Steinfeld et al., 2006, p. xxi) to 51% (Goodland & Anhang, 2009) of all anthropogenic greenhouse gases
 - ▶ Uses 70% of all agricultural land and 30% of all land of the planet (Steinfeld et al., 2006, p. xxi).

Animal justice as a social justice issue

- ▶ Consequences of consuming other animals for human beings: vulnerable groups and communities
 - ▶ Jobs in slaughterhouses among most dangerous work, typically performed by racialised/ethnicised people (Eisnitz, 2006; Fitzgerald, 2010; Sebastian, 2018)
 - ▶ Climate change impacts vulnerable countries and communities in the Global South → environmental refugees
- ▶ Need to move beyond Anthropocentric thinking, expand feminist intersectional paradigms to include species (Twine 2010)

Ways out? Towards more ethical and sustainable food practices

- ▶ Urgent need to adopt more ethical and sustainable ways of living and relating to other species
- ▶ Posthumanist paradigm in gender studies: a welcome turn but not sufficient
- ▶ Care for other animals: symbolic level → material practices (critical animal studies approaches)
- ▶ Rethinking our food practices, food systems:
 - ▶ EAT-Lancet Commission on Food, Planet, Health envisions a Great Food Transformation: food eaten by humans should be both healthy and sustainable = largely plant-based food (Willett et al., 2019)
 - ▶ Plan-based diets suitable, nutritionally adequate and healthy (Melina, Craig & Levin, 2016)

Men, masculinities and ecology: linking environmental & animal justice with gender

- ▶ Men's identities and practices, masculinities: the potential for more egalitarian gender relations
- ▶ Men's roles in moving towards ecological sustainability
- ▶ Ecological masculinities (Hultman & Pulé 2018, p. 51): linking ecology and gender
- ▶ Food and eating practices gendered
- ▶ Vegan men's everyday food practices: towards less violent, more sustainable ways of eating
- ▶ Previous research on veg*n men (Potts & Parry 2010; Rothgerber 2013; Sumpter 2015; Greenebaum & Dexter 2017; Mycek 2018; DeLessio-Parson 2017; Aavik 2020)
 - ▶ Veganism offers potential for doing masculinity differently
 - ▶ Ecofeminist scholars: by refraining from consuming other animals, men disrupt the link between hegemonic masculinity and meat eating (Adams 1990)
 - ▶ By becoming vegan, men open up avenues for “the negotiation of new, nonnormative masculinities that challenge our traditional understandings of what it means to be manly” (Wright 2015: 26).
 - ▶ Vegan men leave some gendered and other power relations unchallenged (Greenebaum and Dexter 2017)

Care in the context of men's veganism

- ▶ (Eco)feminist ethics of care: expanding ethics of care beyond anthropocentrism (Donovan 1996; 2006)
- ▶ Typical reasons behind veganism: ethics, environment, health → linked by the idea of care: developing and sustaining relationships of care towards nonhuman animals, ecosystems, self-care
- ▶ Veganism framed through the notion of care: “a responsive, affective ethics of nonviolence, built on feminist ethics” (Jenkins 2012, p. 505), interspecies care (Fraser and Taylor 2018)
- ▶ Putting care in practice: care grounded in everyday practice. Necessary to demonstrate our concern about something in our material practices, beyond discursive declarations.
- ▶ Embodied everyday practice of care - for nonhuman animals, Earth, other humans and the self.
- ▶ Care traditionally associated with women's lives and practices. For men, orientation towards care and caring is rather exceptional (Hultman & Pulé, 2018, p.165). For men in particular, veganism offers potential to engage in and/or strengthen their sense and relationships of care.

