

Article

Eating Animals to Build Rapport: Conducting Research as Vegans or Vegetarians

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Abstract: Notions of hospitality, community, and the fostering of rapport and connection are foundational concerns for conducting research across difference. Drawing on methodological literature, this paper considers how access to various communities and “good” data is structured by the notion that in order to develop rapport researchers accept the “food”, specifically “meat” offered by their hosts. When researchers are vegetarians or vegans, this can entail a conflict in which questions of hospitality, relationships, and responsibility to ethical commitments come to the fore. As such, we analyze methodological literature in which the logic of nonhuman animal sacrifice is considered a means to the ends of research through the development of “rapport”—often coded as an ethical relationship of respect to the participant. We draw on experiences of veg*n researchers to explore how this assumption functions to position the consumption of meat as a necessary undertaking when conducting research, and in turn, denies nonhuman animal subjecthood. We interrogate the assumption that culture and communities are static inasmuch as this literature suggests ways to enter and exit spaces leaving minimal impact, and that posits participants will not trust researchers nor understand their decisions against eating nonhuman animals. We argue that because food consumption is figured as a private and individual choice, animals are not considered subjects in research. Thus, we articulate a means to consider vegan and/or vegetarians politics, not as a marker of difference, but as an attempt to engage in ethical relationships with nonhuman animals. In so doing, we call for the inclusion of nonhuman animals in relationships of hospitality, and thereby attempt to politicize the practice of food consumption while conducting research.

Keywords: hospitality; qualitative methodology; vegetarianism; vegan politics; alimentary identities; nonhuman animal subjects

1. Introduction

In this article we discuss the methodological assumptions concerning rapport building and the ethics of eating for veg*n¹ researchers. Specifically, we examine the suggestion that veg*n researchers should suspend their food ethics while in the field. This imperative to eat “meat” while in the field is premised on two ideas: One, that rapport is important for research to occur, and two, that rapport is built through likeness (wherein veg*nism is predominantly considered a marker of difference). To do so, we analyze the methodological literature that discusses rapport building as premised on building similarity, the ways in which veg*nism functions as a marker of difference, and how this relates to notions of hospitality and nonhumans.² We argue that the erasure of difference is impossible and that attempts to do so are unethical and premised on a particular reading of privilege. Here we advance veg*nism as a possible difference to recover from through its abandonment, while other differences in the field are registered as immutable.

While building rapport through practicing likeness is often suggested as a way to mitigate power differentials in research, we argue that practicing likeness does not remedy power inequities. Rather, practicing likeness employs a shallow understanding of power relations and constrains our concern to humans only. We, therefore, consider how an ethical orientation to others (human and nonhuman) can destabilize the dominant discourses of rapport-as-likeness/veg*nism-as-difference, and offer possibilities for rapport building across difference.³ In this paper, we focus on how veg*nism is interpreted as a marker of difference and as an imposition upon those we interact with.⁴ Drawing on feminist methodological insights, we suggest that to erase difference via the consumption of animals reveals a shallow understanding of power relations, and thus is counter to feminist methodological work that attends to a nuanced understanding of power differentials. Therefore, we seek to destabilize the assumption that to eat “unlike” participants in the field is to exercise power over them. We use Derrida’s and Carey’s insights regarding difference to ask how we can extend notions of hospitality to nonhuman others, and thus provide a preliminary means to consider nonhumans as subjects of research

¹ We use veg*ism as short term for form vegan and/or vegetarian.

² For the sake of clarity we use the terms animals and nonhuman animals (both which come with their own set of problems) interchangeably.

³ This paper considers the situation of veg*n researchers interviewing participants. While the situation of omnivores interviewing veg*ns would be consistent with conducting research across difference, we do not agree that the same power dynamics are at play. For omnivores to practice likeness through the consumption of eating like veg*n researchers does not entail the compromise of one’s ethics, nor is it consistent with the structure of sacrifice we examine herein.

⁴ This is especially poignant in research settings where the researcher is white and participants are non-white. Veg*n identity is often read as a marker of privilege and positioned as a practice of white (usually female), privileged bodies. While looking at the ways in which racialization and gender are read alongside of veg*n identity while in the field is out of the scope of this paper, it is an important aspect to consider in methodological inquiry.

in settings marked by economic and cultural power differentials. To do so, we consider experiences of researchers in settings where interactions are considered already rife with power differentials, and draw on insights of those working in these fields.

