



VEGANISM: IS IT A LIFESTYLE OR CULT

The definition of a lifestyle from the Cambridge dictionary is someone's way of living; the things that a person or a particular group of people usually do; or the particular way that a person or group lives and the values and ideas supported by that person or group.

What Exactly is a Cult?

In modern language, a cult is a social group that is defined by its unusual religious, spiritual or philosophical beliefs, or by its common interest in a particular personality, object or goal. In other words, a cult is a group of people with extreme dedication to a certain leader or set of beliefs that are often viewed as odd by others, or an excessive and misplaced admiration for someone or something, or is something that is popular among a certain segment of society.

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Vegan or Veganism?

Being a vegan is not necessarily synonymous with veganism. One is a diet and lifestyle choice, eschewing animal products for food, clothing and other items whenever possible, and the other is a radical belief system that has signs that are very much like those that define a cult. Veganism is an all-encompassing lifestyle. It is an "ism" - which means it's presented as a belief system; a hardline worldview with extreme beliefs. Some of the so-called promises of veganism are: "It is the ONLY way to save the planet," "the ONLY way to save the animals," and "It's 100% guaranteed better for your health." When one thinks of a cult, groups like the Manson Family, Branch Davidians, and Peoples Temple come to mind. While some consider veganism a cult, others do not. However, there are very striking similarities between veganism and other cults. Indeed, some vegans do consider veganism to be a religion.

Is Veganism a Religion?

In a guest blog on the "In Defense of Animals" website dated September 24, 2014, by Dr. Will Tuttle, answers the question of "Is Veganism a Religion?" with these words: "Some people may deny that veganism is a religion, because a religion must, as defined for example by Merriam-Webster, 'relate to or manifest faithful devotion to an acknowledged ultimate reality or deity,' and we don't see this typically as part of being vegan, at least in the beginning stages. However, as our veganism deepens, we begin to realize that it is an authentic, demanding, and rewarding spiritual path that not only positively transforms ourselves, but also positively transforms our society, as a religion should."

Dr. Tuttle goes on to say that veganism, "does in fact relate to an ultimate reality, and that ultimate reality is the profound truth of the interconnectedness of all living beings. Veganism manifests as faithful devotion to the acknowledged truth that all life is sacred and interconnected, and that all living beings are deserving of kindness and respect. Veganism is the core spiritual teaching and ethical principle of all the world religions. It is a practice, a moral statement, a way of living, an aspiration, and also, in some ways, a religion as well."





Is Veganism a Cult?

From a blog called "Introverted Activist- be conscious, be kind, be vegan" the author acknowledges some similarities between veganism and cults and even states that this was a serious question she has been pondering. Furthermore, she states that as she writes her blog posts, she finds herself , "often using certain language that I would associate with a group of indoctrinated people: convert, revert, ingrain, educate, spread the message, stray away, etc. And we are known for trying to get every carnist to also become vegan..."

The author also recognizes that amongst the vegan population there is a lot of pressure on them to convert those around them.

Later in her blog she attempts to dissuade the reader from the idea that veganism is a cult by stating that, "The prime target for cult indoctrination is someone at their weakest moment in life, someone with low self-esteem that can be molded to easily believe an ideology with which they otherwise may not agree, or someone that doesn't know any better. Cult leaders often preach salvation by joining their ranks, allowing the members to gain something that makes them feel better about themselves or promising that they will be rewarded later on."





Animal Extremism and Veganism Are Partners

This should come as no surprise to anyone, but veganism and animal extremism go hand-in-hand with each other. Veganism encourages the animal extremist mentality by equating animals as equal with humans, therefore, they must not be processed for food, fiber, or by-products. There are those who call themselves “ethical vegans” who have a moral opposition to any action that involves animals. They believe animal ownership and animal agriculture in particular “exploits” animals. Therefore they avoid the use and consumption of all animal-based products. These “ethical vegans” even question whether or not they should have a pet, and if so, which one. Since the animal extremist mentality believes that animals are equal with humans and owning them is akin to slavery, and therefore abuse, then why is there even a question as to which pet an ethical vegan can have?

Militance and Violence within the Veganism / Animal Extremism Culture

Animal Extremist groups have become more militant across the globe recently, using extreme measures. They have stormed steakhouses in Australia and the United States; harassed butchers and grocers in France and the United States. They have conducted protests with dumping animal feces and letting off smoke bombs at the homes of executives and scientists. Animal extremists have fire-bombed laboratories and livestock yards. They have bussed people to conduct farm invasions and “open rescues” of animals in the U.S. They have even gone so far as to develop a website and interactive map showing exact GPS coordinates of any and every animal facility including barns, stables, training facilities, modern farms, processing plants, and research facilities to enable their comrades so they can attack these locations. The list of harassment and domestic terrorism conducted by these groups and affiliated individuals is long and varied.