Vegan men's practices of care: empirical insights

- ▶ How do vegan men practice care?
- ▶ Whether and how is their veganism linked to social justice and gender equality?
- ▶ Nordic context
- ▶ Interviews with 61 vegan men in Finland and Estonia (in total)
- ▶ Age: 18-56, average 34
- ▶ Intersectionally privileged: white, mostly ethnic Estonian or Finnish, typically middle-class, living in urban areas, educated

Key findings: towards greater care

- ▶ Intertwined aspects:

- ▶ 1) Non-human life: other animals and the environment
- ▶ 2) Self
- ▶ 3) Human others: gender and intersectionality

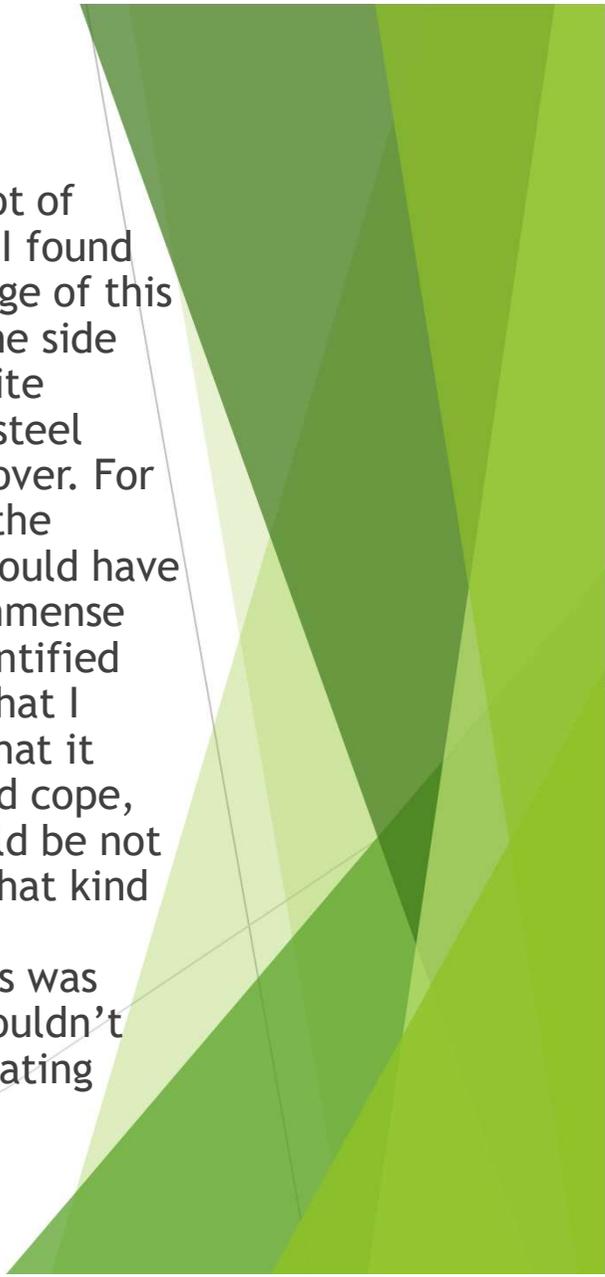


Transition to veganism: recognising a need for change towards more care

- ▶ Diverse narratives of transition
- ▶ Common theme: a (gradual) realisation that a change is needed in one's behaviour towards what was deemed a more appropriate or harmonious way of living, in terms of relating to other species, ecosystems and/or own body and health
- ▶ One of the reasons → more than one, all
 - ▶ Panu, 22, Finland: “The ethical aspect turned me gradually to veganism. I just couldn't consume animal products anymore because I became aware of the horrors and the suffering. So, first it was all about ethics and then I became more aware of the ecological consequences of animal consumption.”
- ▶ Initial focus on self-care → broader care for other life
 - ▶ Timo, 38, Finland: “First, it was only for my own health, but it really changed I think already after being a vegetarian for half a year. It had drastically changed to rather moral or ethical reasons...really feeling with the animals.”