Human dominance over nonhuman animals structures, shapes, and traverses much of our socio-cultural practices as humans. Derrida [1] writes that our dominant subjectivity and institutions (such as law and culture) rely on the logic of carnivorous sacrifice wherein humans understand themselves as superior to animals. This notion of superiority is based on humans denying certain capacities (e.g., language, responsibility, relation to death, and many others) to nonhuman animals, yet it is on the basis of this disavowal that humans constitute what it is to be human [1,2]. Within this structure of humanist superiority, nonhuman animals can be put to death or otherwise exploited so long as they are understood as means to human ends, including the use of animals as food over which rapport is built.

Derrida [2] refers to this as a “sacrificial structure” that operates to render nonhuman animals as noncriminally killable, “such are the executions of ingestion, incorporation, or introjection of the corpse. An operation as real as it is symbolic when the corpse is ‘animal’ (and who can be made to believe that our cultures are carnivorous because animal proteins are irreplaceable?)” (p. 278). In that Derrida highlights the pervasiveness of animal instrumentalization as dominant cultural practices for humans, these practices obviously characterize and shape research design, settings, and interactions. Thus, we consider the animals consumed during a research meal as an operation of the logic of sacrifice wherein the bodies of animals are a means to human ends—specifically rapport between researchers and participants. We interrogate how this privileges an idea of rapport-as-sameness/veg*ism-as-difference, and alimentary choices as individual, depoliticized lifestyle choices. We suggest expanding conceptions of hospitality alongside a complex and dynamic understanding of power relations that enable researchers to maintain their food politics as a way of both engaging ethically with nonhuman others, and as a way of constituting community with both human and nonhuman animals that is open to welcoming as well as to disagreement.

2. Veg*nism as Difference

Meat-eating has a long-history as a dominant social practice (regardless of the realities of meat-eating being reserved for those of high socio-economic status and/or being a very infrequent practice). For many societies, to reject animal flesh is to position oneself outside of dominant social norms [3]. As well, theorizing and investigation concerning meat-eating and veg*nism often consider these practices in ways that produce and perpetuate the notion that meat eaters are normative and veg*ns are those who deviate from this norm [4–7].

For example, Twigg’s “hierarchy of foods” is divided according to the following groups: taboo (not permitted by dominant culture’s boundary, e.g., human flesh, raw flesh, flesh of carnivores); meat (dominant culture’s boundary, e.g., meat of herbivores, red and white); animal products (vegetarian boundary, milk from mammals and eggs); and, fruit and vegetables (vegan boundary). Twigg, writing in 1983, is interested in the symbolic role of food in the construction of society, particularly the ingestion of flesh as a practice of dominant culture, related to status, cultural-uplift, and dominant masculinity [6].

For instance, she identifies a common trope that the more bloody the piece of meat, the more virility the consumer will take on. This belief is related to ideas about gender and sexuality, resulting in the dominant notion that red meat is for “men”, and less bloody white meat is for women as the consumption of “weaker” white meat will not cause aggression or sexual excitement. She writes, “eating, as has been commonly remarked, produces a particularly intimate identification with the consumed product [sic]: we are what we eat” [6] (p. 18). Twigg does not raise an ethical objection to the consumption of nonhuman animals. Instead, her interest appears to lie in analyzing taken-for-granted cultural practices.

Thus for Twigg, the consumption of meat is not a neutral process, but constitutes an intimate relationship between consumer and consumed: “the eating of meat involves a literal incorporation of the animal, and as such, presents us with the ambivalences and complexities of our own attitudes to animals and the animal, nature and the natural” [6] (p. 18). Veg*ism has historically been linked to political movements such as feminism, nuclear disarmament, nonviolence, and ecofeminism. It can be practiced in the attempt to achieve a less exploitative relationship with animals, as a component of spirituality, and for health reasons. Thus, food and meat are not neutral choices, but are tied to and serve as means to practice various relationships to political agendas, to others, to the self, and as a means by which to engage with or resist gender norms.

Recent research that shows that veg*nism continues to function as a marker of difference and “meat”-eating as a marker of dominant (and sometimes retrograde masculinity) [3,8–16]. To eat “meat,” Derrida writes, is to practice dominant western subjectivity, as “the subject does not want just to master and possess nature actively. In our cultures, he accepts sacrifice and eats flesh” [2] (p. 281). Thus, to reject “meat” can be an act that undermines dominant modes of relating to one another, and to nonhuman animals. Veg*nism, as a practice counter to dominant social norms, can be taken as a rejection of cultural identities [3,9,12,17–20]. As Taylor writes, “declining to eat meat is to become a different kind of person, and, as far as many people are concerned, to become an undesirable person at that” [12] (p. 83). Thus, to identify in this way can (supposedly) present a threat to rapport, when rapport is premised upon similarity between persons.