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Animal Extremism and Veganism Share the Same Demographics If Not the Same Characters

Another similarity between animal extremism and veganism are the demographics. More women are supporters of “animal rights” than men, and more young people are supporting animal extremism than ever before. Similarly, more young people are becoming vegan with the average age for turning vegan in the U.S. at 22.4 years of age and 80% of vegans in the U.S. are women. The importance of these demographics will be explained in further detail later.



Animal Extremism and Cults

Animal extremist groups can also be likened as to cult-like in their behavior. The more militant the group, the more cult-like the followers. An example of a militant animal extremist group is Direct Action Everywhere (DxE). This group is based in Berkeley, CA and is closely associated with Berkeley Organization for Animal Advocacy which is a University of California organization. This facilitates DxE’s access to the university, the Berkeley Animal Rights Center and Vegans of the Bay.

The parallels between DxE and other cults are eye-opening.



The Cult of Veganism/Animal Extremism

Carol J Adams, in a blog post even articulates why she, a feminist-vegan advocate, refuses to attend any events if DxE is also on the platform (<https://caroljadams.com/carol-adams-blog/why-i-am-boycotting-events-if-dxe-is-also-an-invited-speaker>). In the blog she calls out DxE as a cult and tells of an incident where over 40 members of DxE, including two who were in the top leadership positions, left DxE. They even wrote "Steps to Healing Our Community," calling out the leadership of DxE and its abusive practices.

Ms. Adams even tells current members of DxE to ask themselves the following questions:

1. Is there a sense that there's so much work to be done "for the animals" that you feel pressured to spend most of your free time working on DxE projects and attending DxE events?
2. Do you feel guilty for having a job outside the movement or because you don't do enough "for the animals?"
3. Do you feel you can never do enough for DxE?
4. Are you spending most or all of your free time with other DxE members, either working or socializing?
5. Do you spend time with friends who are not in DxE? Did you take the Liberation Pledge (that you would not eat with people eating flesh), and did this result in you not seeing friends and family you otherwise loved?
6. Do you volunteer/work with other "animal rights organizations" or do you only spend time on activism with DxE?
7. Have you put aside your discomfort with some actions/activities or tactics because you believe you must do that "for the animals"? Are the events you attend really about the animals or about obedience to the organization?
8. Have you set aside your own gut feelings in favor of the judgement of the group's leaders?
9. Have you come to believe that only this group can "save" the animals?
10. How is the leader referred to? Is any one leader seen as essential to the animal liberation movement? Is any one leader called an "angel," or "the key to animal liberation"? Is it thought that DxE cannot function without this specific leader?
11. Though a process suggests that dissent is encouraged, have you noticed what happens to people who dissent about a topic, or in a manner, that the leader doesn't like? Is there a fear and suspicion of dissenters who are labeled "infiltrators" or is it implied that they are "mentally unstable?"

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12. Do you know who raises and controls the money?

These, and other questions, are also found in many closed-community type religions where there is veneration for a male leader, there is no freedom to disagree, or to succeed at challenging leadership- and this is the definition of a cultic community.

Questions to Ask If You Think Someone Might Be Involved in a Cult

In a blog called WokeVegana, the author, self-described as being heavily involved in an "animal rights cult from April 2014 to October 2017" describes ten signs that animal extremist groups and religious cults share many core similarities.

1. A leader that is worshipped. The 'animal liberation group' the author was involved with has a leader who is worshipped, with some calling him an "angel" which meant it was difficult for him to be held accountable for any of his wrongdoings, including against other activists inside the group.

2. Penalized Dissent. If the group does not value dissent, that is trouble. The author stated that the "leader" would say he valued dissent, constructive feedback and disagreements, but that she and 40+ members of the group were penalized for asking for changes.

3. People Live Together. Members of the group were encouraged to relocate to the headquarters from all over the world, and live together. While it may have given them greater unity, in reality, it allowed the leader to have more control over people.

4. Isolation. The author said that the more she was involved with this cult, the more she distanced herself from family and friends.