1) Care for other animals, the environment and beyond

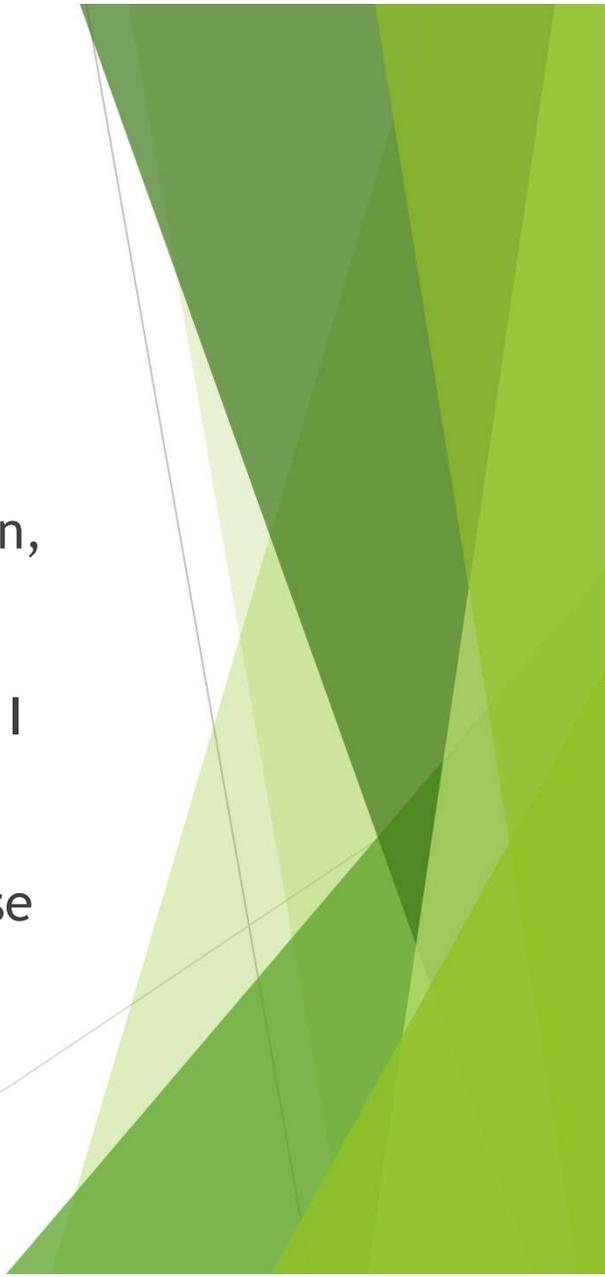
- ▶ Conceptualisation of veganism: the best or the only acceptable way to live, and practice non-violence and care, minimise harm, towards non-human animals and other living beings:
 - ▶ Tapani, 35, Finland: “The leading idea for me...[is] how you can minimise the harm with the resources you have.”
- ▶ Veganism as a way for contributing to a better world:
 - ▶ Eetu, 18, Finland: “I knew I was doing something right and correct by not contributing to animal suffering and also not causing as much environmental impact and then also because the way I eat or because of the vegan diet, I also knew that the Western diet can cause you a heart attack and so by diet and lifestyle you can really make a difference in your life and well-being.”
- ▶ Veganism as a conscious way of life and intervention to the world, rather than a lifestyle or a trend which could be adopted or rejected on a whim.
- ▶ Typically, these aspects - concern for other animals, environment and the self were entangled.

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- ▶ Tom, 41, Estonia: “I was in this resort, this kind of hotel at the base, at the foot of some beautiful mountains covered in rain forest. [...] I just went exploring and I found this concrete pool, swimming pool with the mountains behind it. And at the edge of this pool there was a concrete cell, so it was like concrete on three sides and on one side there were thick metal bars. And inside there was an orangutan... she was... quite lifeless. I mean she was obviously alive. Her hand kind of wrapped around the steel bar... . She did not look at me so much as looked through me. Her eyes glazed over. For all intents and purposes, she was gone. I think she was not...at all engaged in the world. She...I would imagine even if I was able to open the bars, I doubt she would have been bothered to climb out. And that really stuck me. It just hit me with an immense sadness that I felt, looking into her eyes that felt very much like my own. I identified with her as a being, not just another in inverted commas animal. But a being that I identified with, I related to, that I felt like... and I couldn't help but wonder what it would be like if I was in that cage. What kind of life that would be, how I would cope, how I could survive in such a situation? But looking at her, I could imagine, could be not so dissimilar to what it might be like if a human being was in such a state. So that kind of hit home in a new way perhaps for me at the time...that you know...these boundaries I was drawing between myself, others, and then non-human animals was such a farcical distinction that I was really hard for me to cling on to that... I couldn't do that with all human decency. So, I felt that it was not right for me to be treating animals the way I had been.”