3. Building Rapport through Similarity

The assumption that to “get along” or to build rapport with our participants we must be “like” them permeates the methodological advice given to researchers. In literature concerned with qualitative research, those “in the field” are often encouraged to build rapport with their respondents in order to elicit rich material, build trust, and learn more about their area of study [21–23]. Rapport is often framed as a tool in the researcher’s tool belt. Researchers are recommended to spend time in the field before beginning research to make connections, and to find “gatekeepers” to aid with access to human participants and institutions [24–26]. Feminist researchers, however, have questioned the ethics of forming relationships to elicit data [27–29]. They have suggested that building rapport for the purpose of research is manipulative and contradictory to building relationships and trust (the purported goal of simulating likeness). Despite these concerns raised by feminist researchers, building rapport with those in the field and with respondents continues to be framed as key to gaining access to insight from participants, and to the ability to “check” the data collected.

Researchers are often advised to think about how they may be able to bond with their participants. For example, Harrington suggests “ethnographers gain access to information to the extent that they are categorized as sharing a valued social identity with participants or as enhancing that identity through their research” [30] (p. 609). These formulations assume that the ability to get along with participants is a tool of research, and, unlike disagreement, shared identity elicits “good” material and is “more” ethical. Conversely, presenting or foregrounding difference in research settings is positioned as argumentative and as potentially exploiting power relations to assert opinions. Thus, there is the assumption that “differences” between the researcher and their participants should be downplayed, while likeness or “shared social identity” should be used to build connection.

Harrington [30] further suggests that when ethnographers are different from their participants, the sorts of stories they elicit will be likely to be “self-presentation” rather than experiential stories, and therefore a *hindrance* to data collection. Shared “insight” through moments of rapport is assumed to result in closer approximations of “truth” [31]. For Kerfoot, a Canadian (and vegetarian) graduate student, partaking in a formal summer school in Pangnirtung, Nunavut, Canada, meant a consideration of how he planned to act during this trip:

Inuit culture is rooted in hunting, so I decided months before I went that I would at least taste any meat that was offered to me. I felt that refusing to eat “country food,” as it is called, would be an egregious insult to my hosts and would impose limits on what I could learn. To be clear, I didn’t feel that I was merely following protocol to be polite: for me, one of the points of cross-cultural learning is to explore the limits of one’s deepest values—and this includes vegetarianism. Since Inuit emphasize experiential learning, I decided that taking part in country food was part of the experience [32].

Here, difference was considered and decisions about eating nonhuman animals were decided prior to his trip. Kerfoot thus conceptualized that his acceptance in this community was contingent upon his accepting what/who was offered as food, and that if he refused this, his learning would be constrained. Cherry, Ellis, and DeSoucey [33] write about how their consumptive identities (as a vegan researching animal rights activists, a near vegan researching cattle ranching, and a carnist researching politics of foie gras, respectively) also worked to shape what they could or could not learn from their participants. Their reflexive analysis reveals that access to their populations of interest entailed a process of negotiation in terms of their consumption practices and themselves, “...we needed to validate our identities by physically consuming certain items—or not—in front of our participants” (p. 236). For Ellis, his veg*n politics were suspended as a strategy for retaining access to the cattle ranchers he was studying. Ellis built rapport via notions of similarity to ranchers, mentioning his childhood in Idaho, and that his uncle was a cattle producer. They write:

...the ranchers invited Ellis to one of their homes for a lunch of hamburgers. During the meal, one of the ranchers began reminiscing about removing the ‘cancer eye’ from the animal they were eating...he looked for Ellis’s reaction, giving him a smirk...Even though Ellis has become primarily vegan since this incident (though not as a direct result), flinching at the story or spitting out the burger would have compromised his access and rapport [33] (p. 241).

Ellis, whose diet had changed from carnist to veg*n over the course of his research, chose not to disclose his ethics to his participants. Instead, the erasure of difference via the consumption of nonhuman animals was seen as a necessary endeavour for the sake of his research: “Since many ranchers seemed worried that he was not on their side, despite his new veg*n diet, Ellis continued to eat meat when he saw the situation unavoidable, such as during interviews conducted at restaurants” [33] (p. 244). Cherry *et al.*’s [33] understanding follows this rapport-as-sameness/veg*nism-as-difference dualism wherein access was contingent upon proving oneself, and where this entailed eating the products their studies involved. The power relations surrounding hospitality further complicate interactions in research settings where food is considered a marker of similarity or difference.

