Chapter 5

Appealing to Values – Constructing a Caring Vegan Identity

Having just explored the problem and solution components of collective action framing in the previous chapter, here I explore the motivation/identity component, manifested in terms of the values that activists construct around veganism and what kind of character they propose that a vegan embodies. In this chapter I will detail sixteen separate values-based appeals that I found the five animal organizations used in their persuasive messages. While I have elected to organize the values in this way, you will see they are not, in actuality, isolated or discrete categories. They are the overlapping and mutually-reinforcing values that I felt were implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, alluded to as being motivational based on how activists chose to frame problems and solutions (ex: by problematizing cruelty, the activists indicate people identify as compassionate). So in my analysis, I asked, “what do the proposed problem and solution frames imply about the kind of values a viewer would need to care about and identify with to be persuaded by this message?” Framing’s reliance on activating values reflects the theory that frames are recruiting tools for ideology (Oliver and Johnston 2005). As such, the activists’ collective action frames in chapters four and five attempt to work symbiotically, like an ecology, to produce a farmed animal rights discourse.

1 You can also find a version of this chapter published in Emily Plec’s edited book Perspectives on Human-Animal Communication: Internatural Communication, published by Routledge in 2013. My chapter is entitled “Stepping Up to the Veggie Plate: Framing Veganism as Living Your Values.” (see Freeman 2013)
My findings suggest that, to appeal to the greatest number of people, activists attempted to align veganism with identity traits and values that were relatively common and non-controversial in American culture. In this way, veganism is constructed as a natural fit for most people rather than a liberal subculture or extremist identity. According to the five animal rights organizations, the choice to eschew animal meat, eggs, and dairy potentially says a lot about someone’s character. Most predominantly, it says they feel compassion toward fellow animals because they respect animals’ status as feeling individuals, and thus want their own actions to be consistent with these values, demonstrating personal integrity. It also says they likely prioritize other altruistic, caring values such as: life, freedom, environmentalism, humanitarianism, and the desire to make a difference. It says they likely believe in ideals such as: honesty, naturalness and purity, patriotism, and populist notions of fairness. Finally, it says they identify with common-sense personal values favoring individual well-being, such as: health, choice, desire for pleasurable and convenient food, and a sense of belonging and attractiveness to others.

At the end of the chapter I evaluate which of these 16 values were most informed by animal rights ideology, or how they could be re-framed to better align with animal rights ideology, particularly the values of: compassion, respect for sentience and individuality, moral integrity and consistency, honesty, life, freedom, naturalness, belonging, and desire to make a difference. First I begin this chapter by describing the 16 values-based appeals of activist campaigns, sharing a few examples of how animal rights groups associated each value with veganism. I organize the values into three major categories: (1) altruistic, (2) idealistic, and (3) personal.

**Appeals Made to Altruistic Values**

In this section I discuss how the five organizations frequently appealed to people’s sense of altruism and concern for others (human and nonhuman), including the following values: compassion, respect for sentient beings, life, freedom, humanitarianism, environmentalism, and the desire to make a difference. In this way, they construct veganism as the diet most befitting a responsible, caring citizen.