2) Personal transformation and care for the self

- ▶ Going vegan as an important life change: broader personal transformation
- ▶ Veganism as a “new normal”, an important part of sense of self
- ▶ Increase in awareness, openness to new knowledge, emergence of a more critical mind, increased empathy:
 - ▶ Timo, 38, Finland: “Veganism has made me a more empathetic person: less arrogant, less ignorant. And also this drastic change, I think that's also freeing a lot. You know, when you grow up in a cultural environment where it's normal that you eat meat and then you find out it's actually wrong: I've been doing that all my life. I never questioned it and now that I start thinking about it I find out it's... more wrong than anything else that I ever did. It's like I've been doing this completely wrong thing, like just completely bad and I've just been doing that for years and I had no idea because everyone is doing it. And that kind of frees yourself from your culture in a way, because you start doubting also other things around you. ... [I became] a more critical thinker towards my cultural environment and also the government or like towards the country that I live in. ... Nobody told me that they [farmed animals] have been caged and that they have never seen the sunlight. Nobody told me that. Where is the consumer protection there? The slaughterhouses should be... should have glass walls and then this information should be available and be provided....I'm certainly much more critical due to the fact that I found out that I had been betrayed all my life, not learning, not being told that it's completely wrong to do what everyone does?”

- ▶ Veganism as putting empathy and care in practice. Veganism → more compassion and care:
 - ▶ Tanel, 31, Estonia: “I talk about some kind of emotions and feelings, then, after I decided to go vegan, I ... I don’t remember how long it took, but like this empathy or love or understanding...towards animals...that increased a lot. I became much kinder. ... The tree that grows here is as important to the world as I am. So yes, I became more caring and loving. Especially towards animals.”
- ▶ Veganism as a source of a more positive sense of self: living according to one’s values, contributing to systemic change:
 - ▶ Ilmari, 27, Finland: “It was it was very very like empowering. It was like you're in control of that because it is, you know, and because I was like, oh I'm responsible for what happens in the farms. But also, you know, in a way you're also not, because you're indirectly responsible. So, it was empowering to be like, well, at least I'm cutting myself out of that.”

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- ▶ Personal transformation as gendered:
 - ▶ Lukas, 25, Finland: “I feel like maybe being male and vegan, it has kind of like opened me up more to these softer emotions or these kinds of things that would not be considered like necessarily as masculine features. Because I have been vegan, that is already something that sets me somewhat apart from these things. It has kind of opened space. And I’ve kind of seen this same thing in a lot of these vegan male friends of mine.”
 - ▶ Emotions in men’s narratives of transition

3) Care for human others: vegan men's gender and intersectional politics and practices