4. Hospitality and “Food Choices”

Veg*n researchers in the field (and in various cultural settings) are often constrained by dominant notions of hospitality and norms of politeness. For Derrida [2], hospitality “is a philosophy, a thought, a writing, a doing” (p. 100) that would ideally mean an unconditional welcoming of the other. In practice, however, he describes the notion as “hostil/pitality” (p. 110). This is because hospitality, in order to be extended to a guest, entails a power relationship—the ability to invite. Thus, “a ‘host’ is someone who takes on or receives strangers, who gives to the stranger, even while remaining in control” [2] (p. 110). Furthermore, the status of “other,” for which one is held responsible to offering an unconditional welcome, is based in humanist subjectivity and thus is restricted to other humans, “man as other, the other as man” [2] (p. 279). The power dynamics of hospitality while in the field with participants, or at their homes, is compounded by the social significance of shared meals. Mennell, Murcott and Van Otterloo write: “Sharing food is held to signify ‘togetherness,’ an equivalence among a group that defines and reaffirms insiders as socially similar” (as quoted in [34] (p. 110)). The social importance placed on “food as a means of expressing social solidarity” [34] (p. 110) therefore shapes the methodological literature regarding similarity and also influences how researchers feel they are constrained and/or can express difference in research settings.

For example, Sutton [35] notes that there was an assumption that while “in the field” one should adopt the practices of those with whom they were researching. For Sutton, people were especially concerned about how a man would be viewed in Greece as a vegetarian given dominant notions about masculinity and traditions of hospitality. Sutton notes that his commitment to vegetarianism was interpreted by his colleagues as a lack of commitment to his research, “He [a colleague] was not the only one who questioned the idea that I would carry my dietary preferences with me into the field. There was a lingering implication of self-indulgence, or lack of commitment to one’s work in the idea that one wouldn’t embrace the maxim ‘when in Rome...’” (p. 5). This concern was premised on the notion that this alimentary identity would function as a marker of difference that would negatively affect his welcome in the community and in turn his research relationships.

Similarly, Kerfoot’s reflection of his time in Pangnirtung, Nunavut also demonstrates that the consumption of animals was a practice that he understood as necessary for building good relationships with his hosts:

The week we spent camping was when eating nonhuman animals came up. Our meals were largely comprised of bannock and meat: we ate seal, char, duck, and beluga whale. The

setting certainly made a huge difference. I was surrounded by hunters who respect animals, even as they hunt them, and who were willing to share their “catch” with me. I chose to accept, and I don’t regret that choice. Our hosts were very happy to see us enjoy country food, with many saying so explicitly. (This happiness is perhaps not surprising, since even habitual meat-eaters have a history of displaying their disgust when Inuit offer them raw meat) [32].

Kerfoot cautions us that his behaviour exceeded norms of politeness in that it was more so consistent with norms about cultural learning in this setting. He also indicates that the questioning of eating nonhuman animals was impacted by other dynamics and histories of power. It is necessary to consider that the context of Nunavut is specifically shaped by Canada’s history of colonialism, is geographically remote, and in the north of the country. Furthermore, Kerfoot notes that the cost of food is “prohibitively expensive” [32]. Kerfoot highlights the fact that although animals are hunted and consumed by humans, their subjecthood is (largely) not denied. While this orientation does not solely view animals as objects, in the context of Kerfoot’s summer school, their bodies are used within the logic of sacrifice wherein nonhuman animals are positioned and used as means to human ends. In this case, the end was access to cross cultural learning.

Considering Cherry *et al.*’s [33] work, not only was Ellis’s permission bound up with his eating meat to prove likeness and build rapport, but many of the interactions he had with participants occurred in their homes. His ongoing access, therefore, was premised on his performance as a good guest. They write: “...Ellis could not have continued his participant information and interviews with cattle ranchers had he refused to eat meat or stopped eating the meat they served him” (p. 242). This is consistent with the premise that food and consumption function as a “crucial manner of self-constitution and [that] alimentary choices are a means of expressing adherence to a social group” [12] (p. 73). The act of sharing a meal therefore presents ethical dilemmas for the researcher/guest. If rapport is built (only) through similarity, then to reject the food one is offered is to assert difference, and to thus forgo rapport; the implications of doing so are compounded by being someone’s guest.