5. No life outside the Cult. All or most of your time was spent on working on things related to the cult.

6. Rape and Sexual Assault. "It is unfortunate just how common sexual assault is among cults and also within animal rights as a whole. Not only that but then there is a whole pattern of cover-ups, dismissals and general mishandling of these situations so that perpetrators are left untouched while survivors and victims are blamed, not believed and left traumatized."

7. Recruiting. Building off of "no life outside the cult" cults teach you to think of everything in terms of the cult goals.



8. Censorship. Cults control just about every aspect of their member's lives including what they can and cannot say.

9. A Sense of Belonging and Purpose. "New vegans are often lonely, looking for friends who also respect animals and this cult preyed on this fact. The group I was involved with targeted lonely vegans looking for friends and sense of belonging."

10. Financial Exploitation. Cults manipulate members into giving money for the group's objectives. "We were asked to give as much money to them as we could on a regular basis. The group I was in used open rescues in manipulative ways to boost their public image and acquire more donations. While donations were represented as supporting the animals, they were really being used so that the leader's friends didn't have to work and only a small percent of the money was actually going towards caring for the animals they rescued. They also loved getting attention and being hero-worshipped when in reality, they didn't actually care about the individuals they rescued- and this was revealed after being caught in a lie about where donations were going and abandonment of animals at various farm sanctuaries."

Woke Vegana's blog post and Carol Adams description of DxE as a cult are eerily similar. It is apparent through their questions and experiences, that they are familiar with the cult of veganism/animal extremism.



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Sexual Harassment and Abuse Pervasive in Cults

Sexual harassment within animal extremist groups and by extension, veganism, is especially pervasive. This is partly because so many more women than men are involved in both movements and men have "higher status," being hailed as "heroes," that "lend legitimacy" to campaigns. Indeed, Chronicle of Philanthropy published a story about Humane Society of the U.S. and disgraced former CEO Wayne Pacelle.

The author cites a number of animal extremist advocates who have written about the correlation between men and women in these groups and how sexual predation and harassment has become prevalent in both the veganism and animal extremism worlds. He also tries to put the situation in context by stating:

"The culture of the movement creates conditions that are ripe for exploitation, insiders say. Female staff and volunteers are often idealistic, sensitive souls who empathize with the suffering of animals. They assume that men in the movement are kindred spirits. Bonding over their refusal to eat meat or wear animal products, they socialize as well as work together."

Notorious Cults, Their Leaders and Victims

Who hasn't heard of the Manson Family, Peoples Temple or Branch Davidians? Cult leaders like Charles Manson, Jim Jones, David Koresh, Wayne Pacelle, Alex Herschaft, Wayne Hsiung and Nick Cooney? Wait, What?? Yes, these men are all cult leaders, based on the questions asked above.

The #MeToo movement has its counterpart in animal extremist groups, (#ARMeToo) and as we have already shown most leaders are male and most followers are female both in animal extremist groups and in veganism. What follows is a movement where sexual abuse is as rampant in veganism as it is in animal extremism.

Carol J Adams further names FARM founder, Alex Herschaft as having multiple credible reports of sexual harassment at the FARM office and at the Animal Rights Conferences they put on. Due to Herschaft's years of subjecting staff members to pornography, sexual harassment and abuse, many members of FARM abruptly left.



Jaya Bhumitra, former International Director of Corporate Outreach for Animal Equality, stated:

“While the years leading up to the height of #ARMeToo and #TimesUpAR in the spring of 2018- and the subsequent reckoning- were emotionally wrought and exhausting for many of us working to create a safer and healthier space for women and non-binary folks to participate in activism, the solidarity that emerged among us has been the most beautiful silver lining. As soon as we started sharing our stories of survival with each other, our strength grew. While self-preservation is absolutely necessary when coping with issues of harassment and sexual harassment, speaking in whispers and secrets also protects the perpetrators.”

In a blog from January 2018 called “Striking at the Roots, Animal activism around the world” the author states that he spoke at an “Evening of Kindness” vegan event in Melbourne, Australia. The topic was compassion fatigue and burnout and some of the triggers that can lead to those including sexual harassment. After the speech, the only questions and comments were about sexual harassment and they all came from women.



Veganism IS a Cult

The majority of new vegans/animal extremists are young, impressionable, naïve and want to “protect animals” when they should be concerned about protecting themselves from the predatory nature of those who are in leadership positions in these groups. The leaders tend to be strong, mostly male (although females can and do sexually harass others as well), and seen as being more important, therefore more essential to the “movement” than the victims.

By definition, anecdotal comments, and similarities based on other types of cults, it is apparent that veganism and animal extremism are cults.

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