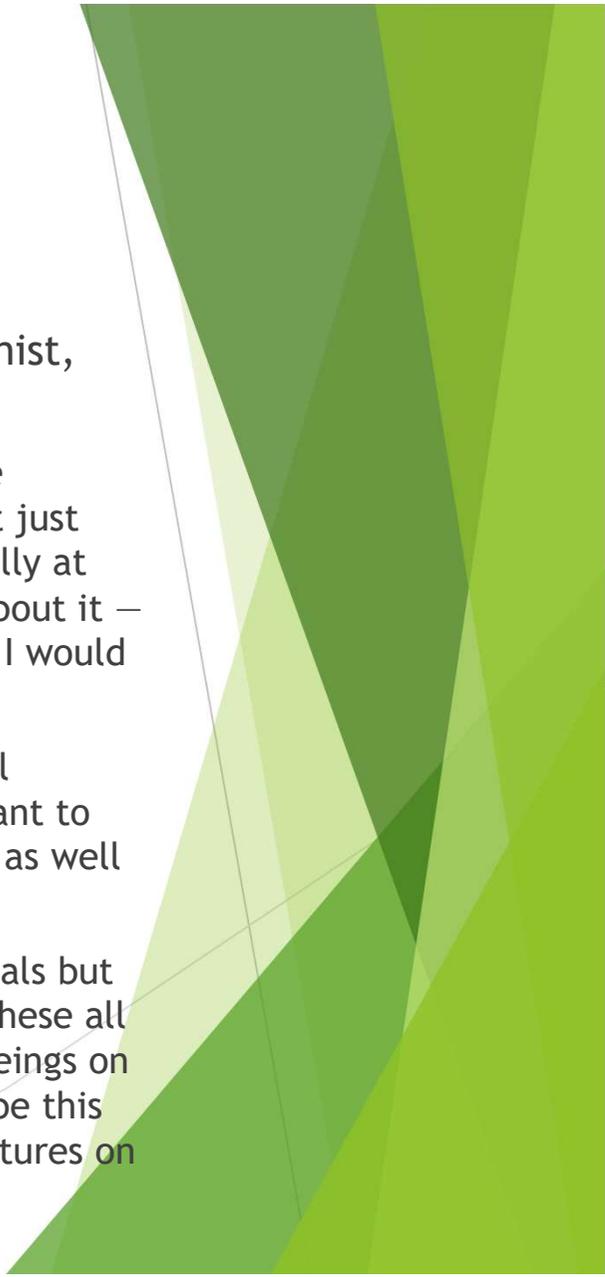
- ▶ Two main ways:

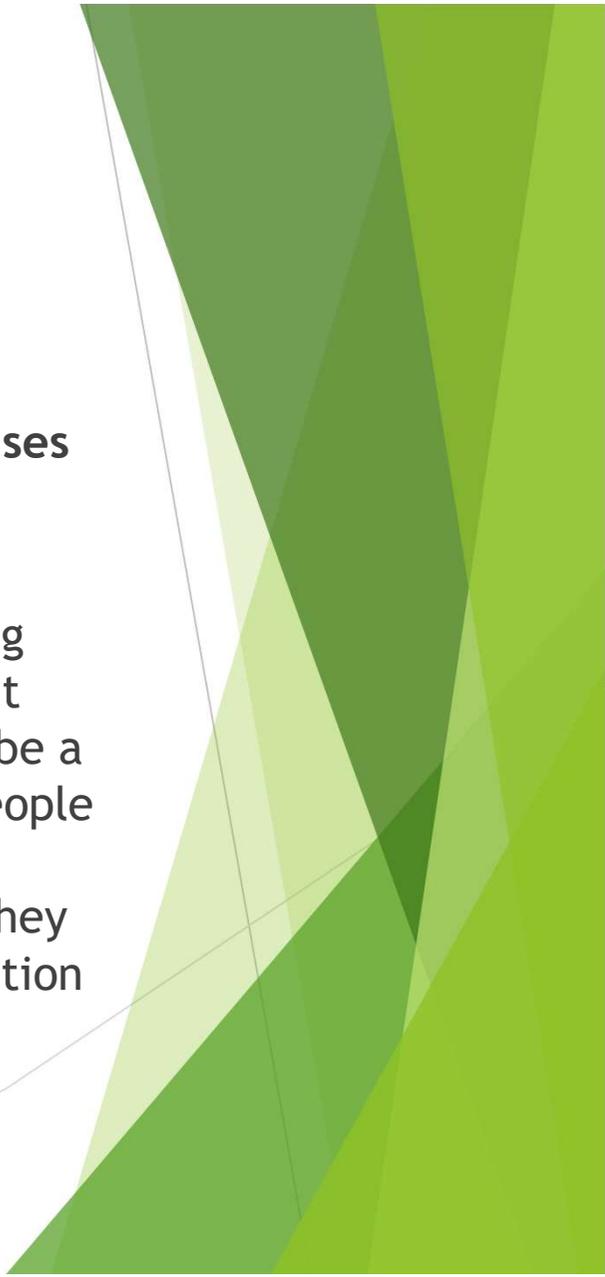
- ▶ **A) Veganism as as part of a broader agenda of social justice, part of one's egalitarian values and progressive politics**

- ▶ Veli-Matti, 34, Finland: “Basically it's the same thing: racism violence, speciesism, veganism, like they all go together. I don't see different being violent to humans or animals.”