The power relations inherent in a situation of hospitality often entail accepting the “food” one is offered; this often means that eating animals is the “polite” (to humans) choice. For example, cultural anthropologist, Lorena Gibson’s blog post “Suddenly non-vegetarian: Dilemmas in anthropological research” chronicles her navigation of food choice and politics in a research setting. Gibson writes that she maintained her vegetarianism in settings where it was normative and when there were convenient vegetarian options:

Being vegetarian was no problem on my trips to Kolkata (India) where vegetarianism is normal for many...and my (Muslim) research participants usually included a vegetarian dish in their meals. I even found vegetarian options at weddings I attended (which was a relief, as it is considered rude not to eat at a wedding *and I wanted to be a good guest*) [emphasis added] [36].

Here, Gibson considers vegetarianism as tenable provided it neither functioned as an outright marker of difference nor functioned to position her as “rude”. Gibson, therefore, signals how vegetarianism works to identify someone as different—and when attached to white researcher bodies—is often read as an extension of privilege and power over participants and an imposition to

those around them. However, the assignment of a “privileged” identity to those who do not consume animals is to ignore the realities of “meat” production. Indeed the ability to be like others and to not ask for accommodation is a signal of privilege in and of itself.⁵

When presented with “meat” at a participant’s home in Papua New Guinea, Gibson recalls that

As a guest, I was offered my plate of food first. All eyes were on me as I accepted it and sat down to eat. I had seconds to decide whether to decline the pork and risk offending my hosts, or whether to eat what was on the plate in front of me. I ate it. I was quite unwell afterwards (not having eaten meat in some years) but preferred this to the discomfort I thought I would have caused by refusing the meal cooked for me [36].

Thus, Gibson’s decisions about what/who she was eating were constrained by common notions about hospitality. Politeness and a desire to remain on good terms with participants overcome the consideration of the animal consumed. These factors also close down possibilities for examining how speciesist power relations shape this situation, “the utterly unselective omnivore—‘I’m easy, I’ll eat anything [anyone]’—can appear more socially sensitive than the individual who tries to eat in a way that is good for society⁶” [38] (p. 32). In so doing, ethical attention concerning the host-guest experience is limited to humans; hospitality for the guest does not consider the pig over whose body rapport is built. The structure of sacrifice, in this instance, operates to position a meal of this animal as the means from which rapport is established and maintained. This is consistent with methodological literature that recommends that veg*n researchers consume nonhuman animals while in “the field”.

Animals can also be used as a means to achieve insider status. Taylor [12] cites the example of a vegetarian co-worker who began eating meat as a way to mark membership in a community, “she began to eat meat again in the Yukon, where eating locally-hunted animals symbolized belonging to a community that she had chosen, whereas a vegetarian diet would have marked her as an urban outsider” (p. 83). Likewise, Sutton also chose to consume meat strategically: “as long as I partook of meat at Easter, showing myself to be part of the human community. I had instinctively decided to make this exception in order to be a full ‘participant observer’ in Easter celebrations. And while it was a daunting task...it was only retrospectively that I realized how strategic this decision had been” [35] (p. 6). Here, the strategic use of the animal’s body as food follows the logic of sacrifice wherein animals are used as means to human ends.

The consumption of the animal is used as a means by which Sutton marked his membership in the “human community”. Therefore the practice of eating animals works to produce and perpetuate dominant boundaries between human and animals. In producing nonhuman animals as objects over which rapport (and thus research) can occur, their subjectivity is denied and possibilities for engaging in ethical (research) relationships are foreclosed. These examples illustrate situations wherein veg*n ethics were marginalized in favour of using animals to build rapport (understood as only being possible by achieving insider status). Whether insider/outsider status is tenable, achievable, and/or desirable has begun to be questioned in the methodological literature. Researchers have begun to problematize the

⁵ Sunaura Taylor argues that to ask for accommodation is not an assertion of privilege, but instead politicizes facets of our identities and practices that are commonly dismissed as individualized personal preferences and/or struggles. See [37].

⁶ Here we consider society as including nonhuman animals.

possibility of assuming one can be “like” participants in that a whole range of other identities are at play in the fieldwork setting [39]. This debate considers the ways in which identities are understood as fluid, complicated, and enacted in relation to others.

5. Attending to Difference

Difference in regard to ethical relationships with nonhuman animals is largely ignored by contemporary literature that attends to the topic of difference. However, this body of work does provide a basis from which to theorize difference specific to consumption practices. Power differentials and differences such as gender, racialization, age, income, housing, and many others have been issues to which qualitative researchers have long been attuned [39–42]. Consequently, researchers must consider their roles as researchers in the field in addition to the other identities they bring and co-create while researching [43]. For example, Davids [44] discussed the difficulty entailed by interviewing conservative female politicians in Mexico and Vrasti [45] decided against researching with communities in Guatemala and Ghana because of the unequal power relations and colonial history of research.

Likewise, Horowitz [46] argued that if we understand research and identities as co-constructed, “researchers should take note and document the process by which their identities are negotiated and constructed in the settings they study. These negotiations, in themselves, provide insights into how the setting members perceive and act toward people with different social characteristics” (pp. 412–413). Researchers are advised not to assume the sorts of interactions they will have, nor which identities will become salient in encounters. Indeed, this methodological literature suggests that while identities are linked to long-standing histories, they are also enacted in each moment and interaction anew. Thus, considering power differentials in research is crucial and cannot be mitigated by presenting ourselves as “like” others.

Increasingly, there is a call for researchers not only to attend to the way difference is at work in their research, particularly in research that is concerned with marginalization, but to also include it in their analysis. In Sultana’s [47] reflections on international research, she writes that “ethical research is produced through negotiated spaces and practices of reflexivity that is critical about issues of positionality and power relations at multiple scales” (p. 375). Thus, reflection in the field focuses on questions of relationships, and the ongoing and constructed nature of research. To attend to reflexivity is to consider how our identities are built in and through research. These identities shape not only the conversations and responses we receive in the field, but also our understanding of these conversations.

Sultana, therefore, argues that researchers must attend to “...histories of colonialism, development, globalization and local realities, [in order] to avoid exploitative research or perpetuation of relations of domination and control” [47] (p. 375). She suggests that attending to these realities is imperative, and that “ethical concerns should permeate the entire process of the research, from conceptualization to dissemination, and [be] especially mindful of negotiated ethics in the field” (p. 375). Here, Sultana signals how realities are constantly negotiated in the field and thus should be considered throughout the research program. Ethics are a process throughout research, rather than amended through practicing likeness. Moreover, pretending to be like others does not attend to these histories or the ways in which they shape our presents, nor to the complexities of interaction and the ways in which power relations are present.

Some researchers avoid attending to difference, linked as it is with disagreement, and thus as a threat to rapport. As Pryke writes: “[i]t might be argued that a researcher should not seek to contradict a respondent even if disagreement is couched in relatively mild terms like ‘the evidence would suggest’, ‘in my view’” [48] (par. 5.5). Indeed, Ellis and DeSoucey both discuss their desire to make their food politics in their research appear less threatening to their participants in order to elicit material and build relationships [33]. This reflects the fact that researchers are told that this is a topic they should avoid or downplay with participants [35]. Contra the call to downplay difference, Pryke [48] and Smyth and Mitchell [31] suggest that not only is disagreement an inevitable component of research, but that disagreement should be added as a tool for researchers to use.

For example, if we return to Sutton [35], we can see that being explicit about his vegetarianism (with the exception of Easter) led to the co-construction of data he would not have otherwise elicited. He writes:

It [vegetarianism] did provoke much interest and discussion...In confronting the “difference” provoked by my vegetarianism, Kalymnians situated me in their own cultural ‘quality space’ in intriguing ways, which revealed to me a number of their cultural preoccupations, attitudes toward “others” and toward their past, that might have been passed over had I not provoked their interest in my “otherness” (p. 5).

Here, Sutton’s vegetarianism was seen as a marker of difference, yet functioned as a means by which rapport was built over difference.

The idea that difference is productive is part of a larger trend in recent methodological literature that questions the assumption that rapport itself facilitates rich data [49]. Relying on a conceptualization of participants in a way in which they are unable to tolerate difference in those conducting research with them, not only works to homogenize those we work with as “all the same”, but also denies that people confront differences in their everyday lives. To assume that participants are unable to negotiate or understand that difference exists and to be able to work with those different than them is to deny them the opportunity to think with researchers about orientations.

In terms of food, the decision to eat “meat” in the field employs an impoverished understanding of ethics in the ways in which it positions participants as unable to understand difference as explained above. Additionally, this perspective suggests an easy solution to dynamics that are fraught with histories and ongoing relations of domination on a global scale. In Katie’s experience conducting research about volunteer abroad programs in rural Ecuador and urban Nicaragua, participants often asked about her decision to not eat animals. While they were often clear and quick to say they did not share this orientation to nonhuman animals, they were curious, open to conversation, and interested in talking with her about it. Indeed, some families who hosted volunteers expressed relief at not having to provide what privileged foreigners⁷ who stay with them often expect—“meat” for every meal.⁸

⁷ We can see here how an association of (usually white) privileged bodies in the global south with animal ethics through veg*n identity can be complicated by the ways in which participants in this work cite foreigners as often asking for more “meat” than host families are used to consuming or can afford. It is crucial to consider orientations to ethics with nonhuman animals as not tied to white racialized bodies.