- ▶ Expanding understanding of interlinked oppressions:

- ▶ Markus, 40, Estonia: “Veganism makes you very sensitive to injustice towards animals. It is a thing of privilege. We are in such a privileged position in relation to animals that we have taken the right to call them things. ... This idea of superiority has been unpleasant to me since I was a child. Someone taking a position of authority not because of their worth, but for some other reason. For example, in relations between men and women - I have already observed this before my veganism - often men want to show women their place.”

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- ▶ Veganism: helping to develop an awareness of injustice among humans, challenging gendered and other power relations, identifying as pro-feminist, critical of “toxic” masculinity:
 - ▶ Niko, 26, Finland: “Maybe it's kind of that's one thing that's kind of made me question more – also about other things. Kind of examine my values and not just doing things that other people are doing and ‘that’s okay’; look more critically at things ... like for example, the gender issue. I used to be more ambivalent about it – or at least, ‘that doesn’t concern me, so I don’t have to think about it’. So, I would say that it has also had an influence on that.”
 - ▶ Lukas, 25, Finland: “Ever since I kind of started having some kind of political consciousness, the main idea for pretty much all my beliefs is that I don't want to cause any unnecessary harm to anyone. So, veganism goes in line with that, as well as this doing the civilian service and all my other political beliefs as well.”
 - ▶ Gordon, 48, Finland: “I think toxic masculinity is damaging not just for animals but also for women, for you know, people of different sexual preference. I see these all connected and you know, it's a big, it's a big problem for a lot of different beings on this planet when men think that they have to be this way and are raised to be this way. That's I think harmful to a lot of different creatures ... Because all creatures on this planet deserve respect and freedom and equality.”

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- ▶ **B) Connections between veganism and other social justice causes were not explicitly made or seen as unimportant:**
 - ▶ Peeter, 33, Estonia: “I would totally keep them separate. I somehow understand this connection, but ... I think it’s a thing that would alienate men [from veganism] ... I mean, if you put them all together, then if you are vegan, you always have to be a feminist and to support gay rights etc. It would be great if people were like this, but even if someone wants to be all that and agrees to all this, but if you ask them to commit to all this, they would say “Hey, this is too much for me”. ... I see this connection and why there is a synergy there, but I think these should be thought of as separate issues.”

Conclusions

- ▶ Gender, social change, sustainable food practices, human-animal relations at the age of the Anthropocene
- ▶ How might ecological masculinities (Hultman & Pulé, 2018) look like in more concrete terms, through the framework of veganism?
- ▶ Examining men's veganism through the notion of care: towards non-human animals, environment, other human beings and the self
- ▶ Going vegan as a significant and positive life change: putting care in practice
- ▶ Veganism as part of broader leftist values and politics, intersectional agenda of anti-oppression, challenging “toxic” masculinity vs not seeing veganism as part of social justice, not making these links
- ▶ Difficult to neatly separate these men: greater compassion and care for others, even if not consciously or intentionally having or cultivating awareness on gender and intersectional inequalities

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- ▶ Veganism as one concrete way to perform care for men and contribute to the emergence of (more) ecological masculinities
 - ▶ But:
 - ▶ Whether and to what extent does men's veganism translate into broader social and institutional change?
 - ▶ Challenging capitalism, unequal gendered power relations?
 - ▶ Despite these limitations: veganism as a tangible way for men to (begin) to practice care for human, non-human others, environment and the self
 - ▶ Need for Western privileged men in particular (as a group, most responsible for climate change) to challenge dominant forms of masculinity, to cultivate and practice more empathetic, caring and kinder ways of being
 - ▶ Oppressions are interlinked: social and environmental justice intertwined with animal justice
 - ▶ Extending care to other species

Thank you!