⁸ Because meat is not financially subsidised as it is in North America, the financial burden that placed upon hosts by guests consuming standard North American diets (high in animal products) is high.

Although imposition and proselytizing are certainly concerns that researchers must be reflective about, we suggest that erasing difference is not an adequate way to address inequity, nor is it attentive to histories or complicated ways in which power is negotiated in everyday life.

To frame not eating “meat” as a problem during research collection ignores the political economy of eating nonhuman animals, and suggests that others cannot be open to particular ethical orientations. While we recognize that each of these framings of rapport, relationship and trust building attend to ethical questions about conducting research with participants, they do so in ways that ultimately ignore relationships “in the field” with nonhuman animals. While we may not imagine nonhuman animals as participants in the traditional sense (*i.e.*, as informants), removing them from our concerns about ethical relationships while debating whether or not to build rapport through eating them denies their necessary participation in our decisions about relationship building. Thus, we argue that to attend to ethics in the field means that not only do we need to consider the human participants we work with, but we need also to extend our ethical attention to relationships with nonhuman animals.

6. Reconsidering Hospitality and Others

As we have discussed above, dominant notions of what it is to be “human” are premised on the separation and distancing from traits deemed to be animalistic [1]. Thus, to eschew meat that is offered to researchers continues to be read as a rejection of dominant cultural norms, as a marker of difference, and as a positioning of oneself outside of a community in question. Dominant discourses concerning table fellowship and building rapport shape how veg*n researchers negotiate their initial and ongoing access to research settings, and in this instance, influence their decisions about what and who they eat in light of building and maintaining rapport. The examples above show that self-presentation in terms of animal politics can be hidden, played-down, or used as a means from which rapport can be built over difference. In this section, we argue for a reconsideration of privacy; specifically in regard to eating as a site of individualized choice [50] in light of Derrida [2,51] and Carey’s [17,18] writing on hospitality. In so doing, we articulate a notion of hospitality that includes nonhuman others and thus undermines the veg*ism-as-difference framing. Following Carey [17,18] we suggest a retheorizing of veganism as a *practice* and ethical orientation to animals and eating that challenges the structure of animal sacrifice through practice. Consequently, dominant humanist ontologies that function to produce nonhumans as means to human ends are undermined.

Privacy

The normative nature of “meat”-eating works in such a way as to negate the recognition of eating as a particular relationship: “the consumption of animals as food is so taken for granted, normalized and habituated that it simply is not reflected upon as a *relationship* between humans and other animals” [50] (p. 236). The act of eating itself is easily taken up by notions of privacy and individual choice: “Admittedly, the inherently individualized site of eating renders discourses on food as quite readily complicit with a neoliberal rubric of ‘lifestyle choices,’ democratic in name only, that have been erased of any reference to the human and non-human labour, environmental costs, and ethical problems that underwrite all food items” [17] (p. 176). As Jenkins and Twine demonstrate, discourses of privacy and individual liberty code veg*nism as a violation of social norms of politeness.

Following this logic, researchers are encouraged to abandon their politics in order to build rapport through likeness. The relationships researchers are called to be attentive to are those with other human beings, as animals are written out of relationships through the operation of these discourses of food and consumption.

Consequently, veg*anism is easily depoliticized and positioned as a dietary preference amongst many others that can be abandoned and taken-up as needed and with little consequence. This depoliticization, motivated in part by consumption being turned to a matter of individual choice means that “the norm of food privacy enacts a double assault on autonomy: first in the ontological exclusion of animals from the moral community, and second, through compulsory participation in anthropocentric violence” [50] (p. 232). Jenkins and Twine, however, demonstrate that the limits to privacy and autonomy undermine themselves, in that they do not extend to give permission for our consumption of other humans, or to animals kept as companions, for example. Thus, “the deployment of food privacy mistakes participation in the hegemonic practice of meat eating as personal freedom” [50] (p. 235). Instead, Carey [18] suggests that we consider “consumption in terms of its potential hospitality or inhospitality to life” (p. 232). In so doing, we are able to reframe “meat”-eating and veg*ism as relationships between humans and animals that allow us to reconsider privacy, choice, and difference. In turn, the notion that veg*anism indicates difference and provokes disagreement (and thus threatens rapport) is rendered unfeasible.

Carey problematizes “vegetarianism” when it refers to a rules-based program in which the eschewal of meat is conflated with a sense of ethical superiority and the project of “sacrificing sacrifice” is complete. She argues that regardless of the rejection of “meat” our socio-cultural institutions are permeated and produced by humans’ exploitation of animals. Instead, she posits a reading of “veganism” that functions not as “another mark of difference for the human subject, but that is instead more resolutely about continually striving to realize a form of justice in the human-animal relationship” [17] (p. 9). In so doing, a “refigured vegetarian practice will have to acknowledge the patent impossibility of completely purging ourselves of complicity with violence” [17] (p. 9). In considering veg*anism along these lines, possibilities for including nonhumans in moral communities are opened, “in any case, explicitly advocating veganism as an ethico-political practice of lesser or non-violence disrupts the presumption of food privacy in nearly all food-related settings” [50] (p. 235). For researchers to maintain their food politics not only encourages an encounter of difference between human beings, but does so without the sacrificial logic coded in the abandonment of food politics in the face of the other.

Connections can be forged across difference in meaningful ways that recognize the subjectivity of those nonhuman animals with whom we share space. While nonhuman animals may not be conceived of as participants in society in the traditional sense (although some have been challenging this, see Donaldson and Kymlicka [52]) they, like humans, are interpolated into these power structures which regularly call for and legitimize their death. In some research settings these nonhuman animals may be invisible, or as in the case of Ellis [33], they may be explicitly present. We suggest that the presence and subjectivity of nonhuman animals could be considered as an Other that we should be welcoming, rather than murdering for rapport. Thus, the discourse of privacy, motivated as non-interference or individualized choice can be resisted by a conception of how our ethical practice can extend to consider “community [as] more than human” [17] (p. 1). In so doing, a recognition of power relations

traversing and ordering the social can be resisted, “a simplistic appeal to the personal nature of diet operates according to an inaccurate conception of autonomy that neglects the productive role of normalization” [50] (p. 235). Thus, to unconditionally welcome the other would include human and nonhuman others.

We suggest that if we conceive of hospitality in this way, which allows for a nuanced understanding of power relations, we can imagine that maintaining food politics in the face of the Other would serve as a means of engaging ethically with nonhuman others. It would also be a way of constituting community with both humans and animals, and as a way to provide the conditions for the welcoming of responses (potentially disagreement) made by human participants. Accordingly, this reading of hospitality would allow researchers to present themselves according to their particular ethical, social, and political orientations, and would serve to welcome the responses of participants. This does not imply the foregoing of an analysis of how power operates in everyday interactions, but rather to be attentive as Sultana [47] calls for, to the ways in which we are interpolated through everyday interactions, and how each of these interactions is shaped by the context in which they happen. This is not an argument that researchers should be welcomed unconditionally by participants (conceived of as the participants’ Other), but instead to recognize that when we as researchers assume we can know how participants will respond and perceive food ethics, we undermine their subjectivity and do a violence to how we imagine human and nonhuman others [17] (p. 3). This framing of hospitality also calls for an ethical practice that considers nonhuman animals as members of the community through which we think and practice our ethics.

7. Conclusions

We have argued that using Derrida’s notion of hospitality to think through the ways in which researchers are called to eat “meat” while in the field for the sake of rapport and research data does not take seriously calls for reflexivity and nuanced understanding of power dynamics. Where rapport is conceived of as likeness, researchers are encouraged to disguise parts of themselves in order to elicit “good” data and form a bond with participants. Instead, we suggest that our identities are often engaged in the field in ways that are unpredictable and unmanageable. We contend that an expectation that rapport is constructed via the fact that we share (or at the least, pretend to share) the same political orientation to nonhuman animals negates the possibility that rapport can be built over (or even through!) disagreement or conflict, and denies complexity to our human participants. This relationship with research participants also constrains our ability to engage in ethical relationships with nonhuman animals.

While there are critiques of the ways in which power relations cannot be undone, and these dynamics in the field are complicated by being received in someone’s house, we suggest that a Derridian notion of unconditional hospitality to others, alongside recent arguments in methodological literature that difference is productive in research settings, positions a critical questioning of how consumption enacts various relationships with others. To understand the rejection of certain “foods,”—especially when these foods are comprised of the body parts of sentient animals—as not political, but as private or individual choices is consistent with the operation of the logic of sacrifice. Thus, to include the animals used for their meat in communities of moral consideration positions

eating as a “highly social *and* impersonal practice with a whole series of consequences” [50] (p. 237). As such, the act of eating is politicized as a site wherein to practice ethical interactions with others—human and nonhuman animals alike.

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Author Contributions

Both authors contributed equally to this work; the names of the authors appear in alphabetical order.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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